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Exploring the Effectiveness of Field Preaching Evangelism in the United Methodist Church

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EXPLORING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FIELD-PREACHING EVANGELISM
IN THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

by

PAUL D. JOHNSEN

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Luther Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment of

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ABSTRACT

Exploring the Effectiveness of Field-Preaching Evangelism in the United Methodist Church

by

Paul D. Johnsen

Explores present-day versions of John Wesley's field-preaching. Wesley preached in fields, at marketplaces and in a variety of other outdoor settings. Field-preaching requires pastors to take their preaching ministry beyond church buildings. This thesis considers the effectiveness of pastors who preach at restaurants, coffee shops, bars and in rented spaces. It also evaluates the cost of these efforts. It argues that reclaiming this historic Methodist practice helps reach a population and demographic currently not served by most United Methodist congregations.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION, PROBLEM, JUSTIFICATION AND RATIONALE

“Which one of you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?”(Luke 15:4)¹

John Wesley, the genius behind the Methodist movement, spent a considerable portion of his ministry field-preaching. For Wesley, this method of evangelism meant preaching outside, in the open air. It meant taking the gospel to the people. Wesley could stand up and preach at a moment’s notice. Wesley and other field-preachers had a wealth of biblical knowledge and a number of their favorite preaching texts, which they used over and over.

Wesley refused to wait for people to come and sit in the church pews. He went looking for them. He preached thousands of sermons in the open air. Early in the morning, he preached at the entrance to factories and throughout the day at a variety of other locations. He preached wherever he persuaded a group of people to listen. Later in his ministry he acknowledged that he did not like field-preaching. But, he knew no other way of taking the gospel to so many people.

Wesley’s field-preaching faced opposition on an array of fronts. The Anglican Church opposed the practice. Many clergy despised it and banned Wesley from most of their pulpits. At various field-preaching appointments, hecklers came out to torment him

¹ All scripture passages come from the *New Revised Standard Version* of the Bible.

and disrupt his discourse. Immediately following a sermon preached in the open air at Newgate, the sheriff handed him a note informing him that he was not to preach there anymore.²

Despite Wesley's emphasis on field-preaching, "Methodism did not spread like wildfire across the British landscape during the centuries and membership never reaching one tenth of one percent of the population during Wesley's lifetime."³ Still, this model ignited the Methodist movement as it reached across the Atlantic Ocean to the original American Colonies and then westward through the American continent. Wesley's preachers, the original circuit riders, rode horses from community to community proclaiming the gospel. They preached in pubs, one-room schools or out in the open air. They preached wherever they could gather people together.

Since field-preaching is such a substantial part of United Methodist tradition, it seems appropriate to ask, in what ways is it still practiced? How effective are these efforts? What can the church and I learn from congregations that take their preaching ministries out to the community?

Justification and Rationale

In 1968 the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church merged to form the United Methodist Church. This new denomination posted a membership of over 11 million people. Since its founding, the United Methodist Church in this country has consistently lost members each year. Today the membership in the

² John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 14 vols., vol. 1 and 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), v.1, 194.

³ Richard P. Heitzenrater, email, August 12, 2013.

United States is closer to 7 million while the global United Methodist Church claims a membership of over 12.5 million. According to church consultant James Griffith, more than eighty percent of United Methodist congregations in the United States lose members annually. Only twenty percent of the congregations maintain or exhibit a numerical increase in membership.⁴

In over thirty-four years of pastoral ministry, I have observed that congregations rarely demonstrate a passion for going out and searching for those beyond the church. Or, if they had, that passion dissipated upon attempted application. Rather, it seems, congregations develop the best in-house programs possible. Churches try to get the word out. They create new and improved websites with important links, advertise on the church page of the local newspaper and join the Chamber of Commerce for more exposure. Once or twice a year, they may even have an “Invite a friend to worship Sunday.” Yet, United Methodists remain puzzled that their membership numbers continue to decline.

As a United Methodist clergy I worked in small and large congregations, multiple point charges in all corners of the state of Wisconsin. I have lived in five different cities and averaged a seven-year stay in each of my previous appointments. While my bishop and district superintendents evaluate me as an effective pastor, my appointed churches have only realized a growth in membership about once every three years on average.

When I started in ministry, the Wisconsin Conference of the United Methodist Church had a membership of over 125,000 people. Today the membership is barely over seventy thousand. Statewide we lose about four percent of our members each year. If we

⁴ James Griffith, “People of the Mission Field,” (paper presented at the Wisconsin Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, Middleton, Wisconsin, June 22, 2014).

continue on this progression and minister like we always have, we can expect this plunging spiral to continue.

This thesis will examine what happens as United Methodists tap into John Wesley's practice of field-preaching. Instead of waiting for people to come to their sanctuaries, they go out and find them and share with them the good news of God's grace. Looking through a Wesleyan lens, will United Methodist congregations see their neighbors and their community differently? Will they find even more opportunities to reach out beyond their church property?

How has Field-Preaching been viewed in the Past?

John Wesley

Initially, field-preaching repulsed John Wesley. He believed preaching belonged in the church where people gathered willingly, listened to the scriptures and, with eyes focused on the preacher, paid close attention to the sermon. But Wesley discovered that, in most sanctuaries, this was not happening. Sermons were delivered so badly that church attenders got very little, if anything, out of the message.

Around the same period, Wesley experienced George Whitefield's field-preaching. Whitefield spoke to huge crowds of people who gave him their undivided attention. Almost immediately, Wesley envisioned new options for his ministry. For the first time, he considered the possibility and call to preach beyond the sanctuary. As soon as Wesley started field-preaching, he broadened the reach of his ministry. He began to see the whole world as his parish. Despite this new emphasis, Wesley confronted significant resistance from his Anglican clergy colleagues who believed—as he previously did—that preaching belonged in the sacred space of the church sanctuary.

Many of Wesley's preachers became field-preachers as well. On the American continent, circuit riders were assigned to territories, also known as circuits. These persons preached to anyone who would listen. A number of these field-preaching sites became churches. As the country expanded westward and circuit riders continued their work, new churches were started across the American frontier.

Modern Day Field-Preachers

Donald Soper

The Reverend Lord Donald Soper, clergy in the Methodist Church of Great Britain, field-preached for more than seventy years. Methodism, socialism and pacifism were the three pillars his theology. According to an obituary written about him, "Soper was well-blessed by nature, outstandingly handsome even in old age, elegant in dress, quick-witted and genuinely charming."⁵ Each week he expounded in London at Tower Hill and Hyde Park. At Tower Hill he spoke to city workers, city dwellers, dock laborers and those who lived in the streets. In his preaching at Hyde Park he spoke to a more professional crowd with more women present.⁶ In many ways, he practiced Wesley's approach to field-preaching. He offered a window for people to look in and catch a glimpse of the Christian faith. He addressed human need believing that—in many ways—the preaching in the Church had become irrelevant and unable to speak a timely word.⁷ According to Soper, large numbers of people who listened to him talk about Jesus Christ in the open air would never set foot inside a church. He argued that "by far the greater

⁵ Colin Morris. "Obituary: The Reverend Lord Soper." *The Independent*, December 22, 1998

⁶ Donald Soper, *The Advocacy of the Gospel* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1961), 67.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

number of them regard the Christian Church as an institution which is not equated with Christianity, and which is composed of those who have progressively departed from its spirit.”⁸

Soper practiced what he called the “fellowship of controversy.”⁹ As individuals posed their challenging and sometimes trick questions, Soper did his best to answer and reflect theologically. He was not timid about debating the faith. If someone raised an issue for which he had no response, he invited that person to come back the next week when he would be prepared to discuss the topic. A variety of people tested him including Buddhist priests, a Muslim Sufi and at least one person who accused him of being mad. The man persisted, “If you’re not mad can you prove to me you’re not mad?” Baffled by this request, Soper asked, “Well, can you prove that you’re not mad?” The man answered, “I can.” He presented his discharge certificate from a London mental institution.¹⁰ Soper suggested that anyone interested in field-preaching should be patient and as entertaining as possible.¹¹

During the final years of his life, Soper became mostly immobile with arthritis though his mind remained as sharp as ever. Twice a week he was taken from his home to Tower Hill and Hyde Park where he continued field-preaching. According to the obituary, “It was a majestic demonstration of sheer indomitable Christian will.”¹²

⁸ Ibid., 73.

⁹ Morris, “Obituary: The Reverend Lord Soper.”

¹⁰ Soper, *The Advocacy of the Gospel*, 27,28.

¹¹ Ibid., 70.

¹² Colin Morris. “Obituary: The Rev. Lord Soper.” *The Independent*, December 23, 1998

Brother Jed

While a student at the University of Wisconsin (1978-1980), I observed a traveling preacher who showed up each fall and preached in the main mall section of campus. Brother Jed (George Edward Smock, Jr.), a United Methodist layman, spent an entire week preaching in the open air, for five hours a day. He had his supporters, a small group who encouraged and prayed for him. Most everyone else listened for a while and then either tried to ignore his never-ending rant or did everything they could to disrupt him. Brother Jed received at least one pie in the face on the Madison campus. Late on a Friday afternoon, students at the Memorial Union hooked up a loud speaker, aimed it in the preacher's direction and a deep voice announced, "My dear Brother Jed. This is God. Shut up." Even Brother Jed laughed.

Brother Jed describes his preaching style as combative. He fashioned this technique after the Reverend Doctor Hubert T. Lindsay (also known as Holy Hubert) who notoriously engaged in argumentative preaching on college campuses in the 1960's. Brother Jed contends that this contentious style gets people's attention.¹³ He provokes and insults. He freely offers his assessment on where individuals in the crowd will contemplate eternity. Throughout the school year, Brother Jed still can be found preaching on college campuses across the United States.

Aside from his financial backers who contribute to his organization, The Campus Ministry USA and occasional letters from students who thank him for guiding them to the faith, he concedes there is no way for him to critique the effectiveness of his efforts. But,

¹³ A telephone interview with the author on February 4, 2014.

like John Wesley, Brother Jed believes that he can always get a sizable congregation in the open air, which is not always true inside a church sanctuary.

Personal Experiences with Field-Preaching

My first experience with field-preaching occurred at the First United Methodist Church in Green Bay, Wisconsin. On Easter Sunday, 2005, we took one of our three Easter morning worship services to the Oneida Casino in Ashwaubenon, Wisconsin. We gathered in the casino's main ballroom, directly across the lobby from the gaming room with slot machines, other games and a multitude of Easter morning bettors. We wanted to take the gospel to the people at the casino. The Oneida Tribe and convention staff promoted this effort with signs around the hotel and flyers in each room.

We felt this was a bold move for an anti-gambling United Methodist congregation. While the Church Council approved this field-preaching mission unanimously, a few church members objected. They opposed any promotion of gambling, including proclaiming Christ's resurrection at a gambling casino.

While the main ballroom had a seating capacity for approximately fifteen hundred people, we welcomed a crowd of seven hundred and fifty. People came dressed for gambling. Some walked into the worship space with freshly mixed cocktails. Others had their early morning winnings tucked into their front pocket. With the doors across from the casino wide open, worship began with the words: "Jesus Christ Is Risen Today." The congregation responded: "Jesus Christ Is Risen Indeed."

Since most of the hotel guests came from out of town, the effectiveness of this effort was unknown. We did not experience a surge in our own worship turnout in the following weeks. Still, this was an attempt at field-preaching

A Definition of Field-Preaching

For the purpose of this thesis, field-preaching is defined as an intentional effort of taking the preaching ministry of the church to the community. The goal is to connect with people outside the church. This thesis explores the effectiveness of congregations that engage in a modern form of field-preaching. Do they reach the people they seek?

Although Wesley preached in the fields and other places in the open air, the fields of today may be restaurants, coffee shops, bars and rented school buildings, wherever people gather. In these locations, congregations hope to bond with persons who have little or no faith. They reach out to those who have been hurt, bored or simply not welcomed by the established church.

Many congregations live-stream their services on the Internet and make sermons available on podcasts. Pastors also preach at funerals and memorial services where they speak to significant numbers of people outside the faith. Although these efforts are forms of contemporary field-preaching, this thesis will focus on congregations that deliberately go beyond their traditional place of ministry out to the community.

Effectiveness will be evaluated by how these field-preaching efforts make new disciples, followers of Jesus Christ. This will be appraised in several ways. How many people come into a congregation's ministry by "profession of faith?" How many become active in the ministry of the church without joining the church roll? Do these efforts attract disgruntled persons who have left a church or those who have never experienced the church? How does field-preaching help congregations influence a population that is not drawn to the main services of the church?

How Will This Study Be Approached?

Biblical and Theological Justification for Field-Preaching

Much of the Bible tells the story of God and God's people searching, locating and caring for the lost. Many of the biblical books—both in the Old and New Testament—could be employed to validate the practice of field-preaching. Instead, this thesis will begin with Jesus' own field-preaching. He did not set up shop and wait for people to come to him. He urgently traveled from community to community, across an entire region, proclaiming the good news of God's love. Jesus built this ministry on the foundation of the prophets and the witness of John the Baptist. Those who followed him, including the disciples and the Apostle Paul, continued to take the good news to the people, wherever they lived.

John Wesley's theology correspondingly inspired him to preach out in the open air. He cared for those who lived without the church, or any faith community, because he believed that God cared for them. Wesley's Arminian influence will be reviewed especially highlighting his contention that God did not predetermine life. Rather, all people have freedom to accept or reject God's love.

Field-Preaching in a Secular Age

In John Wesley's time the sacred and the secular were clearly defined. Churches and religious institutions did the sacred work while all other places were secular. In field-preaching, Wesley made the bold move of taking the sacred directly to the secular. He preached outside of factories, in the market place and out in the fields.

Today the lines between the sacred and the secular become difficult to distinguish. Evangelists preach in football stadiums and congregations meet in movie

theaters. In addition, most people are not willing to gather out in the fields or get to work early in the morning just for the opportunity of listening to an inspiring sermon. Many, in fact, no longer believe in God or in any higher power. Others remain convinced that they can navigate their spiritual journey. They see no need for the oversight of the institutional church. Given these dynamics, this thesis will explore field-preaching strategies for reaching those who live in this new secular time.

Literature Review

John Wesley never dreamed of field-preaching. As a well-trained Anglican priest, he could not imagine the possibility of preaching outside the sanctuary. He cherished the pulpit, the liturgy and seriousness of worship. But when Wesley learned of the effectiveness of field-preaching from his good friend and former Oxford University classmate George Whitefield, he envisioned fresh possibilities for his ministry and the Methodist movement.

Using John Wesley's journals and his other writings, we will examine his thoughts on field-preaching. He wanted field-preaching to help the church which had become, in Wesley's estimation, ineffective and irrelevant. Wesley passionately defended field-preaching and believed that this practice was essential for the future of the faith.

The writings of Wesleyan scholars will be reviewed, paying particular attention to their evaluation of Wesley's field-preaching. We will then appraise new innovations in evangelism. What must congregations consider as they reclaim John Wesley's passion for going out and finding the lost?

Research Method

An *exploratory case study*¹⁴ method will be developed to learn from four congregations that have gone out beyond the traditional church building with the intent of making disciples for Jesus Christ. Based on curiosity, this research method desires to learn from these congregations who have employed a modern version of John Wesley's field-preaching.

Included in this study will be the Sycamore Creek United Methodist Church in Lansing, Michigan. This congregation hosts the Church in a Diner every Monday evening. During the meal, the pastor and others lead the worship.

Union Coffee in Dallas, Texas is a nonprofit church ministry. A full service coffee shop, Union Coffee serves a variety of coffee and meal options. Ten percent of their sales help support their monthly mission project. Union Coffee offers three worship services throughout the week, on Sunday, Tuesday and Friday evenings.

Urban Poiema in Milwaukee, Wisconsin meets every Sunday morning in a bar. The bar shares a parking lot with a tobacco warehouse and a liquor store.

Urban Village Church in Chicago, Illinois meets in four different rental spaces throughout the city. They seek to be "Bold, Inclusive, Relevant."¹⁵ They first locate a need for ministry and then find a place to rent to meet that need.

This thesis desires to learn from each of these congregations. How did they get started in this outreach ministry? How is it working for them? The role of preaching in

¹⁴ Robert A. Stebbins, "Exploratory Research in the Social Sciences," in *A Sage University Paper* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001).

¹⁵ The Urban Village Church, www.urbanvillagechurch.org (accessed January 15, 2014).

these settings will be examined. Pastors, church leaders and participants will be invited to describe their ministry and comment on the importance of preaching.

This *exploratory case study* will also scrutinize the financial implications of these ministries. What required expenditures can congregations expect as they take their preaching ministry out to the community? This thesis intends to help congregations approach new field-preaching initiatives with their eyes wide open.

Who Will Benefit?

After this information is gathered, analyzed and the key components of effective field-preaching identified, it is my hope that these findings will help congregations in different settings. Are there effective practices found in these four congregations that are transferable to other venues?

Based on the discoveries of this study, a strategy will be developed to make an initial attempt at field-preaching in Hartford, Wisconsin where I am currently appointed. Three Monday evening worship services will be offered at the Perc Place Restaurant, a very popular local establishment. We will intentionally invite persons who are not involved or associated with any church or ministry. I will be curious of the number of people who come, the number of people who come back for a second or third experience and the feedback they offer.

Congregations across this country struggle with diminishing memberships. Many churches initiate new programs and expand their missions without realizing any identifiable or sustainable growth. This thesis asks if a renewal of field-preaching can help change the downward spiral of congregations within the United Methodist Church?

Is it conceivable that a modern version of Wesley's field-preaching could have a positive impact on the entire United Methodist Church?

As I enjoy ministry now more than ever and have, potentially, eight to ten years of active preaching remaining, I hope that some variation of field-preaching will become part of my ministry.

Conclusion

Given the decline in the United Methodist Church membership across the United States and the apparent, if not obvious, need for a more innovative approach to go out beyond the church building, this thesis will explore contemporary efforts at field-preaching. Field-preaching transformed John Wesley's ministry. It gave him an opportunity to preach to more people than could ever fit into a church and to all those who, for whatever reason, would never find their way to the sacred sanctuary. Field-preaching was not a gimmick or a passing fad that could be utilized until a better approach came along. Instead it took Wesley to the places where people lived, worked or socialized. He preached anywhere he could assemble a crowd, including outside of coalmines, in market squares, in the shadows of famous churches, standing on tombstones in graveyards and in the fields where people came to listen. Despite the Anglican Church's resentment for this practice, Wesley knew of no other way of offering the gospel to so many people. Field-preaching helped him go out, on God's behalf, and find the lost.

In Chapter Two the biblical and theological foundations for field-preaching will be explored in greater depth. I will also consider how the secular world has changed since

the eighteenth-century. What bearing will that have on potential field-preaching ministries today?

CHAPTER TWO

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

In its earliest days, field-preaching became an important part of the Methodist movement. It was employed by John Wesley and applied by many of the preachers who followed him. Wesley thought that the practice was not only vital for the church in his day, but especially for the church in future generations. If the church deserted its passion for going out and finding the lost, would it have any meaningful ministry? In this chapter I will assess the biblical and theological foundations for field-preaching. I will also explore the specific challenges of field-preaching in this secular age.

Biblical Foundations

John Wesley's field-preaching follows a model set by Jesus. Jesus does not stay in any one place longer than necessary. He is not tied to a particular synagogue, temple or any specific geographical location. Jesus keeps moving. According to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus begins his ministry by leaving his home in Nazareth and settling in Capernaum by the sea. (Matthew 4:13) Even there, he keeps a busy travel schedule. He proclaims, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." (Matthew 4:17) He calls his disciples and travels throughout Galilee teaching, preaching and healing the sick.

Out in the open, on the side of a mountain, Jesus preaches the Sermon on the Mount. (Matthew 5,6,7) He sees the large crowd, climbs up the mountain, sits down and

begins by saying to his disciples, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:3)

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus calls his disciples and immediately moves on to Capernaum teaching in the synagogue and healing the sick, including Simon’s mother-in-law. Word of Jesus spreads. Although his disciples plead with him to remain in Capernaum and minister to the multitudes coming to him, Jesus says, “Let us go to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came to do.”(Mark 1:38)

Throughout his ministry, Jesus demonstrates his commitment to the lost. He finds the lost everywhere, in the synagogues and out in the world. He does not wait for people to find him. He travels from town to town diligently searching. He finds the lost in persons possessed with demons. His own disciples get lost. As they get caught on the sea in the midst of a storm they panic. They cry out in fear. Jesus asks them, “ Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?”(Mark 4:40)

In the fifteenth chapter of the Gospel of Luke, Jesus reveals his desire for the lost. “Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, ‘This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.’” (Luke 15:1-2) Jesus tells three stories of going out and searching for the missing. A shepherd temporarily abandons ninety-nine sheep as he sought for the missing one. When he finds it he celebrates. “Just so, I tell you there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”(Luke 15:7) Then he tells of a woman who had a set of ten precious coins. When one disappears, she sweeps the house diligently and goes looking for the missing

coin. When she finds it she summons her friends to come and celebrate with her. Finally, Jesus speaks of a father who has two sons. The youngest son claims his inheritance, travels to a distant land and spends it all. When famine strikes and life becomes unbearably difficult, he returns home. His father sees him coming. He runs to meet him and hugs him. Then he celebrates with a huge party. “This son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!”(Luke 15:24) When his oldest son refuses to come home and join the party, his father goes out and searches for him. When he finds him, he pleads with his eldest to come home, “But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.” (Luke 15:32)

In the Gospel of John, Jesus continues searching for the lost. In his travels he engages people like Nicodemus (John 3), the Samaritan woman (John 4) and the woman caught in adultery (John 8). He boldly announces, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12) He invites people—wherever they are—to live in that light.

Jesus, the field-preacher, offers a profound paradigm for the church. He is on the move, continually searching for the lost, reaching out to those who are far away from the love of God.

Jesus’ ministry follows in the shadows of John the Baptist’s field-preaching in the wilderness. “And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.” (Mark 1:5) The lost find a new way to live in the words of John the Baptist. Many repent and are baptized.

Jesus' field-preaching stands doggedly in the tradition of the Hebrew prophets, prophets like Elijah, Jeremiah, Amos and Jonah. These prophets go and find the very ones who need to hear their message the most. During King Ahab's reign, the people of Israel turned to other gods and idolatry became part of their everyday lives. God sent Elijah to get their attention and bring them back. (I Kings 17) Even before his birth, God appointed Jeremiah to be a prophet to the nations. When Jeremiah complained that he was too young, God said, "Do not say 'I am only a boy,' for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you." (Jeremiah 1:7) God sent Amos with a harsh message to the people of Israel who foolishly wandered away from God. They were convinced that their sacred festivals and their assorted sacrifices were enough. But through Amos, God announced that he took no delight in their religious traditions and would not accept their offerings anymore or even listen to their songs. Instead, Amos proclaimed, "But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." (Amos 5:24) In the story of Jonah, God sent Jonah to reach out directly to the lost. Grudgingly Jonah entered Nineveh field-preaching. He cried out for all to hear, "Forty days more, and Nineveh will be overthrown." (Jonah 3: 4) He offered no grace, no hope, just the word of the Lord. His sermon brought an entire nation to repentance.

Just as Jesus fostered his ministry on the foundation of the prophets, the Apostle Paul stayed near to the pattern of Jesus. We find, in the Apostle Paul, one of the most effective field-preachers of all time. Initially called Saul of Tarsus, he persecuted the church in Jerusalem. He moved throughout the community arresting followers of Jesus. He endorsed the stoning of Stephen. (Acts 8:1) But, on a journey to Damascus, Jesus comes and finds him. A bright light blinds Saul and he falls to the ground. Then he hears,

“Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”(Acts 9:4) He asks, “Who are you, Lord? The reply comes, “I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting.” (Acts 9:5)

Saul is taken to Damascus and for three days he cannot see, nor does he eat or drink anything. Then God sends Ananias to him. Ananias opens Saul’s eyes and baptizes him. Almost immediately Saul begins preaching proclaiming that Jesus is the Son of God. (Acts 9:20) Jesus’ passion for finding the lost becomes Saul’s passion. Saul’s name becomes Paul. As he travels the known world, he preaches at most stops. He meets people where they live and work. Quite often he finds them outside and not in places of prayer and worship. During his visit to Athens, Paul stands in front of the Areopagus, a very public place where debate is commonplace. He field-preaches:

Athenians I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, “To an unknown god.” What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is the Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life breath and all things. (Acts 17:22-25)

The Apostle Paul accepts people as they are and commends them for the good they do. He does not scold. He welcomes. Then he points them toward a loving God who offers life and grace. He knows that the lost, on their own, will never be able to find their way to the loving arms of God. He searches for them.

Theological Review

John Wesley identified with the lost. He grew up in a home where his father was a hard-working, faithful parish priest. He received his formal and theological training at Oxford. Despite this rich scholastic background, Wesley faltered throughout the early

years of his ministry, which included a botched missionary trip to Georgia in the American Colonies.

A life changing experience came to Wesley on May 24, 1738. He wrote in his journal:

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change, which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt that I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation: And an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.¹

Within twelve months, John Wesley began field-preaching. He preached frequently and, quite often, multiple times in the same day. He constantly tried to connect with those who had no faith and especially with those who lived in the blind spot of the established church. He sought them out and invited them to listen.

John Wesley devoted much of his ministry to searching for the lost. He believed strongly in God's love for all people and in free will. Convinced that people had a choice to accept God's love or not, he shared his guidance as often as possible. But he also recognized that a significant percentage of the populace was far removed from the church's ministry. Many of these became non-believers by default. They knew no other way.

Wesley's theological framework became closely identified with Arminian theology. The name Arminian comes from the Dutch Reformed theologian, Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609) who challenged John Calvin's (1509-1564) teachings on predestination. Arminians identified with those who believed in 'free will' as opposed to

¹ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, V. 1. 103.

those who promoted “determinism.”² Getting a solid handle on Arminian theology, nonetheless, becomes a much greater challenge. The English Puritans were the first ones to label those who were Protestant, but not Calvinists, as Arminians.³ Arminianism still had a much broader understanding. Many of the dissenters claimed the Arminian brand. It even becomes synonymous with liberalism and universalism.⁴

According to Wesleyan scholar Randy Maddox, Wesley was an ‘Arminian’ in that he shared the views of 18th century English Arminians. It is not clear that he read much of Arminius himself. Wesley views the Arminian testimony as harmonious with the early Church.⁵

In his article, “What is an Arminian?” Wesley detailed his objections to Calvinism. He argued that Calvinists hold that “...God has absolutely decreed, from all eternity, to save such and such persons and no others; and that Christ died for these, and no one else.”⁶ Wesley countered this view by claiming that the Arminians hold “that God has decreed from all eternity, teaching all that have the written word, ‘He that believeth shall be saved.’ And, ‘He that believeth not shall be condemned.’”⁷ Calvinists claimed that God’s grace is irresistible. Wesley acknowledged that there might be such rare moments when God’s grace was irresistible but there were many more occasions when it

² Richard P. Heitzenrater, Personal Email, May 10, 2015.

³ W. Stephen Gunter, “John Wesley, a Faithful Representative of Jacobus Arminius,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 42, no. 2 (2007): 77.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁵ Luke L Keefer, Jr. , “Characteristics of Wesley's Arminianism,” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 22, no. 1 (1987): 80.

⁶ John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 14 vols. 9 and 10 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), v.10, 359.

⁷ *Ibid.*, v.10, 359-360.

was not. Calvinists maintained that true believers could not fall from grace. Wesley countered that even the most faithful can “make a shipwreck of grace and good conscience.”⁸

If God did not predetermine an individual’s ultimate destination, then Christians have a responsibility to share the gospel with as many people as possible, meeting them wherever they can be found. They have the “free will” to receive this gift from God. Conversely, if Wesley were a proponent of Calvinistic teachings, then field-preaching would not be necessary.

As an Arminian, Wesley believed that God’s grace could be understood in three distinct parts: 1) Prevenient grace; 2) Justifying grace;⁹ 3) Sanctifying grace.¹⁰ Stephen Gunter suggests, “In its broadest sense, Wesley meant by prevenience that each and every salutary human action or virtue, from the earliest expression of faith to the highest degree of sanctification, is grounded in the prior empowering of God’s grace.”¹¹ Prevenient grace makes faith possible. For Wesley, it is active in every human soul. It opens the human heart to the possibility of faith in God. It enables faith but does not guarantee faith.¹² In his published sermon, “On Working Out Our Own Salvation,” Wesley argued that prevenient grace summons “the first wish to please God, the first dawn of light concerning his will and the first slight transient conviction of having sinned against

⁸ Ibid., v.10, 360.

⁹ The United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville, TN.: United Methodist Pub. House, 2012), 51.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Gunter, “John Wesley, a Faithful Representative of Jacobus Arminius,” 81.

¹² The United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, 52.

Him.”¹³

If convenient grace were active in the lives of all people—and only a small percentage of them went to church—the faithful needed to go out and find them. Field-preaching gave listeners an opportunity to connect with God, perhaps for the first time. An early morning sermon preached outside a factory or a sermon preached late in the afternoon in the field may have been just what a person needed to come to faith.

Field-Preaching in the Secular Age

As we consider field-preaching in the twenty-first century, we must acknowledge that the world has changed significantly since the days of John Wesley. In John Wesley’s world, the sacred and the secular were clearly defined. Cathedrals, churches and sanctuaries were sacred. The marketplace, schools (non-parochial), factories and fields were secular. Preaching and religious teaching was done on sacred ground. The rest of life was lived in the secular world.

Wesley made the significant move of taking his preaching ministry beyond the sacred space. He walked out of the sanctuary and went to the fields, the city squares and other public and secular places and proclaimed the good news of God’s grace. The Church of England and Anglican priests criticized Wesley’s field-preaching. Still Wesley spoke to thousands of people who rarely, if ever, entered the holy space.

Field-preaching in the twenty-first century comes with different challenges. Now it is difficult to distinguish between the sacred and the secular. Is the sanctuary any more sacred than the movie theater? Is a cathedral more sacred than a football stadium? The boundaries between the two have blurred. This makes field-preaching all the more

¹³ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, v. 6, 509.

problematic. Where will the lost be located? Or, will they be everywhere?

Wesley targeted those who had fallen away from God and those who never knew the love of God. They were lost. Today we have people in church who come with more doubt than faith. There are persons outside the church who may be engaged in their own spiritual journey. Where will the lost be found?

Charles Taylor in his monumental work, *A Secular Age*, argued, “even as faith endures in our secular age, believing does not come easily. Faith is fraught; confession is haunted by an inescapable sense of its contestability.”¹⁴ It is not that people do not believe in God anymore. Faith has simply become one option of many. In this troubled time, believers doubt and to some extent doubters believe.

Taylor offers an overview of three distinct stages of secularism. In *Secular*₁, he describes the classic age of secularism where the priests did the work of the sacred and everyone else—the butcher, baker and candlestick maker—lived the secular.¹⁵ In *Secular*₂, he defines the secular as areligious and where the sacred was found in the religious institutions, including synagogues, chapels, churches and cathedrals.¹⁶ (John Wesley lived his life in *Secular*₂.) *Secular*₃ is a time where faith is questioned and many do not believe in God.¹⁷ Taylor describes the process of immanentization where the fullness of life is sought within an enclosed self-sufficient, naturalistic universe, without

¹⁴ James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor*, Kindle ed. (2014), loc. 3 of 148.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, loc. 19 of 148.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, loc. 21 of 148.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

any reference to the transcendent.¹⁸ Many within the church today believe we remain in Secular₂ where faith will preserve and be strengthened through our religious institutions. Taylor argues that we live in Secular₃ where faith in God is contested.

People now have an overabundance of options of living apart from the sacred. They live and thrive in this world without a perceived need for God or any higher power. In conveying Taylor's argument, James Smith notes that "it is not that our secular age is an age of disbelief; it's an age of believing otherwise. We can't tolerate living in a world without meaning."¹⁹ Taylor identifies this as "exclusive humanism," where meaning is found within the world that can be seen, experienced and understood without any perceived need for God or other higher power.²⁰ Exclusive humanism is not the only option. But it is a viable option for many.

Still the absence of God creates a sense of loss. Taylor recognizes that it can be experienced throughout the totality of the life experience. He contends that many "feel emptiness of the repeated, accelerating desire and fulfillment, in consumer culture; the cardboard quality of bright supermarkets, or neat row housing in a clean suburb."²¹

Effective modern day field-preaching must address this emptiness. The standard preaching of the church—including the three points and a poem sermon—may not be very applicable in a field-preaching setting. Instead it is essential for the field-preacher to create a safe space where participants share their doubts, ask questions and come to conclusions even if those conclusions differ from traditional church teaching.

¹⁸ Ibid., loc. 48 of 148.

¹⁹ Ibid., loc. 47 of 148.

²⁰ Ibid., loc. 21 of 148.

²¹ Ibid., loc. 68 of 148.

Taylor advocates that the Christian response to those who find no need for God in their lives “is not to have an argument about the data or ‘evidences,’ but rather to offer an alternative story that offers a more robust, complex understanding of the Christian faith.”²² Instead of the field-preacher presenting a version of God’s non-negotiable plan of salvation, the field-preacher might be prudent to share about a God who is willing to meet us where we are, in our questions, in our doubts and especially in our unbelief.

Effective field-preachers also discover that those searching for spiritual meaning do so from an individualistic perspective. While community remains important, this comment will be more common than not. “The religious life or practice that I become part of must not only be my choice, but it must speak to me, it must make sense in terms of my spiritual development as I understand it.”²³

Field-preaching opportunities will continue. “As Taylor observes, the ‘spiritual’ perspective has room to recognize that even ‘people who are very successful in a range of normal human flourishing (perhaps especially such people) can feel unease, perhaps remorse, some sense that their achievements are hollow.’”²⁴ Modern day field-preachers must be attentive and searching for such persons. John Wesley sought the same type of people in his field-preaching more than two hundred years ago.

Conclusion

Not only did John Wesley believe that field-preaching was an effective means of ministry, he understood that it was consistent with the ministry of Jesus. Jesus spent days

²² Ibid., loc. 76 of 148.

²³ Ibid., loc. 88 of 148.

²⁴ Ibid., loc. 107 of 148.

field-preaching. This practice had a foundation within the tradition of the Hebrew prophets who were sent by God to go to specific persons or groups of people and deliver God's message. Through his field-preaching in the wilderness, John the Baptist prepared people for the coming of Jesus. Following Jesus, the Apostle Paul field-preached. He shared the gospel of Christ with people all over the known world.

Wesley demonstrated a passion for the lost, at least in part, because of his own experience. He came to a newness of faith on May 24, 1738 when he felt his heart strangely warmed. He recorded in his journal, "I felt that I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation." Within the year, he started field-preaching. He preached multiple times a day and quite often seven days a week.

Wesley's understanding of grace, more than anything else, motivated his field-preaching. He believed that God's prevenient grace is active in every human soul. Field-preachers offered people an opportunity to connect with God. Because of his emphasis on free will as opposed to determinism, Wesley became closely associated with Arminian theology.

Field-preaching in the twenty-first century comes with a number of new challenges. In this secular age, faith and belief in God is no longer the only option. Instead, it has become one of many options. The lost may be found just about anywhere, both in and outside of the church.

Chapter Three will review the literature related specifically to John Wesley's field-preaching. More current evangelism resources will also be utilized as I continue to explore the effectiveness of field-preaching evangelism in the United Methodist Church.

CHAPTER THREE

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The previous chapter considered the biblical and theological footings for field-preaching. Jesus, the Apostle Paul and others took the gospel to the world. They preached whenever people listened. Quite often this happened outside the hallowed ground of the synagogue. With a similar determination, John Wesley used field-preaching as a tool to speak to those who had no faith connection.

In this chapter, field-preaching literature will be reviewed beginning with John Wesley and moving to the present day writers with the intent of establishing the underpinnings for contemporary field-preaching. The works of John Wesley will be appraised along with those who have studied Wesley's ministry attempting to understand the origins, implications, opportunities and problems with field-preaching. Then current resources will be reviewed demonstrating the urgency for the United Methodist Church to claim once again the historic practice of field-preaching.

Background

O.C. Edwards, in *A History of Preaching*, tells how John Wesley learned field-preaching from his friend George Whitefield. Whitefield learned it from Howell Harris.¹ Howell Harris, from Wales, initially taught school. But, following a powerful Christian

¹ O. C. Edwards, *A History of Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004), Kindle Edition, loc. 11157 of 40903.

conversion experience, he became an influential, itinerant field-preacher throughout Wales and England.² George Whitfield learned of Harris' effectiveness. They became friends after exchanging several letters. Whitfield went along with Harris as he preached in the fields where Harris' crowds and style impressed him.

In field-preaching, Whitefield saw the potential and challenge for his own ministry. While he felt the call to this ministry, the Anglican Church did not allow for itinerant field-preaching.³ Preaching had to be done within the sacred, consecrated space of the church building. Whitefield by-passed this restriction by using field-preaching as a fundraising tool to support an orphanage he started in Georgia. With his background in drama and his ability to captivate a crowd, he consequently experienced great success as a field-preacher. He even preached to a crowd of eighty thousand people at London's Hyde Park.⁴ Although Whitefield did everything he could to get people to turn away from their sins, his emphasis "was not on God's wrath so much as on the divine love and pity that sought the lost sheep and the rejoicing in heaven whenever one was reclaimed."⁵

In 1739 Whitefield invited John Wesley to join him in field-preaching. At first Wesley was hesitant and remained committed to the polity of the Anglican Church. Nonetheless, he was impressed with Whitefield's results. He wrote on March 29, 1739:

In the evening I reached Bristol and met Mr. Whitefield there. I could scarce reconcile myself at first to this strange way of preaching in the fields, of which set me an example on Sunday, having been all my life (till very lately) so tenacious

² Edward Morgan, *The Life and Times of Howell Harris*, Reprint ed. (Denton, TX: Holywell, Hughes and Butler, 1998), 150.

³ Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, loc. 11066 of 40903.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., loc. 11104 of 40903

of every point relating to decency and order that I should have thought that saving souls almost a sin if it had not been done in a church.⁶

But just four days later on April 2nd, Wesley gave field-preaching a try. “At four in the afternoon, I submitted to be more vile, and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation, speaking from a little eminence in the ground adjoin to the city, to about three thousand people.”⁷ From that moment on, Wesley was a committed field-preacher and it became a significant percentage of his mission. According to Wesleyan scholar, Richard Heitzenrater, “From very early on in his ministry, John Wesley realized that his mission could not be fulfilled if it were limited by the typical conventions of the English parish system. Out of necessity he began preaching outdoors.”⁸

As a field-preacher Wesley’s crowds never matched Whitefield’s, still he spoke to significant numbers of people. On several occasions he preached to congregations of over twenty thousand in attendance.⁹ In the remaining fifty-two years of his ministry it is estimated that he preached over forty thousand sermons.¹⁰

John Wesley

Field-preaching transformed Wesley’s mission. He saw a much bigger picture. On June 11, 1739 he wrote, “I look upon all the world as my parish; thus far I mean, that in

⁶ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, v.1, 185.

⁷Ibid.

⁸ Richard P. Heitzenrater, “John Wesley’s Principles and Practice of Preaching,” *Methodist History* 37, no. 2 (1999): 91 and 92.

⁹ Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, loc. 11191 of 40903.

¹⁰ Ibid.

whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right, and bounden duty, to declare unto all that are willing to hear, the glad tidings of salvation.”¹¹

As much as Wesley preferred the comforts of proclaiming the gospel in a beautiful sanctuary, field-preaching gave him an opportunity to speak to larger congregations. And, since he was not tied to regularly scheduled church services, he had more preaching opportunities. He preached multiple times a day, seven days a week. On June 26, 1759, he wrote: “On Monday and Tuesday evening I preached abroad, near the Keelmen’s Hospital, to twice the people we should have had at the House. What marvel the devil does not love field-preaching! Neither do I: I love a commodious room, a soft cushion, a handsome pulpit. But where is my zeal if I do not trample all those under foot, in order to save one more soul?”¹²

Field-preaching offered other advantages. Wesley believed that his voice carried better in the open air than in any church building. Wesley sought out places that gave him good sound and allowed his powerful voice to project. He preached under tall trees, outside of coalmines and in front of walls. On September 14, 1746 after preaching to a rather large crowd at Gwennap Pit in England, a natural amphitheater, he wrote, “I was first afraid my voice would not reach them all; but without cause, for it was so strengthened that I believe thousands more might have heard every word.”¹³ Twelve years later he affirmed the power of his voice, “By repeated observation I find that I can command thrice the number in the open air that I can under a roof.”¹⁴

¹¹ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, v. 1, 201.

¹² *Ibid.*, v. 2, 491.

¹³ *Ibid.*, v. 2, 32.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, v. 2, 515.

For all of the potential benefits of field-preaching, however, Wesley failed to convince his Anglican colleagues of its value. For the most part, they despised the practice. More and more of the clergy blocked Wesley from preaching in their pulpits. On May 7, 1739, as he prepared to travel to Pensford, he received the following letter: “Sir, Our minister, having been informed that you are beside yourself, does not care that you should preach in any of his churches.”¹⁵ Wesley made the trip anyway and preached about a half-mile from Pensford at Priestdown.

Wesley responded to critics by insisting that he targeted those who had no connection to the faith. He searched for persons who spent their days in the local alehouses and for those who were unnoticed or unwanted by the established church. He preached to congregations of people who never set foot inside a place of worship. While this may not have been the customary practice of the church or even viewed as irregular, Wesley considered it part of his calling to save souls. According to his journal entry on Sunday, May 20, 1759, “I preached at eight in an open place at Gins, a village on one side of the town. Many were there, who never did and never would come to the Room.”¹⁶ Reflecting upon his preaching in the middle of the Moorfields, Wesley wrote, “Here were thousands upon thousands, abundantly more than any church could contain; and numbers among them who never went to any church or place of public worship at all. More and more of them were cut to the heart and came to me in tears, inquiring, with the utmost eagerness, what they must do to be saved.”¹⁷

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, v. 1, 192.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, v. 2, 480.

¹⁷ John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 14 vols. 7 and 8, Sermons vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), vol. 7, 422-423.

Wesley responded to grumblers who were indifferent to the plight of those outside the church, “Will you say (as I have known some tender hearted Christians,) ‘Then it is their fault; let them die and be damned?’ I grant it is their own fault; and so it was my fault and yours when we went astray like sheep that were lost. Yet the shepherd of souls sought after us, and went after us into the wilderness.”¹⁸

Wesley faced yet another charge that field-preaching was worse than not preaching at all because it was illegal. In his lengthy defense of field-preaching, “A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion” Wesley offered this summary of their argument against field-preaching: “But field-preaching which is contrary to the laws of the land is worse than not preaching at all: But field-preaching is contrary to the laws of the land: Therefore it is worse than not preaching at all, because it is illegal.”¹⁹ Wesley notes that the “laws of the land” refers to the Act of Toleration that protected those who dissented from the established church. He maintained that field-preaching was not a dissenting act. He saw himself, his ministry and his preachers as part of the established church. The Act of Toleration did not apply. According to Wesley’s assessment, field-preaching was not illegal.²⁰

Wesley also heard the infuriating claim that field-preaching was indecent. For him, however, it would be indecent to ignore or forget all those who were lost. He even turned the criticism on to his accusers. “I wonder at those who still talk so loud of the indecency of field-preaching. The highest indecency is in St. Paul’s church, when a

¹⁸ Ibid., v. 8, 229.

¹⁹ Ibid., v.8, 113.

²⁰ Ibid.

considerable part of the congregation are asleep, or talking, or looking about, not minding a word the Preacher says.”²¹ Then Wesley wondered if there is anything more decent than a churchyard or a field filled with people behaving as if they are standing before the Judge of all as he speaks from heaven?

On other occasions, Wesley faced verbal and physical threats at various field-preaching stops. At Darlaston, he encountered an angry, rioting mob. Wesley tried to calm the situation. He spoke to the ringleader and his lieutenants. He recalled that they came to him as lions and went out as lambs.²² Still there were those who wanted his blood. The mob surrounded the house where he was staying. Wesley went to the door and asked, “Are you willing to hear me speak?” They answered, “No, no! Knock his brains out; down with him; kill him at once.”²³ Wesley managed to escape. While this situation was worse than most, Wesley encountered angry opposition at many of his field-preaching ventures.

At the first Methodist Conference on June 25, 1744, the subject of field-preaching came up. “Is field-preaching lawful?” The Conference answered: “We do not conceive that it is contrary to any law either of God or man. Yet to avoid giving needless offense, we never preach without doors, when we can, with any conveniency, preach within.”²⁴

Three years later, in 1747, the Methodist Conference included field-preaching in their debate and asked: “Have we limited field-preaching too much?” The Conference answered, “It seems we have.” The following rationale were given:

²¹ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, v. 2, 113.

²² *Ibid.*, v. 1, 436.

²³ *Ibid.*, v. 1, 438.

²⁴ W. L. Doughty, *John Wesley Preacher* (London: Epworth Press, 1955), 49.

(1) Because our calling is to save that which is lost. Now we cannot expect the wanderers from God to seek us; it is our part to go and seek them. (2) Because we are particularly called, by going out into the highways and hedges (which none will do if we do not) to compel them to come in. (3) Because the reason that is against it is not good, 'the house will hold all that come.' The house may hold all that come to the house, but not all that will come into the field. (4) Because we have always found greater blessing in field-preaching than in another preaching.²⁵

Despite the fierce opposition and the threats to the field-preacher, the Methodists affirmed the importance and necessity of field-preaching.

As often as Wesley engaged in this practice, he never preached without a plan to follow-up with those in the congregation. Methodist Societies cared for persons who came to faith or came closer to faith through field-preaching, especially after Wesley itinerated on to other communities.²⁶

Under Wesley's jurisdiction, Methodist societies purchased or built preaching houses for their meetings and preaching services. The Foundry in London became Wesley's headquarters and his first preaching-house. His initial impressions of that building were not promising. He described the structure as an "uncouth heap of ruins."²⁷ But after a substantial remodeling, rebuilding and significant debt, the Foundry was completed. It included a residence and study for Wesley, guest rooms, space for band meetings, a stable and a coach house. But, more importantly it included a large room with plain benches that could hold fifteen hundred people, including separate galleries for men and women.²⁸ Services at the preaching-houses were designed primarily for Methodist

²⁵ Ibid. p. 50

²⁶ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, v.8, 300.

²⁷ Ibid., v.8, 38.

²⁸ Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, Second ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2013), I Book, 197 of 617.

society members. Still no one was turned away. Many others came and listened to Wesley preach. This was especially true in the cold of winter when field-preaching was not all that appealing.

Wesley came to believe that the Methodist movement—and the established church for that matter—could not survive without field-preaching. In a rather prophetic moment, Wesley conceded, “I do not find any increase of the work of God without it. If ever this is laid aside, I expect the whole work will gradually die away.”²⁹

And yet, after more than thirty years of field-preaching, Wesley still did not care much for the practice, but recognized its importance. On September 6, 1772, he reflected: “I preached on the quay, at Kingswood, and near King’s square. To this day field-preaching is a cross to me. But I know my commission and see no other way of ‘preaching the gospel to every creature.’”³⁰

Other Wesleyan Resources

Since the time of John Wesley many have studied his ministry, including the volumes of his writings, his sermons and his field-preaching. These scholars present a clearer view of his clout and his effectiveness as a leader. They also help us to see more clearly the challenges Wesley encountered in field-preaching.

In the Bicentennial Edition of *The Works of John Wesley*, there are several samples of Wesley’s field-preaching sermons.³¹ These examples are brief and were transcribed by persons listening to Wesley. But they illustrate Wesley’s attempt to

²⁹ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, v. 3, 184.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, v.3, 479.

³¹ John Wesley and Albert Cook Outler, *The Works of John Wesley. 115-151 Volume 4* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1987), 515-524.

connect with people. One sermon, “I Will Heal Their Backsliding” based on Hosea 14:4 was written down by George Story, one of Wesley’s assistants. The sermon demonstrates how Wesley sought out sinners and in this case the backsliders. He tells the story of a wretched man who came to faith and then started preaching. However, he had very little success. He fell back into his wicked ways. Then this fallen preacher found himself in a rather awkward place.

“At a little inn, there was a parcel of lead miners drinking and swearing and they were abusing the Methodists, calling them a parcel of damned rogues that went about the country deceiving people; and this man was one of them (someone) hath found it out. Speak, man, speak. He answered, ‘I know you are a parcel of villains and I am more a child of the Devil than any of you; and I am afraid that all of you will have a better place in Hell than me.’³²

Wesley spoke of this man, “I happened to be in those parts and hearing of him...I found him full of faith and full of God.”³³ Wesley concludes, “Look up and be thou saved; unto him that hath died for thee; though your sins be red as crimson, his blood shall wash them white as snow. The Lord make you as at first; come naked to a naked Christ.”³⁴

There is a distinct difference between Wesley’s oral and printed sermons. According to Richard Heitzenrater, “Wesley preached spontaneously without notes or manuscript assistance. Many of his printed sermons, however, seem to be carefully developed homiletical treatises written specifically for publication.”³⁵

³² Ibid., 519.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 515.

William Doughty's book, *John Wesley Preacher*, chronicles Wesley's preaching life. He argues that Wesley never intended to compete against the established church, but to guide people to the faith. Still field-preaching created animosity between the Anglicans and Wesley. That view was expressed in Samuel Butler's novel, *The Way of the Flesh*. Character Reverend Pryer attacked Ernest Pontifex for his open air preaching and his low church Anglicanism:

You cannot and must not hawk Christ in the streets, as though you were in a heathen country whose inhabitants had never heard of him. The people here in London have had ample warning. Every church they pass is a protest against them, and a call to repent. Every church bell they hear is a witness against them; everyone of those they meet going to and coming from church on Sundays is a warning voice from God.³⁶

As a preacher of the gospel, Wesley saw these very people, the lost, as the very ones needing to be saved.

Doughty also notes, "There was one outstanding feature of an ordinary church which Wesley required in his field-preaching—a pulpit."³⁷ It was important for him not only to see the congregation, but also to be seen and heard by them. Often he stood on a chair or table, the steps of a building and even on a tombstone.³⁸

Louise Dygoski, in her Ph.D. dissertation, "The Journals and Letters of John Wesley on Preaching," examines the theory and practice of Wesley's preaching in light of eighteenth-century rhetorical concepts. According to Dygoski, field-preaching services were rather simple and adapted to the situation. These field-preaching events included

³⁶ Doughty, *John Wesley Preacher*, 45.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

extemporary prayers, the singing of several of Charles Wesley's hymns and preaching. "The usual order was to begin with prayer and then sing before and after the sermon."³⁹

The most distinctive part of field-preaching, for Wesley and other preachers working with him, was its extemporaneous nature. Dygoski identifies three reasons for the inevitability of extempore delivery. First, she acknowledges that not all preachers can compose a well-crafted sermon on paper. When a poorly written sermon is read aloud it fails to seize the attention of the listeners. While that same preacher using spontaneity might have a better opportunity of connecting with the congregation. Second, "...the continual traveling of preachers made the written discourse an impossibility." Third, many of these preachers would have been inconvenienced if they had to carry with them their sermons and sermon material.⁴⁰

Although Wesley became frustrated when he was no longer allowed to preach in many of the Anglican pulpits, he gradually saw this as a direct benefit to Methodism. From his first venture in field-preaching in the beginning of April of 1739, until the end of the year, Wesley delivered at least five hundred discourses. It was reported that only eight of those were in churches.⁴¹

Dygoski suggests that people came and listened to Wesley for numerous reasons. Many came out of curiosity. Some stopped to listen only because their paths crossed the place of preaching. "Some collected merely to see what would happen for the 'news' of the plain speaker, the unusual cases of physical disturbances accompanying conversions,

³⁹ Louise Annie Dygoski, "The Letters and Journals of John Wesley on Preaching" (PhD diss., Wisconsin, 1961), 99.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 92.

and the entertainment and violence afforded by hecklers and mobs, had spread abroad.”⁴² She also acknowledges that some, who came to jeer, stayed to pray. Wesley preached to great numbers of the poor who had no interest in attending church services. Whatever the motive for attending, people came to hear John Wesley.

Wesley adapted swiftly to the various congregations, crowds and to the settings in which he preached. He was skilled—probably from experience—at dealing with those who tried to disrupt his preaching. “Every conceivable device was employed: bells were rung; drums were beaten; ditties and ballads were sung; mud, stones, eggs and refuse were thrown; fire hoses were sprayed over the audiences; harlequins performed; drunkards behaved indecently or molested the women; names and insults were shouted aloud; oxen and dogs were driven among the listeners.”⁴³

Field-preaching, by its very nature, allowed people to come and go at will. This produced both good and bad results. If one did not stay and listen to the entire message they could get a distorted view of what was being said. Some who came casually were taken by the gospel message and stayed to listen. Others remained only long enough to hear what they did not like and left in disgust.⁴⁴

Irrespective of the situation or location, Wesley’s gospel message remained the same for all. He was never swayed by a person’s birth or social status or church affiliation. He did not cater to the rich and powerful. “He spoke the truth to the best of his ability and interpreted the biblical teaching with great plainness of speech.”⁴⁵

⁴² Ibid., 109-110.

⁴³ Ibid., 121.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 112-113.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 103.

George H. Williams, in his Ph.D. dissertation, “The Word Came With Power: Print, Oratory, and Methodism in Eighteenth-Century Britain” suggests that Methodist preaching—including field-preaching—introduced itself at a time when most preaching was extremely fruitless.⁴⁶ Anglican preachers wrote well-composed sermons but delivered them so poorly that they bored their congregations. Dissenters, on the other extreme, were criticized for their overly exaggerated delivery. Neither approach connected with the people. “Needless to say, ‘enthusiastic’ religious response was an anathema to those for whom Christianity was primarily a reasonable system of belief to be assented to by rational audiences.”⁴⁷ Wesley tended to be more enthusiastic than rational in his preaching. Despite the criticisms, the crowds clearly responded to him.

Williams also argues that Methodism plainly benefited from the excitement of evangelical revivals. Wesley’s preaching style had much more in common with evangelical groups than with his Anglican colleagues. Wesley, however, was extremely cautious of associating with any group that advocated leaving the Church of England.⁴⁸

According to Williams, preaching was considered one of the most significant forms of oratory in the eighteenth-century. “Like acting, it would have been far more likely to have been heard by the average person than the speeches of lawyers or parliamentarians, but unlike acting, preaching was not generally accused of corrupting

⁴⁶ George H. Williams, “The Word Came with Power: Print, Oratory and Methodism in Eighteenth-Century Britain” (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 2002), 61.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

the morals of the nation....”⁴⁹ In many ways the time was ripe for John Wesley’s field-preaching.

Ian J. Maddock, in *Men of One Book, A Comparison of Two Methodist Preachers, John Wesley and George Whitefield*, offers insights into Wesley’s hesitancy for field-preaching. Although he was convinced of the requisite of field-preaching and that he had been set aside by God for this work, “...Wesley was reluctant to undertake and sustain a ministry considered ‘irregular’ by the Church of England.”⁵⁰ Wesley remained committed to the established church.

Maddock also documents how perceptions of Wesley and his ministry differed. “After hearing Wesley preach for the first time in 1769, Johan Henrik Liden unflatteringly reported that ‘the spiritual father of the so-called Methodists’ has no great oratorical gifts, no outward appearance...” And yet he had a very powerful lasting impression of Wesley’ “he has the learning of a bishop and the zeal for the glory of God which is quite extraordinary. His talk is very agreeable.”⁵¹ According to Maddock, many of Wesley’s twentieth-century biographers identified a similarity in Wesley’s preaching to that of the Apostle Paul.⁵² He was seen as the “chosen apostle to the masses.”⁵³ Although Wesley was not averse to apostolic comparisons, he made no effort to

⁴⁹ Ibid., 65.

⁵⁰ Ian J. Maddock, *Men of One Book : A Comparison of Two Methodist Preachers, John Wesley and George Whitefield* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 56.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

sentimentalize his life as a field-preacher. It was not the life he sought. Field-preaching simply became the most expedient means of offering the gospel to the people.

Wesleyan scholar, Richard Heitzenrater in his book, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, details how Wesley made sure that those who were impacted through field-preaching had the opportunity for follow up. Wesley's plan included getting them involved in small groups, which he called societies and bands. "During this period, Wesley was also organizing and attending band meetings daily and circulating among several society meetings in the evening."⁵⁴ These societies and bands offered a place where people could be nurtured in the faith. Nevertheless, the number of persons participating in these small groups was considerably less than the sizeable crowds that listened to Wesley preach.

Paul Wesley Chilcote, in his book, *John and Charles Wesley, Selections from Their Writings and Hymns—Annotated and Explained*, describes the fundamental challenge Wesley encountered as a field-preacher. "As a scrupulous priest of the church of England, Wesley had prided himself on his adherence to the regulations of the church."⁵⁵ During that time, priests were only permitted to preach in the church building to which they were assigned or in other churches with the permission of the priest in charge or the bishop. But Wesley had this expansive vision of spreading the gospel throughout the whole land.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN2013), iBook Edition, loc. 183 of 619.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., loc. 181 of 614.

Field-Preaching in the New World

Field-preaching made its greatest impact in the American Colonies. Hundreds of field-preachers—called circuit riders—took the gospel to all parts of this developing nation. Many of these circuit riders did not have much formal education. Most of them were not accomplished preachers or theologians. But they were numerous and they crisscrossed the new world.

Field-preaching gave the Methodist movement an effective model when it reached across the Atlantic Ocean and to the American Colonies. The new field-preachers, the Methodist circuit riders, took the gospel directly to the people. This helped ignite an amazing growth in Methodism. John O. Gross, in *The Beginnings of American Methodism*, describes the role of the circuit riders and their willingness go anywhere sharing the gospel. But, these field-preaching circuit riders had their work cut out for them.

Gross quotes an unnamed source, “Someone has said that American Christianity’s first order of business after winning the battle against England was to wrest the new nation from control of the devil.”⁵⁷ Within the intellectual community, deism flourished.⁵⁸ While these persons believed in a creating God, they argued that God now kept his distance. In addition to this, many of the founding fathers and persons in positions of power were open about their disbelief in the word of God.⁵⁹ As the young

⁵⁷ Paul Wesley Chilcote, John Wesley, and Charles Wesley, *John & Charles Wesley : Selections from Their Writings and Hymns--Annotated & Explained*, iBook ed. (Woodstock, Vt.: SkyLight Paths Pub., 2011), loc. 61 of 266.

⁵⁸ John O. Gross, *The Beginnings of American Methodism* (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1961), 62.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 62.

nation grew, the impact of faith diminished. Gross quotes church historian William W. Sweet, “In the period of the Revolution and in the years immediately following, religious and moral conditions of the country as a whole reached the lowest ebb tide in the entire history of the American people.”⁶⁰

It was in this new land, that the field-preaching circuit riders went everywhere. Quite often circuit riders rode where there was no sign of civilization. Still they rode until they found a house and then held services.⁶¹ “They fulfilled the folk saying that in times of blizzards, snowstorms and cloudbursts, ‘nobody was out but crows and Methodist preachers.’”⁶²

The circuit riders’ strategy was rather simple. They found people where they lived and ministered to them. Quite frequently the Methodist circuit riders were first guests of families on the frontier. They helped with chores during the day and then after dinner, they offered religious instruction to the family and any neighbors who wished to join them.”

Their ministry and work was recognized by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1908 in an address to the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church:

The whole country is under a debt of gratitude to the Methodist circuit riders, the Methodist pioneer preachers, whose movement westward kept pace with the movement of the frontier, who shared all the hardships of life of that frontiersmen, while at the same time ministering to that frontiersmen’s spiritual needs, and seeing that his pressing material cares, and the hard and grinding poverty of his life did not wholly extinguish the divine fire within his soul.⁶³

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 63.

⁶² Ibid., 71.

⁶³ Ibid., 71.

The circuit riders simply followed the model of John Wesley. Like Wesley, they too recognized that the whole world is their parish.

Evangelism and Innovation

For John Wesley, field-preaching was a direct form of evangelism. It was a means of delivering the gospel to those beyond the church. As the world has advanced and developed, the means of reaching people outside the church has changed significantly. Pastors and congregations need to be conscious of these new understandings. Reaching people today requires a more modern approach.

Adam Hamilton serves the Church of the Resurrection in Kansas City, Missouri, the largest congregation in the United Methodist Church. Hamilton started this congregation as a field-preacher, preaching each week in a funeral home. In his most recent book, *Revival, Faith As Wesley Lived It*, he reflects on Wesley's beginnings as a field-preacher. Wesley preached to more people outside of the church building than he ever preached to on the inside. Hamilton notes that Wesley never issued altar calls. Instead, after offering them Christ, he pleaded with them to flee the wrath that is to come by participating in a small group known as a religious society.⁶⁴ For Wesley the field-preaching event was not an end-all, but the first step to a life of faith. Follow-up mattered.

The Reverend Heather Heinzman Lear serves as the Director for Evangelism Ministries for the United Methodist Board of Discipleship. She claims that one way to reclaim Wesleyan evangelism is to move congregations from membership to discipleship. "Membership focuses on what happens inside the church walls but discipleship

⁶⁴ Ibid., 73.

transcends them and engages the world.”⁶⁵ Effective evangelism reaches out beyond our church building finding people where they live, work and relax.

George Hunter challenges church leaders to rethink their focus on ministry. His book, *Should We Change Our Game Plan? From Traditional or Contemporary to Missional and Strategic*, acknowledges that the world has changed. As congregations reach out to the world through forms of field-preaching or other ministries, they must know that the old rules no longer apply. He argues that “...the most viable and contagious churches in the future will be ‘missional’ (or ‘apostolic’) and the most effective among those will be strategic local movements.”⁶⁶

Hunter suggests that there is no mystery to the decline of the mainline church. We have moved into the secular age and the church, by and large, has missed it. This new environment creates both challenges and opportunities. He notes that in the Western world, there are increasing numbers of people who have never been substantially influenced by the Christian faith. Many persons have no Christian memory or background. Most of our communities have growing populations who have no idea about what Christians are talking about.

Hunter indicates that in this secular age there has been a major shift from guilt to doubt. For centuries Christians and people of faith have been taught to follow God’s commandments. When they failed, they were overwhelmed with guilt. Today doubt is the most common feature experienced in people outside of the faith. Hunter strongly suggests

⁶⁵ Adam Hamilton, *Revival: Faith as Wesley Lived It* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2014), iBook Edition, 110 of 221.

⁶⁶ Heather Hahn, “Five Ways to Reclaim Wesley's Evangelism,” *United Methodist News Service*, March 7, 2014 2014.

that the most indispensable strategic response to people's doubts is the ministry of conversation. "There is probably no shortcut, with many people, to a period of honest dialog, involving multiple conversations, in response to their questions and doubts."⁶⁷

While people in the secular age remain curious about Christianity, they are also attracted to other religions, philosophies and worldviews.⁶⁸ Christianity has become one among many options. In addition, secular people in their focus on themselves have lost their connection to community. They often view their lives and their world as out of control.⁶⁹

Hunter acknowledges that most secular people "are culturally estranged from the church."⁷⁰ The style, language, music and even the architecture of churches make no sense to them. Hunter suggests the church's strategic challenge is to find ways to make their expression of faith interesting and relevant, to make its truth claims clear and to let people in on how we see life different in the world through the lenses those truths provide.

Hunter offers an economic metaphor that may be helpful for congregations considering taking their preaching ministries outside the church building. He argues that there are "Demand Side" churches and "Supply Side" churches. The "Demand Side" churches believe that whether they flourish or not will be determined by the demand for

⁶⁷ George G. Hunter, *Should We Change Our Game Plan? From Traditional or Contemporary to Missional and Strategic* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2013), iBook Edition, loc. 10 of 179.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, loc. 43 of 179.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 44 of 179.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 45 of 179.

their religious services.⁷¹ Whereas the “Supply Side” churches “take the initiative to people, and populations, on the people’s turf.”⁷² They willingly go outside the sanctuary.

James K. A. Smith in his book, *How (Not) To Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor*, examines Taylor’s monumental work *A Secular Age*. According to Smith, Taylor articulates that we live in a time where all faith is questioned and many do not believe in God. It is an age of doubt for everyone, believers and unbelievers alike. He advocates that this absence of God creates a sense of loss.⁷³ Consequently, if we are willing to converse and meet people where they are, this time may be an ideal opening for field-preaching.

Donald O. Soper in his book, *The Advocacy of the Gospel*, outlined the conversational style of his field-preaching.⁷⁴ He willingly encouraged people to ask their questions, challenge his theology or express their doubts and disbelief. Most of his sermons were built around the questions that people asked. If an issue were raised that he was ill-equipped to discuss, he promised to learn about it and talk about it the following week.

Leonard Sweet attempts to revolutionize our understanding of evangelism. In his book, *Nudge: Awakening Each Other to the God Who is Already There*, he defines evangelism as nudging people to see the God who is active in their lives. He argues that nudge evangelism is based on three notions: 1) Jesus is alive and active in the world; 2) Followers of Jesus “know” Jesus well enough to recognize where he is alive and moving in our day; 3) Evangelists nudge the world to wake up to the alive and acting Jesus and

⁷¹ Ibid., 48 of 179.

⁷² Ibid., loc. 142 of 179.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor*, loc. 68 of 148.

nudge others in the ways God is alive and moving. Sweet discounts the value of those who utilize the “Wrath of God Syndrome” as their primary means of evangelism. Scaring “the hell out of people” is not nearly as effective as helping them to see how God is moving in their lives. Rather, “evangelism is an invitation for broken people together to meet the Christ who loves broken people. We are all damaged but loved, crushed but cherished, with a divine embrace.”⁷⁵ Are contemporary field-preachers able to give this nudge?

Phil Maynard in *Shift, Helping Congregations Back Into the Game of Effective Ministry* argues that most congregations today are neither missional nor effective in reaching people with the gospel. He cites several studies suggesting that sixteen to twenty-nine year olds outside the church have a most unfavorable view of Christians. They view Christians as judgmental, hypocritical, old fashioned, too involved in politics, out of touch with reality, insensitive to others, not accepting of other faiths, boring and confusing.⁷⁶ To reach even a fraction of this group requires a major rethinking of how we reach out. There is little chance that people in this group will ever, on their own, show up at church on Sunday.

Robert Coleman’s, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, argues that an intentional effort is needed in reaching out to the world. He asks, “Why is the contemporary church so frustrated in its witness to the world? Is it not because among the clergy and laity alike

⁷⁵ Soper, *The Advocacy of the Gospel*, 64-82.

⁷⁶ Leonard I. Sweet, *Nudge: Awakening Each Other to the God Who's Already There* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010), iBook Edition, loc.30-31 of 354.

there is a general indifference to the commands of God, or at least a kind of contented complacency with mediocrity.”⁷⁷

Conclusion

From his first experience as a field-preacher, John Wesley discovered the advantage of taking the gospel directly to the people, especially to those who were beyond the reach of the church. Preaching outside the sacred sanctuary was a momentous move for Wesley. It took him some time to come to terms with this. But, this new form of evangelism became the heart of his remaining years of ministry. He gave his life to this work.

Today, more than two hundred and seventy years after John Wesley delivered his first field-preached sermon, the church still struggles to find effective ways to influence those who have no desire to enter a church building and worship in a sacred sanctuary. Even the United Methodist commitment to “Open Hearts, Open Minds and Open Doors,” fails to reach those who do not know the promise of the gospel. What happens when we step beyond the sacred, consecrated space of the sanctuary and meet people where they are? The fields today may not necessarily be outside. Instead, they will be found in diners, coffee shops, bars and rental spaces among other places. Unlike previous studies, this thesis will explore the effectiveness of current efforts of field-preaching. Wesley was so committed to this practice that he could not envision the church persevering without it.

Chapter Four offers a comprehensive description of how this thesis will explore the effectiveness of field-preaching evangelism in the United Methodist Church. Each field-preaching site will be described. The exploratory case study method will be

⁷⁷ Ibid., loc. 24 of 354.

explained in specific detail. I will also share what I anticipate to find and give the plan for my own attempt at field-preaching in Hartford, Wisconsin.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Field-preaching made a momentous impact on the Methodist movement. Although hesitant initially, John Wesley championed this practice. Once he started preaching beyond the sanctuary, he became convinced of its importance. He field-preached multiple times a day in different locations and circumstances. He preached early in the morning before laborers started their daily shift. He preached in the center of cities and villages and out in the fields where hundreds—and sometimes thousands of people—listened.

When the Methodist movement crossed the Atlantic Ocean to the American continent, the Methodist circuit riders field-preached their way westward. They searched for settlers and often found them in the remotest of places. Typically the circuit riders helped the settlers during the day and then in the evening held preaching and teaching services.

While some forms of field-preaching have continued in the United Methodist Church, our historic passion for going out and finding the lost has disappeared. Today many United Methodist congregations expect people, even the lost, to come and find them. Congregations remain convinced that the institution of the church is the only place proclaiming the gospel.

What happens when United Methodist congregations reclaim the deep-rooted practice of field-preaching? This thesis asks three specific questions. First, do these

present-day field-preaching ministries reach a population that is currently not served by the established church? Second, how important is the preaching and how does this preaching differ from typical sanctuary preaching? Third, how expensive is it for congregations to start a field preaching ministry?

The Research Process

The “*Exploratory Case Study Method*” will be used to learn from congregations engaged in contemporary field-preaching. This method facilitates a search for generalizations that leads to a detailed and profound understanding of field-preaching. Data will be gathered, examined, investigated and analyzed. Since field-preaching has not been a significant part of my preaching experience, this exploration leads me into a new environment of ministry.

Exploration is especially helpful when there is a lack preliminary research on the topic. Although we know of John Wesley’s experience with field-preaching—including his own assessment of its value and his crowd size estimates—there has been very little, if anything, written specifically on the modern version of this extraordinary Methodist practice.

Credibility concerns surround all research methods. This is especially true with exploratory research. Robert A. Stebbins acknowledges three potential pitfalls to this method of research:

1. Reactive effects of the observers’ presence or activities on the phenomenon being observed.
2. Distorting effects of selective perception and interpretation on the observers’ part.

3. Limitations of the observers' ability to witness all relevant aspects of the phenomena in question.¹

According to Stebbins exploratory research evokes suspicion "because of the heavy subjective element involved when a lone researcher (the usual way exploration is conducted) observes and interviews, employing an open ended design."² He argues that the validity of this method can be enhanced in several ways. First, the researcher discusses the generalizations that emerge with those being interviewed. Then asks those being interviewed, does this sound familiar? Second, the researcher looks for evidence that contradicts the hypothesis. Third, the researcher gathers as much data as possible prior to making generalizations.

Stebbins also acknowledges a grammatical tense difference in the reporting of research using this exploration model. He argues that unlike the reporting of scientific data in the past tense, exploratory research should be conveyed in the present tense. He writes, "After all, the goal of exploratory research reports is to present a set of hypothesis knitted together as grounded theory, with the entire ensemble to be confirmed later."³

Field-Preaching Settings

The efficacy of these field-preaching ministries will be explored from different perspectives. Are these ministries making new disciples? Are an increasing number of people participating in the ministry? Does the preaching make a difference in the lives of individuals? Does the ministry attract persons who, on their own, would not set foot inside a church?

¹ Ibid.

² Stebbins, "Exploratory Research in the Social Sciences," 48.

³ Ibid.

Four United Methodist ministries were selected as modern day examples of field-preaching. The Sycamore Creek United Methodist Church in Lansing, Michigan became active in field-preaching as a new church start. This congregation meets every Sunday morning in an old church building. On Monday evening they field-preach at Jackie's Diner, a local restaurant. Those in attendance order off the menu and eat their evening meal as worship leaders and the pastor direct the service.

Union Coffee in Dallas, Texas runs a ministry out of a full service, non-profit coffee shop. Located within walking distance of Southern Methodist University, Union Coffee is a popular meeting place for students, faculty and others. During the week, they offer three different worship services. Their two field-preaching services include a Sunday evening service, which targets the creative, artistic community and a Tuesday evening service focusing mostly on twenty-year-olds. On Friday evening, they offer the Naked Stage, another unique experience, which serves as an entry point for their ministry. The Naked Stage invites participants to share personal stories related to a specific theme.

Urban Poiema congregation, another new church start, meets on Sunday mornings at Mangos Tropical Bar and Grill in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Also known as Up Church Milwaukee, this mostly Hispanic congregation begins the service with a half-hour of lively music followed by prayer, scripture and preaching. Mangos Bar and Grill shares a parking lot with a tobacco depot and a liquor store. The parking lot is a busy place on Sunday morning. In addition to their publicity and a variety of ways of inviting people to join them, they hope their lively brand of music will draw people into the service.

Urban Village Church in Chicago, Illinois is the most longstanding field-preaching site studied in this thesis. This ministry meets at four locations throughout Chicago. They identify a need and a potential area for outreach. Then they rent a place to gather. The Urban Village Church does not own any buildings or property.

These four congregations were identified in several ways. Initially, the Wisconsin United Methodist Bishop, Dr. Hee-Soo Jung and district superintendents made suggestions. Two of the congregations were found by searching the Internet. For example, after googling “church in a diner” and “church in a coffee shop,” the Sycamore Creek United Methodist Church and Union Coffee popped up.

These are not the only United Methodist congregations engaged in field-preaching. The ministries did, however, meet the explicit criteria of this thesis. That is, each of these ministries makes an intentional effort of taking the preaching ministry of the church out to the community. They attempt to connect with people who are not part of any church or ministry.

These congregations also reflect some of the diversity found within the United Methodist denomination. One of these congregations is theologically conservative, one is mainstream United Methodist, while two are theologically progressive. Male pastors serve three of the congregations and a female serves one. One of the congregations is predominately Caucasian, two are composed of mixed races: African Americans, Hispanics, Asians and Caucasians. One congregation is mainly Hispanic. But all four are similar in that their preaching ministry happens beyond the traditional sanctuary.

At each of the field-preaching sites, I participated in the worship service attempting to imagine what it would be like walking into that setting off the street. I

asked myself, “Would there be something to bring me back?” I paid attention to the elements of the service including the music, prayer times and other sharing. But mostly, I wanted to learn how the various pastors took advantage of the preaching moment.

Gathering Data

Prior to my site visits, I communicated with the pastor through email and phone conversations. I explored their websites desiring to learn as much as possible about each ministry before my arrival. I asked the pastor to identify individuals who would also be willing to be interviewed by me. I wanted to learn from three basic groups: those who have been involved in the ministry for more than a year; those who have been active for six months or less; and, those who were new to the ministry.

A series of recorded interviews were conducted at each site. I sought to learn from the pastors, lay leaders and a representative sample of participants. The pastors gave me permission to use their full name in this thesis. All others will be referred to by their first name. All participants consented to recorded interviews. All of the interviews were transcribed, coded and analyzed.

From the pastors and the lay leaders, I wanted to understand their vision and the broader foresight of the ministry. I asked:

- What are their expectations and dreams for the outreach?
- What has worked for them and what has not?
- What is the role of preaching?
- How are people becoming involved in the ministry?
- What are the processes to include them?
- How do you evaluate the effectiveness of this ministry?
- What do you know about the faith backgrounds of those who participate?
- What are the challenges?

Follow-up questions were asked based on their responses. For example, if nothing was mentioned about the finances, I addressed that with a follow-up question. Where applicable, I also wanted to learn how this field-preaching ministry differed from their main worship location. Does field-preaching ministry have a specific focus or is it a repeat of what the traditional church members experienced?

At each field-preaching site, I also interviewed persons participating in the ministry. While these individuals may not have had the broad vision for the ministry, this ministry had, in some way, impacted them. I asked:

How did you come to be here?
 What keeps you coming?
 How has this experience impacted your life?

Again follow-up questions were asked. If they did not mention the preaching, I asked, "How important is the pastors' message for you?" I wanted to discover their draw or attraction to the ministry. I also wanted to learn something about their faith background or lack of a faith background.

Field-Preaching in Hartford, Wisconsin

After learning from each of these field-preaching ministries, I made a preliminary attempt at field-preaching in Hartford, Wisconsin, where I am currently an appointed pastor at First United Methodist Church. With the support of the congregation, we tried to recover Wesley's passion for going out and finding the lost.

After considering several possible locations, the best available setting proved to be the Perc Place Restaurant in downtown Hartford. Not only is this a popular gathering spot, it was affordable. We rented the restaurant. Those in attendance were offered free

coffee or soda and a tasty dessert. Participants had the opportunity to order off the menu at their own expense.

To help cover the cost of this field-preaching experiment, First United Methodist Church received a one thousand dollar grant from the Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation. This money covered the cost of the restaurant rental, the drinks and desserts plus miscellaneous expenses.

We met on three Monday evenings in September and October of 2015. Each Monday had a specific theme. Week One: “If God is so good and so loving, why is there so much evil in the world?” Week Two: “Is there really a hell?” And, Week Three: “How good do we have to be?” I began each service by welcoming those in attendance. I also tried to create a safe place where they would be allowed and encouraged to share their thoughts and their doubts.

Each week a small band played three or four secular music pieces. A brief scripture reading, a ten-minute sermon with a response time followed. Those in attendance were encouraged to verbally share their thoughts and understandings. They had the opportunity to ask questions, disagree with what they heard or engage in discussion. The service ended with closing music and a sending forth.

The Perc Place has a capacity for a hundred and twelve persons. While this field-preaching event was intended for those outside the church, I asked the members of First United Methodist Church to sign-up for twenty-five spots each week. I had no idea how many people, if any, would come. I wanted to make sure that there would be a significant number of people so the restaurant would not feel empty.

We advertised this outreach in several ways. Posters were printed and placed at various locations around Hartford, including the Perc Place Restaurant, a downtown bookstore, other commercial establishments and the Community Rec Department. The members of First United Methodist Church were strongly encouraged to invite people they knew who had no faith connection. Social media, including Facebook, Twitter and Instant Messenger was also utilized to get the word out.

Several church members were enlisted to gather data after each Perc Church experience. They approached evening participants and asked and recorded their responses to these questions:

How did you come to be here?
What were your impressions?

These interviews were then transcribed, coded and analyzed.

Expected Outcomes

From the very beginning of this study, my hypothesis was that field-preaching would be more effective at reaching those outside the church than waiting for people to come to a congregation. I also thought it likely that these ministries would have an increasing number of participants. But this increase would not necessarily translate into a growing church membership. Taking the vows to become a United Methodist is such a significant step, church membership would lag behind the participation numbers.

Since field-preaching requires a certain gall and nerve, I suspect that each of the field-preaching pastors would have an adventuresome and innovative spirit. Not only must they think outside the box, they must think outside the church. They will have a vision for what they see happening and the ability to communicate that vision with

others. They will also have the self-confidence to do whatever it takes to make the ministry work.

I expect that preaching should be an important part of these ministries. Too many churches suffer through poor sermons week after week while some types of preaching have bad reputations. But preaching done faithfully and well draws people closer to God. The effectiveness of each of these field-preaching sites will depend largely on the pastor's talent and effectiveness as a preacher.

I also predict that these field-preaching ministries will be expensive endeavors. The cost for rental, equipment, sound system and additional supplies requires a significant investment. In Hartford, we spent one thousand dollars for three field-preaching services. That translates into an annual cost of somewhere between ten and fifteen thousand dollars. That does not include the cost for equipment like a keyboard and sound system.

John Wesley believed in field-preaching. Going out and finding the lost represents an essential part of the church's mission. My findings will demonstrate the necessity for reclaiming Wesley's passion.

Limits of this Thesis

Pastors across the United Methodist Church preach in a variety of ways. Most of these sermons are preached in a traditional church sanctuary or somewhere on the church property. This thesis, however, focuses exclusively on risk-taking pastors and congregations who take their preaching ministry beyond their own sanctuary's sacred space.

These forward-looking ministries model a new wave of evangelism. In fact, their efforts may be viewed as radical and even outside the boundaries of the mainline church. While it is hoped that the discoveries of this thesis will be helpful to congregations in other settings, not all of the findings will be transportable to other locations. For example what works in the progressive, university community of Dallas may not be as effective in rural Wisconsin.

Other denominations also engage in modern forms of field-preaching. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, the United Church of Christ, the Presbyterian Church U.S.A and the American Baptist Church have congregations that field-preach in various ways, but they were not studied in this thesis.

Most of the data gathered was gathered during one visit to each site. If these ministries were followed over an extended period of time—preferably three to five years—those findings would be far superior to this study.

The discoveries from the Hartford field-preaching experiment will be somewhat incomplete. In Hartford we tried to learn as much as possible during a three-week window where I ended up preaching mostly to my own church members. Whereas the four featured field-preaching ministries took months and even years to get established. These ministries had plenty of experience with trial and error, ascertaining what worked and what did not.

Within these limitations, it is hoped that this thesis will help United Methodist congregations and other churches discover innovative ways of reaching beyond their church structure and seeing their ministry locale in a whole new way. If we have no passion for going out and finding the lost, what do we have?

Conclusion

This thesis evaluates the effectiveness of four highly unique United Methodist congregations that attempt to recover a contemporary form of field-preaching. Field-preaching today may not take place near factories, corn fields or even in the open air. It happens when congregations and pastors focus on bonding with those who have no faith, those who have walked away from the faith or those who simply do not know what they believe anymore.

In Chapter Five, the data gathered during my four site visits and the Hartford field-preaching experiment will be presented and evaluated. Do these ministries accomplish what they hope? Are they able to connect with those outside the church?

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The Exploratory Case Study Method was utilized to gather data from four ministry sites that employ a modern day version of John Wesley's field-preaching. At each location the lead pastor was interviewed, as well as ministry leaders and ministry participants. I interviewed a representative cross-section of people at each location. Thirty-nine persons consented to be interviewed. These interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded. Most of the data is qualitative based on the interviews and personal observations. I will also offer several quantitative findings based on specific comments of those interviewed.

As the researcher, I experienced each of the ministries. I attended the Church in a Diner in Lansing, Michigan on Monday, March 23, 2015; Union Coffee in Dallas, Texas on Tuesday and Wednesday May 12 and 13, 2015; Urban Poiema In Milwaukee, Wisconsin on Sunday June 7, 2015; and Urban Village in Chicago, Illinois on Sunday June 21, 2015. All interviews were conducted on site with one exception; Pastor Mike Baughman of Union Coffee had a scheduling conflict that made him unavailable during my time in Dallas. I interviewed him over the phone prior to my visit. Following each visit, I emailed each pastor with a few follow-up questions.¹

¹ Transcripts of these interviews are in Appendix A.

Initially, I was surprised by the relatively small attendance at each location. Church in a Diner welcomed thirty-five worshipers, Union Coffee fifty-eight, Urban Poiema thirty and Urban Village one hundred twenty-five. I was impressed that most of the participants at Union Coffee and Urban Village were in their twenties. This is a demographic largely missing from United Methodist congregations.

At each site, I experienced and participated in the worship. There were no special emphasis or significant celebration during my visits. The one exception was Urban Village. I attended the Sunday immediately following Charleston, South Carolina's church shootings. Response to this tragedy became a major focal point of the service.

On three Monday nights, September 14 and 21, and October 5, 2015, I conducted field-preaching services at the Perc Place Restaurant in downtown Hartford, Wisconsin. While a rather brief experiment, it revealed a new opportunity for ministry.

Church in a Diner

Church in a Diner gave me my first experience with modern day field-preaching. Sycamore Creek United Methodist Church sponsors this service each Monday night at Jackie's Diner in Lansing, Michigan. The diner is located on a four-lane road in a commercial district. Each day Jackie's Diner serves only breakfast and lunch. On Monday evenings, Jackie opens the diner for this ministry. A volunteer crew arrived ninety minutes prior to the service to set-up a screen and a sound system. Performance musicians brought their own instruments, including a drum set. Thirty minutes prior to the service, the music team practiced their music. The service began at 7:00 p.m. Most participants arrived early, ordered their meal and conversed with one another.

All first-time guests receive a free burger and fries. Five first time visitors attended the service on March 23rd. One man, after finishing his meal, stood up and left during an early part of the service.

Throughout this service people moved around. Waitresses took orders and delivered meals. Participants took bathroom breaks or got up for drink refills. During the sermon one man walked behind the pastor and made a funny face.

Aside from these distractions, those in attendance paid attention. At two places within the sermon Pastor Tom invited the group to talk around a table. He gave them specific questions and five minutes for discussion.

Following the sermon, one worship leader made a number of announcements including an invitation for people to participate in a Holy Week mission project. Post service, the pastor, leaders and music team gathered for a brief evaluation of each worship service.

Union Coffee

Union Coffee has a spacious, flexible facility, in a prosperous part of Dallas across the highway from Southern Methodist University. They utilize a commercial kitchen and a full service coffee bar. Adjacent to the coffee service area, is a large room filled with a variety of tables, chairs, booths and a private meeting room. During my visit this room was filled with students studying, working on projects, talking or enjoying their coffee and listening to music. Union Coffee also draws some Southern Methodist University faculty and local businesspersons. For all its benefits, the building creates several challenges. Parking is not easy and there is no option for drive-through service.

Union Coffee sponsors three distinct services each week. On Sunday evenings they offer a service call “Studio.” This worship experience targets Dallas’ artistic community. On Tuesday evening, they offer “Kuneo,” a service that attracts people in their twenties. Friday evening they present “The Naked Stage.” Individuals stand on stage and tell their story without any notes or props. Since the launch of Union Coffee, “The Naked Stage” has been a main entry point for this ministry. These worship experiences are lay led. At Studio and Kuneo, Pastor Mike delivers the message.

Prior to worship, chairs and tables were moved to accommodate worship services. Volunteers walked around informing people that there would be a worship service. Union’s customers were invited to stay and participate, put on their headphones and continue working, or move to the side room where they can work in silence. Based on my observation, no one left. Some participate and a few take advantage of the side room. The service began with a welcome introducing the evening theme. A band played several secular, non-religious songs. Different people made a brief personal witness about the evening theme. A guest pastor preached a sermon, which was followed by twenty minutes of discussion. Prayers were offered and communion was served.

After worship most participants remain at Union Coffee for over thirty minutes. During this fellowship time, tables and chairs are put back into place facilitating Union Coffee’s next day’s business.

Urban Poiema

Early on Sunday morning, Urban Poiema volunteers convert the Mangos Bar and Grill from a place that serves food and drink to a worship space. This was accomplished in a short amount of time. They used television screens to scroll announcements prior to

the service. This included displaying words for the songs, unison prayers and scripture readings. There is a separate sound system, which allows translations from English to Spanish.

Mangos Bar and Grill offers an ideal location for field-preaching. It shares a parking lot with a tobacco depot and liquor store. There is plenty of foot traffic into both of these establishments on Sunday mornings. This location is also in one of the more violent neighborhoods in Milwaukee.

Doughnuts, coffee and juice were available throughout the morning. The service began with thirty minutes of music and prayer. This was followed by a brief intermission. Many got up for more refreshments, some used the bathrooms and the paid musicians departed for their next gig.

During the second half of service, Pastor Juan sat at a table where he read scripture and preached for twenty minutes. He served communion. After a few brief announcements, he offered a benediction. Very quickly, the worship space was transformed back into a bar where lunch would be served within the hour.

Urban Village

Urban Village has four ministry locations around Chicago. In an attempt to reach young professionals on Chicago's south side in the Hyde Park-Woodlawn neighborhood, Urban Village rents the chapel at the Chicago Theological Seminary. Of the four field-preaching sites visited, this is the only ministry that gathers in a setting designed specifically for worship. Unlike other sites where the ministry is close to the street, the chapel is located on the fourth floor of an academic building.

Urban Village's setting is very much like a contemporary church, with chairs, a place for a band and musical leaders and a preacher's lectern. A large video screen scrolls announcements before services begin. Words to the songs, prayers and communion liturgy are all shown on this screen.

During their service, Urban Village welcomed fifteen new members. Some of these joined the ministry while others unite with the United Methodist Church as well. While I was impressed with the class of new members, Pastor Emily indicated that this was their first new member class in six months.

This worship service included music led by very talented musicians. The song leader had been a quarter-finalist on American Idol. Several community and world prayers were offered, including prayers for the people in Charleston, South Carolina. A ministry participant shared his faith testimony. Pastor Emily preached a twenty-five minute sermon detailing her concerns and anger over the Charleston church shootings.

Following the sermon, communion was served. Church participants also had an opportunity to light a candle as a prayer for someone they know. Pastor Emily delivered the benediction and most of the church attendees moved to a dining area adjacent to the chapel for a potluck coffee hour.

Perc Church

Following my visits to four field-preaching ministries, I engaged in field-preaching. For three weeks we met at the Perc Place Restaurant. We offered free coffee, soda and a dessert to all who came. Posters, social media and personal invitations were primary means of advertising. Each week we brought in our own keyboard and sound

system. We designed these services with the intent of making it as comfortable as possible for those who have no faith connection.

After a brief welcome and introduction, the service began with two or three songs by our musicians. There was no congregational singing. After the sharing scripture, I preached a ten-minute sermon. Discussion and feedback followed. Discussion questions were printed on the program.

I selected themes to attract those outside the church. The first week we discussed, “If God is so loving, why is there so much evil in the world?” I asked these follow-up questions. “What should God do about evil?” And, “How do we resist evil?” The theme for the second week was, “Is there really a Hell?” Discussion questions were, “What are your impressions of Hell?” And, “If God is so loving, why did God create a Hell?” The third week we focused on “How good do we have to be?” And I asked, “In what ways do you feel pressure to be perfect?” And, “When we mess up and make mistakes why is it so difficult to forgive ourselves?”² All three presentations generated discussion as a whole group.

Over a three week time we had thirty-five, thirty-two and forty-eight people attend. On both the second and third evening, people eating at the restaurant, who did not know about the service, chose to stay.

² Manuscripts of these sermons are in Appendix D.

Research Findings

Field-Preaching

Each of these four ministries employs a contemporary version of field-preaching.³ They reach out to people who have no connection with any faith community. Included in this group are those who have been “de-churched” or disillusioned with the church, those who have been bruised or bored by the church, those searching for something more in their lives and even nonbelievers and atheists. Getting people in the door, however, is the greatest challenge.

Each ministry has opportunities to speak to people who have come for one purpose and then decide to stay for a service. At the Church in a Diner, it is very likely to have people show up for a free burger and fries and then choose to stay for the worship. Jim tells how he came to the Church in a Diner for the food. He did not know if he would stay for the service or not. But he said, “Pastor Tom caught my attention. I wanted to listen. I decided to come back again, again and again.”⁴

As a non-profit coffee shop, Union Coffee has more coffee and food patrons than they have worship attendees. Still many of these customers stay for the service. Jane told how she and one of her colleagues came to Union to finish up a work project, then decided to stay for the Kuneo service. Scott, who graduated from Southern Methodist University Law School, explained that he first found Union Coffee as a place to study, but then started attending the services. According to Pastor Mike, “So one thing I really

³ My worksheet for coding the transcripts is found in Appendix C.

⁴ A sampling of participant interview transcripts are in Appendix B.

like is that almost every week there are people in the background with their headphones on doing their work, but they will be singing along with us in worship.”

Urban Poiema has opportunities to attract people who are out for one purpose and then come to worship. Pastor Juan tells that there have been times when individuals are out buying tobacco or liquor and come and join them in worship. But at the same time, he fears that the bar setting may be a hindrance. Although he believes that while God is present in their worship, he knows that a bar setting keeps some people away. There are those persons who will not go to bar. Danny, a regular attender, is perfectly comfortable with the location. He argues that we break boundaries “by taking the gospel to places it has not been.”

Persons attending Urban Village make a decision to come. It is intentional. Urban Village welcomes very few people who wander off the street and take the elevator or stairs to the fourth floor. But still they connect with those who come for one reason and stay for another. Or, they may get those who came once and then decided to return repeatedly. One woman explains that she was not at all interested in returning to church. She came to support her spouse, but to her surprise, she was deeply moved by the worship. Others report coming for the music or to be with friends and have similar experiences.

At the Perc Church we also had a few families and individuals who were finishing their dinner and decided to stay for worship. Jane was not expecting a worship service. “We came out here for something to eat. We didn’t know anything about the service until we arrived. We decided to stay and it gives us something to think about.”

While these ministries do not draw huge crowds as John Wesley enjoyed, they provide a means of interacting with those who are beyond the reach of most churches. Whenever this happens, these ministries are field-preaching.

Faith Backgrounds of the Participants

While these ministries reach people with a variety of faith and non-faith backgrounds, most participants have had some connection with a church. They may have grown up in a church, have been active in youth group, sang in the choir, but then for one reason or another stopped attending. Several gay men and lesbian women shared that if their previous church knew who they really were, they would not be accepted. Eight of the thirty-nine interviewed still attend their “regular” church but find that these ministries supplement their faith. For example, there were Catholics at each location who attend weekly Mass. Then they feel free to come to these ministries.

According to Pastor Tom at the Church in a Diner, their gathering is mostly people who describe themselves as formerly Christian, individuals who left a church after a bad experience and those who have no church connection. Although somewhat tentative at first, they slowly become active and involved in the ministry. Pastor Tom also acknowledges that the Church in a Diner reaches committed Christians who, because of work schedules or other commitments, do not attend church services on Sunday morning.

Union Coffee draws people who grew up in a Protestant or Catholic Church but left it because they were hurt or bored. According to Pastor Mike, “A common thing that I hear from those who have left the church is that they went to Vacation Bible School, they attended youth group and then went off to college. But, when they had new questions about God or the faith, their home church did not address them.” Others at

Union Coffee left the church because of one scandal or another. Pastor Mike also estimates that twenty percent of people who attend Studio or Kuneo worship are part of the gay and lesbian community. He explains that Southern Methodist University, just across the highway from Union Coffee, offers twenty-eight campus ministries. Only one of them has been open and affirming of gays and lesbians.

Urban Poiema has a variety of faith backgrounds present on Sunday mornings. Pastor Juan notes that Hispanics generally come from either a Catholic or Pentecostal background. He says, "As Hispanics we like a very emotional, lively worship experience."

Pastor Emily at Urban Village says that most of their participants come from a Christian background of some stripe. "And we also have people who claim to be atheists or non-believers." The weekly congregation is made up of people from Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Pentecostal and non-denominational backgrounds. She states that it "runs the gamut in terms of Christian traditions in a lot of ways." Because of this diversity most people are stretched in one way or another. Some may not be accustomed to pastors preaching from a manuscript or experience the deep exegetical work in the sermons. For others the candle lighting and praying on the side is new. Most appreciate the relevance in the preaching that they do not remember from their former tradition.

Most of Perc Church is made up of United Methodists. We did welcome a non-practicing Catholic, a Missouri Synod Lutheran and seven people who had no church association. One woman explains that she was raised a United Methodist. "But as an adult I found the United Methodists to be too liberal especially on matters of scripture."

She now belongs to a much more conservative church. But when asked if she would come back to the Perc Church she said, “Absolutely.”

The Importance of Preaching

Of thirty-nine persons interviewed, twenty-eight talked about the importance of the pastor’s message. Many even described it as extremely important or hugely significant. Several respondents made it clear that they come for the sermon. Daniel from Urban Village says, “I really crave the message and look forward to it each week.” But, each of these interviewees understood the importance of preaching differently.

At Church in a Diner, several respondents described the relational nature of Pastor Tom’s sermons. They tell about how he “connects with us. He understands us. He knows our struggles.” Others identify his approachable personality. This makes his sermons important to them.

Union Coffee participants recognize the importance of preaching because it leads to deeper and more intellectual discussions. Jeff acknowledges that he doesn’t come to Union to get all his questions answered; he comes to engage the questions. Pastor Mike helps him do that. They also mention Pastor Mike’s talent at moving from sermon to discussion time.

People at Urban Poiema find the importance of preaching in Pastor Juan’s passion. He does not hide his love for the Lord. Ricky, who grew up in the Roman Catholic tradition, never saw that passion in preaching until he heard Pastor Juan. Angela says, “His message is what is meaningful and he gives you the knowledge to go out and be disciples.” Pastor Juan preaches with the confidence that God will be with the congregation as they return to one of the most turbulent areas in the city of Milwaukee.

Many Urban Village respondents made it clear that Pastor Emily's sermons are important because she connects scripture to every day activities. Antonio believes that her sermons deal with real life situations, social injustice issues, race relations and gender equality. Angelo even utilizes Urban Village's tag line to stress the importance of the sermons. "The sermons are bold, inclusive and relevant."

All these ministries are located in vastly different communities. In Lansing, Church in a Diner finds itself in struggling middle class America. Union Coffee in Dallas is close to the very wealthy Southern Methodist University. Urban Poiema is located in one of Milwaukee's more violent neighborhoods. On the south side of Chicago, Urban Village attracts socially responsible, upwardly mobile young adults. Perc Church is in a middle-class community of Hartford, Wisconsin.

Collaborative Preaching

Two ministries prepare sermons in a collaborative manner. At Union Coffee, a design team plans worship and creates the sermon. Scott, part of that group, explains that this process starts two weeks prior to the service. After brainstorming, they spend two hours talking through the sermon. Together they shape the message. Scott adds, "It is really awesome because it is not just the pastor in his study writing it out." Pastor Mike affirms the community role in shaping a sermon. Still, there are times when this method does not work. Occasionally, he has to ditch everything prepared and move in a totally different direction. Pastor Mike adds, "And so it's very humbling, frightening and exciting all at the same time."

The collaborative effort at Urban Village works slightly differently. Pastors at each Urban Village location plan out their sermons together. Using their own lectionary,

they create and develop sermon series. They agree upon key points that they will emphasize. Since Chicago's neighborhoods are distinctly diverse, pastors adapt sermons to their specific ministry setting.

Interactive Preaching

Three of the four ministries tend to be more interactive than a traditional United Methodist Church. A traditional church sings hymns, prays together, uses responsive readings, preaches a sermon and may have a time for passing of the peace. The Church in a Dinner, Union Coffee and Urban Village offer much more interaction.

At the Church in a Diner, Pastor Tom preaches the same sermon on Monday night that he preached on Sunday morning. According to Pastor Tom, his Monday night sermon is more interactive. People talk to him throughout the service. They affirm what he says or ask for additional clarification if they do not understand. Also Pastor Tom stops his sermon twice to allow for five-minute discussions.

Both Studio and Kuneo at Union Coffee are intentionally interactive. Typically for these evening services, Pastor Mike talks for ten minutes. Then he gives everyone five minutes to talk with those close to him or her. He says, "We put discussion prompts on the screen that people can use or ignore depending on what is more helpful to them." He then facilitates a ten-minute discussion with the entire gathering. Scott articulates that it is important for him "to hear the scripture read and interpreted, but it is also important to ask questions and, if necessary, redirect the focus." Several respondents acknowledge that they do not have all the answers and sometimes they finish a service with lingering questions. Others indicate that sometimes the discussions get uncomfortable—especially when talking about difficult issues—but the Union Coffee congregation embraces that

and recognizes that as part of spiritual life. This interactive preaching helps Union Coffee attendee Philippe hear scripture and the message from different perspectives. He says, “We get to talk about subjects that most people do not get to talk about in a regular church.”

Urban Village offers a different form of interaction. They do not have discussion times during a service, but they offer other types of interaction. Pastor Emily explains that they try to pull from a variety of traditions. “We sing, we use icons and candles that people get to light and take a moment to pray. That is familiar to those folks from Catholic backgrounds.” They also offer places for prayer on both sides of the room during communion, which they offer every week. Nonetheless, many discussions happen in the extended fellowship time following services.

Urban Poiema’s service is similar to a typical United Methodist service. Most of the interaction happens before and during the intermission or following the service.

Perc Church participants are very open during the sharing time. After the sermon, there is time for group discussion. They speak and respond to questions. Sue likes the experience. “There is no pressure, very relaxing.”

I found it surprising that people were willing to talk and share in an open way. In hindsight, nonetheless, I think it would have worked better for people to talk around the tables first and then talk as a whole group.

Cost of Field-Preaching

John Wesley may have been able to stand on a tree stump and preach in a field to a large crowd of people without making a significant financial investment. This is not possible anymore. Nevertheless, the initial financial outlay and ongoing expenses vary significantly from one location to the next.

Church in a Diner meets at Jackie's Diner. The ministry does not pay rent, but the diner gets the benefit of thirty to forty customers on Monday evenings. The church buys the meals of those who come for the first time. The church also covers the cost of the meals for their staff and worship leaders. According to Pastor Tom, this amounts to about \$150 a week. Annually, this comes to \$7,800. The ministry also made an investment in a sound system, screen, projector and miscellaneous items. This equipment is also utilized during Sunday morning services. Of the four ministries, Church in a Diner has the smallest budget.

Union Coffee, at the other extreme, is the most expensive of all sites visited. Initially the North Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church invested \$250,000 in this project. According to their business manager, Mary, "There are some people in the North Texas Conference who consider us to be the most successful new church start because we have not had to go back and ask for additional funding." Given all that they have learned, Pastor Mike believes that future iterations of Union could be launched with a cost of somewhere between \$100,000-\$150,000. While the goal is to make Union self-sustaining, they are not there yet. Their success at reaching twenty years olds—a population missing from many United Methodist congregations—makes outside fundraising rather easy. For this reason, individuals and churches contribute to Union Coffee.

Urban Poiema requires a significant investment. In addition to a \$15,000 grant for computers, sound system and devices for language translation, the Wisconsin Conference of the United Methodist Church pays Pastor Juan's salary and benefits. This is an annual expense in range of \$60,000-\$80,000. With the probability that Urban Poiema will not

become self-sustaining in the near future, that annual investment must continue. Mangos Bar and Grill makes its space available for Urban Poiema rent free, but that correspondingly makes Pastor Juan nervous. He explains, “That’s a very scary proposition. We never know when they are going to pull the plug on us and we will be out on the street. It’s a constant worry.”

Pastor Emily at Urban Village says their ministry receives significant support from the Northern Illinois Conference of the United Methodist Church to do the church planting work. They also receive outside financial contributions from people and congregations who believe in what they are doing. However a majority of their giving comes from their four congregations. She says their annual budget is over \$300,000. This supports the pastors, staff and four ministry sites. The current Chicago south side location required a preliminary investment of \$70,000.

Each of these ministries takes a weekly offering. They acknowledge, however, that additional funding is required. Other financial givers, grants and United Methodist Conferences support their efforts.

While most congregations have no road map for developing a field-preaching ministry, congregations need to be both bold and cautious at the same time. Field-preaching ministries require a significant and continuing investment. All four of these congregations are willing to share their story—including their successes and mistakes—with the aim of helping other churches be more cost effective as they take on similar endeavors.

The Wisconsin United Methodist Foundations gave \$1,000 to the Perc Church. We ended up spending \$150 per evening. We did not ask for an offering.

Invitational Culture

All four ministries recognize the importance of building an invitational culture. Not only does the pastor invite, but each participant is encouraged to extend invitations as well. More than half the respondents interviewed came for the first time after being invited. Invitational culture does not stop after they arrive. Not only do they participate, they are invited to help with set up or take down. They extend invitations for missions and small group opportunities. Pastors stress invitation, encouraging the worshipers to bring a friend or neighbor the following week.

At Church in a Diner, Pastor Tom recognizes that this ministry has come a long way in becoming more invitational, but he also knows that they have a long way to go. As easy as it is to invite family and friends to go out to dinner, a number of the ministry participants remain hesitant.

Individuals who attend “Naked Stage” at Union Coffee are invited to return next week and also attend Studio on Sunday evening or Kuneo on Tuesday evening. Union Coffee invites their coffee shop patrons to join in worship.

During his benediction, Pastor Juan emboldens the attendees to invite their family, friends and neighbors to come with them the next week. In his preaching, Pastor Juan seeks to empower people and give them hope. He makes it clear that there are people throughout the neighborhood who need what they offer.

Urban Village depends on their invitational culture. Without an invitation, only a few people would know that it exists. Their worship service models an invitational life. An invitation moves the congregation from worship to a time of food, fellowship and discussion.

Invitation is the most effective way to get people to Perc Church. Most non-church related attendees come because they received an invitation. Patti explains that she came because she was invited. “It was very good and inspiring.” Personal invitation did far more than our other advertising.

Volunteer Staff

All four ministries studied depend heavily on volunteer staff. They involve six to twelve persons other than the pastor to make a service happen. Some set up the worship space, others install a sound systems and monitor microphones. At Church in a Diner, Union Coffee and Urban Poiema, volunteers walk around inside and out inviting people to participate. Some music and service leaders are also volunteers. Each pastor would echo Pastor Juan when he says that he has “some super heroes working on my team.” Ministry sites are not hesitant to invite first-time attendees to help out. Joining in becomes part of the field-preaching culture.

While there are different tasks and responsibilities, Perc Church utilizes ten volunteers a week. Persons transport and set up the equipment. Our secretary prints the bulletins. We employ greeters. We have people move tables, set up the worship space and then put the restaurant back together.

An effective field-preaching ministry is not a one-person show. It requires input, help, skills and talents of others. A large pool of volunteers is essential. A lone pastor can no longer go out and start a field-preaching ministry. Without a dedicated team of helpers, the effectiveness of that effort would be greatly diminished.

Challenges

All four of these field-preaching ministries must secure funding. Like most church ministries, this is a continual process. They must also seek new ways to reach a larger population.

At Church in a Diner, Pastor Tom says his biggest challenge is keeping the ministry fresh. “You know the idea is fresh for a while. It is the same thing as a church plant. Its brand new then it is not brand new.” Keeping it fresh requires energy and creativity. He also concedes that his team needs to become more invitational if Church in a Diner has a long-term future. He encourages all who are served by this ministry to extend invitations to their family, friends, co-workers and neighbors.

Union Coffee has both business and ministry related challenges. Pastor Mike talks about the necessity of improving coffee shop operations. “Our belief is that if our coffee shop operations become as strong as our community outreach we will be unstoppable.” He also thinks they need to figure out what success looks like for Union. He recognizes that they do many things well. “But we need to see what one thing it is that we can really devote our time and energy into with maybe one or two secondary objectives.”

As Pastor Juan concerns himself with finances and their location, he knows that Urban Poiema must reach more people. If Mangos Bar and Grill is not the best location, they will need to find some other place. He admits that if they fail to reach beyond their thirty-five to fifty regular attendees, they will not become a viable, self-sustaining ministry.

Urban Village faces an ongoing challenge of retaining members. Young people in urban settings do not stay long. According to Pastor Emily, “They have to go to where

the jobs are. Or, because of life circumstances they have to move. So it is hard to keep people for a really long amount of time.” At the Hyde Park-Woodlawn site they reach a multi-racial congregation, which is consistent with the demographics of Chicago’s south side. She believes this is of particular importance noting that the three other Urban Village locations are predominantly white.

The biggest challenge to maintain Perc Church as an ongoing ministry is the time and energy required. It is one thing to lead the service for three weeks; it would be a completely different challenge to do it every week. Additional pastoral staff is needed to do this on a long-term basis.

Effectiveness

All four of these present-day field-preaching ministries demonstrate vital signs of effectiveness. They all do a good job of reaching people who have left the church for a variety of reasons. They find ways for these people to get involved in their various ministries and missions. People interviewed claim that these field-preaching ministries boost their faith. However, I did not interview or meet anyone who comes from a non-faith background. Even so, all four of these ministries work to expand their reach. They are not willing to write off any group of people, including those who do not have a church background.

Church in a Diner has a goal of growing their participation by five percent a year. They also evaluate their effectiveness by numbers of people who come to the service and then become involved in some aspect of their ministry.

Union Coffee evaluates their effectiveness in a variety of ways. Pastor Mike states that they can evaluate like other churches do. How many people come to worship? How

many people become involved in the ministry? He also wants to know if more people are walking in their doors this year than last year. “That is an important indicator for us. If we are providing something that is worthwhile for the community, they will sustain it with their dollars.”

For Pastor Juan, effectiveness is entirely a faith matter. He knows that he could have all the money he needs and the best possible meeting place, but if they are not leading people to a deeper faith commitment, then what is the purpose? “When I stop seeing people baptized, when I stop seeing people get involved in the work of the ministry, then I have nothing to measure the effectiveness of what God is doing here.”

Urban Village at Hyde Park-Woodlawn seeks to become more effective as they build on their diversity. They have opportunities that other ministries do not. They survey the congregation. They track attendance figures. Pastor Emily seeks signs that their faith and faithfulness as a ministry grows.

Conclusions

As John Wesley preached to people outside of coal mines, at the marketplace or in the fields, each of these field preaching venues has opportunities to speak to people who have come for one reason and then stay and listen. People may come for a meal, a coffee or a bottle of wine and then join the worship experience. Others may come to be with their spouse and then find themselves moved by the worship service experience.

The people attracted to these field-preaching ministries have had some connection to the church. While each pastor claims that they have a few persons who have no faith background, I did not talk with or interview anyone who had no church experience. In fact, most of these people recognize the church’s language of the church. They know

what it means to pray. They talk about forgiveness and grace. They understand the importance of baptism and the mystery of communion. They listen to preaching. While these individuals may have taken an intentional or unintentional sabbatical from faith, the church was at one time part of their life. By connecting with these individuals, field-preaching ministries are reaching a population currently not served by the church.

Of the four ministry sites, Urban Poiema is best positioned to influence those who have no faith background. Their location, their commitment to the neighborhood and their passion for including and welcoming others gives them an opportunity to make inroads with this demographic. In his preaching, Pastor Juan does not assume that those listening to him know anything about the Bible. He speaks in a way that church people and those outside of the faith understand.

Some of the people attending Union Coffee and Urban Village worship at another church. These young persons are serious about their faith. They are not satisfied with a once-a-week faith experience. They want more opportunities for spiritual growth. They long for small group gatherings, monthly mission projects and occasions to gather as a community.

There is no doubt that music, fellowship and community are important aspects of each of these ministries. Nevertheless, preaching is the main attraction. These people articulated a longing for faith, for the Bible to speak to their lives. They are not looking for someone to spoon feed them the answers to life challenges. But, they do want reassurance that God is with them in their struggles.

As one who has written and preached my own sermons for over thirty years, I was surprised by the power of the collaborative sermon process at Union Coffee. It makes

sense that a group of twenty year-olds would have different perspectives and understandings than a pastor who is ten to fifteen years older. They craft a sermon that will be much different than anything the pastor would have come up with on his or her own. Not only does the collaborative process give the entire worshiping community a greater investment in the sermon, it helps explain why Union Coffee is so popular with young men and women in their twenties. They experience sermons that speak to their life.

With the exception of Urban Poiema, these ministries engage in interactive preaching. A flexible setting makes this possible. In a traditional sanctuary with church pews it is a bit uncomfortable to have people gather with three or four others and discuss a question, and a large group discussion is almost impossible. In these settings people can easily move about and talk to one another. As they do this week after week, they get good at it. This interaction and discussion becomes an important part of the sermon.

A field-preaching ministry in today's culture requires a significant investment of money as well as time and energy. The more stand-alone these ministries are—like Union Coffee—the more costly they will be. Pastors at Union Coffee, Urban Poiema and Urban Village have an advantage over Pastor Tom at the Church in a Diner. Church in a Diner is an outreach of the Sycamore Creek United Methodist Church. Pastor Tom cares for the concerns of the main church while at the same time trying to support and build this field-preaching ministry. The other three pastors have the luxury of focusing solely on their field-preaching ministry. If the Sycamore Creek United Methodist Church wants to grow Church in a Diner, Pastor Tom will need additional help. Long term, Church in a Diner may need its own pastor dedicated to this ministry.

Based on my findings, field-preaching ministries take time to develop. Congregations and denominational bodies that start and support these efforts must be willing to make a long-term commitment. These ministries take months, and even years, to become fully established and sustainable. Since each field-preaching opportunity will be different, there is no template on how to proceed. Mistakes will be made. But, the ministry team will also learn what works in their particular setting. Given time, support and financial resources, field-preaching may become an important evangelism tool for the United Methodist Church.

Present-day field-preaching requires a committed team of paid staff and volunteers. The initial planning process and recruiting of that team can take months. Once the ministry is launched a team is essential for getting the word out, continuous invitation, the weekly logistics of set up and take down and ongoing fundraising. Field-preachers who try to do it all themselves will fail.

As the United Methodist Church continues to decline in membership, field-preaching ministries will be one resource in helping stop and reverse this trend. Field-preaching done well enables the church to engage people who stay away from traditional church ministries. If our denomination reclaims this historic Methodist practice, we will slow down and help turn around our church decline. However, having said all this, field-preaching is not the only solution, but it is a necessary part of the puzzle.

In Chapter Six, I will evaluate this thesis identifying both the strengths and weaknesses of this project. I will describe how the *Exploratory Case Study Method* led me to my conclusions. If I had an opportunity to redo this thesis, I could answer the question, “What would I do differently?”

CHAPTER SIX

EVALUATION

This thesis focuses on exploring the effectiveness of field-preaching evangelism in the United Methodist Church. Four ministries engaging in present-day field-preaching have been examined. With help from First United Methodist Church in Hartford, Wisconsin, I experimented with field-preaching here in our Hartford community. Field-preaching is potentially a well-timed resource for our church today. However, it requires a significant investment of money, energy and a committed team to make it happen.

This chapter will examine the strengths of my thesis. What worked well? How useful was the *Exploratory Case Study Method*? Did I deliver what I promised? What project weaknesses, if any, are there? If I had to start from the beginning, what would I do differently?

Strengths of this Thesis

A significant strength of this thesis is my direct experience with Church in a Diner, Union Coffee, Urban Poiema and Urban Village. While these ministries have elaborate websites with videos and inspiring testimonials, being physically present gave me a broader and more complete understanding of how each operates. Their locations, for example, have a unique atmosphere, each has its own dynamic. I am convinced that people at Union Coffee would not automatically feel at home at Urban Village. It is possible that attendees at Church in a Diner would not be comfortable at any other

settings. However, I would not have learned any of this by simply reading testimonials and viewing websites.

Being onsite helped me better understand the heart of each ministry. Participating in worship and engaging in casual conversations before and after worship services taught me quickly what matters most to those involved. All four worship experiences are vastly different. What might be considered a distraction at Urban Poiema is a common occurrence at Church in a Diner. Urban Village has a dynamic musical team. The softer music of Union Coffee fits its setting perfectly. The manner of interactive preaching also varies dramatically from one location to another.

A second strength of this thesis is my conversations with lead pastors. Pastor Tom, Pastor Mike, Pastor Juan and Pastor Emily all have an innovative and risk-taking spirit. They each have their own style and unique talents. They are not afraid to make mistakes and learn. They drive the ministry. Listening to them talk about their vision and hope gave me a clearer view of possibilities they see for growth.

A third strength of this thesis is lessons learned from a cross section of attendees at each location. The attendees describe what matters to them and why they come. They relate what the preaching or the pastor's messages means to them. Most importantly, they help me understand why they keep coming back week after week. Just like the pastors and ministry leaders, attendees have hopes and dreams for their ministry. Their ministry matters to them.

Comparing the four ministries side-by-side is another strength of this thesis. All four sites—including their surrounding neighborhoods—are vastly different. Each locale helps frame the ministry. Church in a Diner has a base of people who have lived in

Lansing most of their lives. Milwaukee's violent inner city impacts Urban Poiema. Union Coffee benefits from Dallas' affluence. Urban Village claims a significant number of upwardly mobile young professionals who are here today but may be moving on tomorrow.

A final and important strength of this thesis is my personal experience with field-preaching at the Perc Place in Hartford, Wisconsin. Learning from the four pastors who engage in this practice, I tried it myself. Along with First United Methodist Church, we discovered a new opportunity for ministry in our community.

The Exploratory Case Study Method

The Exploratory Case Study Method makes this thesis possible. Upon beginning, I knew very little about present-day field-preaching. I read articles about pastors who set up shop in a bar or at the beach and started a preaching ministry. I had a few encounters with Brother Jed's preaching to the sinners on the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus. Other than that, my experience with present-day field-preaching was limited. Much of my calling has involved unlocking church doors and waiting for people to come. The whole idea of going out and meeting people at non-religious venues in the community was new to me. This research method helped me discover an entirely new way of preaching beyond the sanctuary.

While there are more than thirty-two thousand United Methodist congregations in the United States, field-preaching ministries are relatively rare. Aside from a few newspaper and magazine articles, not much has been written about them. I traveled to Michigan, Texas, Milwaukee and Illinois to experience these ministries.

Listening and reviewing responses to my open-ended questions helped me learn what each field-preaching site did well. Asking open-ended questions helped me understand what makes the four ministries effective. Their distinctive perspectives offered some surprises. For example, the process of collaborative preaching caught my attention. Having a team brainstorm and write a sermon together is an innovative concept for me. While I have participated in lectionary study groups, each pastor still writes his or her own sermon.

As much as answers to my open-ended questions were important, responses to the follow-up questions helped me discover even more. Those interviewed offered specific examples. They told me of moments when preaching hit home for them. It was not just on one particular day, but week after week.

Recording and transcribing all interviews is an important piece in this research method. I ended up with more than sixty pages of single-spaced transcripts. Transcripts were analyzed and coded. Reviewing transcripts—underlining, highlighting, circling key words—helped me take a step back and reflect on what each individual shared. I paid attention to the frequency of certain words or themes, like; ‘mission,’ ‘interaction,’ ‘invitational,’ ‘preaching,’ ‘collaborative preaching’ and ‘a committed volunteer staff.’

This research method also helped reveal a faith history of those participating. While pastors know their congregations, each participant is more unique than the whole. I heard numerous comments like, “I grew up in the church. Over time, the church didn’t speak to me anymore.” Several others said, “If my church knew who I am, they would not accept me.” Others remember involvement in the church from when they were young. For reasons they cannot remember, they stopped participating. All four of these United

Methodist ministries also connect with people from a variety of Protestant and Catholic traditions.

What Did Not Go Well?

Each location included a ministry, the ministry's mission and the people targeted by the ministry. I felt that I had a solid understanding of what the four ministries were doing and what they hoped to do. If I had had opportunities to do additional interviews and gather more data that would have enhanced this project. Several factors prevented this from happening. I interviewed people prior to and following services. There were occasions when I interviewed more than one person at a time. Then there were those who did not wait around to be interviewed. Church in a Diner, for example, had some first-time guests who left immediately following the service. I did not get to them in time for an interview. At Union Coffee in Dallas, a young man made some interesting comments and observations leading the opening part of the service. Before I could follow-up with him, he was gone. I sent him an email asking several questions, but he never responded. I called and left a voice message, but he did not call back.

I was unable to interview anyone who claimed a non-church or non-faith background. According to each pastor these people are part of their ministries. If they were present, I did not find them.

A few people did not consent to an interview. They appeared a bit wary of the release form I asked them to sign. This was especially true at Urban Poima—the predominantly Hispanic gathering—where a few attendees were suspicious of my presence. Two people, both lawyers, read the entire release form very carefully before signing. Most however skimmed it or signed it without reading anything.

What Would I Do Differently?

While pleased with my data, more interviews would have helped me achieve a clearer understanding of each ministry prior to my visits. For example, three or four telephone interviews with key leaders would have been helpful. Their descriptions could have helped me better imagine what I would experience. Listening to them could have helped me learn how inviting they are simply by the way they talk about their ministry.

I wish I had had an opportunity to talk with those who were once active, but no longer active. Just as every congregation has a list of inactive members, so do the four field-preaching ministries. Many inactive attendees may have had schedule changes or moved to another community. Their input would have facilitated a more complete understanding of the four ministries. It would be interesting to know how these inactive attendees live out their faith. In other words, do present-day field-preaching ministries help them unite with other ministries of the church?

This thesis could have been enhanced if my schedule had allowed for multiple visits to each site. Church in a Diner, Urban Poiema and Urban Village utilize space that is used in a different way the rest of the week. Therefore, my only option for additional visits would be on Monday evenings at Church in a Diner and Sunday mornings for Urban Poiema and Urban Village. During a four-day visit to Dallas, I made multiple visits at Union Coffee, which allowed for additional interviews.

Since all four ministries are under guidance of the United Methodist Church, conversations with district superintendents, neighboring United Methodist pastors and their bishop would have provided additional insights.

As the lone investigator, I did all the interviews. I interviewed each person the same way. I controlled the way questions and follow-up questions were asked. I did not attempt to get people to say something that they did not intend. However, if I had a team of interviewers, it could have added significantly to my collection of data.

I wish I had had the opportunity to sit in on a planning meeting at each site. How do they keep their ministry fresh? Does the pastor do most of the planning? Is it a group effort? At Union Coffee, in particular, how does a planning team collaborate and build a sermon? I do not know if any of the four sites would have allowed me to do this, but such an opportunity could have enhanced this project.

Perc Church could have benefited from a longer run. Instead of offering worship services on three Monday evenings, six or nine weeks might have been a better indicator of this ministry's potential. Such an effort would require more financial resources from the United Methodist Church and a more significant time commitment on my part. A longer run could have given me an opportunity to engage a planning team. The team could consist of twenty and thirty year olds who are not active in any local church, a demographic I hoped to reach.

Did This Thesis Deliver What It Promised?

Chapter Four outlined my plan to explore four present-day field-preaching ministries from different perspectives. Specifically, I asked: "Are these ministries making new disciples? Are an increasing number of people participating in the ministry? Does the preaching make a difference in the lives of individuals? Does the ministry attract persons who, on their own, would not set foot inside a church?"

All four questions were answered. Specifically, these field-preaching ministries are making “new disciples” out of persons who, for some reason, left the church. Over time, the church lost its relevance for them. It no longer met their needs or they feared the church would not accept them for who they are. Of course, there are those who were victimized by their church. I previously referred to this group as the burned and bored.

Although several of these ministries remain quite small in numbers, they each experience an increase in participation. First-time guests are invited to become involved. Each ministry offers a variety of weekly opportunities, including mission projects and small group meetings. Numerous attendees take advantage of these offerings.

Most of those interviewed indicate that the pastor’s message makes a difference in their lives. They come expecting a sermon. They even look forward to it. Without preaching, I doubt that the music and fellowship would be enough to bring people back week after week.

Each ministry attracts people who might not set foot inside a church. Church in a Diner welcomes people who have no intention of returning to church. Urban Poima offers liquor and tobacco store patrons another alternative on a Sunday morning. Union Coffee and Urban Village openly welcome gays and lesbians. While all four ministries remain faithful to United Methodist tradition, they do distinguish themselves from regular church. Like John Wesley, the field-preacher, they reach out in a special way.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I discovered that field-preaching still has a place within the church. Contemporary field-preaching, however, looks very different than it did in the days of John Wesley. Today’s field-preachers are more likely to hold worship services in

coffee shops, restaurants, bars and rented space. These preachers search for places where they can connect with those who are outside the church.

The Exploratory Case Study Method helped me discover how the four distinctive ministries speak to people outside traditional church structure. All four of the present-day field-preaching sites have a distinctive feel and ministry. Each field-preaching pastor has unique skill-sets and utilizes various strategies as they seek ministry growth and expansion.

The strength of this thesis included my personal experience with each present-day field-preaching ministry. Then, experimenting with field-preaching on my own facilitated more learning. I can now envision new opportunities in the church and in my own ministry.

In Chapter Seven I will reflect on this thesis. In what ways will my findings help other preachers? How could other researchers follow-up this study? I will also speculate on the ways this thesis will shape my remaining years of ministry, looking particularly at my own growth as a preacher.

CHAPTER SEVEN

REFLECTION

Throughout thirty-four years of ministry in the United Methodist Church, I have experienced a consistent level of frustration. I have heard bishops, district superintendents and other church experts say repeatedly that all we have to do to build the church is to preach good sermons, have great worship and offer a full slate of church programming. And so, we followed proven evangelism programs. We tried to stay abreast with the latest trends. Despite all this, my congregations failed to grow and prosper. New people came but never enough to replace all those who had moved on.

John Wesley's field-preaching intrigued me. Wesley found that ministry done exclusively in churches failed to reach those who needed it most. He preached in fields, at marketplaces, outside factories and in cemeteries. On numerous occasions Wesley spoke to thousands of people in outdoor congregations, many more than could ever crowd into a church sanctuary. He championed field-preaching. Following Wesley, his preachers and circuit riders field-preached. Over time, as Methodism flourished and churches were built, however, field-preaching diminished.

As I began this thesis, I asked are there present-day versions of field-preaching that can help ministries today become more effective? After analyzing four such ministries and attempting field-preaching myself, I am convinced that there is a role for field-preaching. Throughout this final chapter, I will reflect upon this thesis, my discoveries and my hope for United Methodism and for the entire church.

Exploration of Present-Day Field-Preaching

Initially, I had no idea if present-day field-preaching could benefit the larger church. Do these ministries make a measurable impact? How much is dependent on the skills or charisma of particular pastors? Can iterations of these ministries happen in other settings and places? I approached this thesis with abundant optimism. Still, I had my reservations.

I explored four present-day field-preaching ministries of the United Methodist Church. Each ministry approaches field-preaching differently. They have their unique strengths and opportunities. They reach individuals who were once active in church and then, for a variety of reasons, became inactive. Each ministry makes inroads with people who have no faith experience. I found it encouraging that Union Coffee and Urban Village are extremely effective at attracting young people in their twenties and early thirties.

Although no two settings will ever be identical, models of these field-preaching ministries could be replicated in other places. If pastors, congregations and denominational bodies have a clear vision of what they want to accomplish and learn from what others have done with field-preaching, they can anticipate successful results. All who start a present-day field-preaching ministry must be willing to make a substantial and continuous financial investment. It takes time for ministries to become self-sustaining.

My personal experience with field-preaching proved to be a noteworthy part of this study. My first night at Perc Church was somewhat unsettling. I was initially distracted as waitresses moved around taking orders and delivering food and drinks. This

is quite different from sanctuary preaching where everyone sits politely in church pews. After three weeks, I began to be more comfortable with this setting.

Field-preaching demands a high level of creativity, energy and time. A typical Sunday morning sanctuary sermon does not work too well in a field-preaching setting. Field-preaching requires a more interactive presentation, allowing and encouraging conversation. Even with detailed preparation, there is no way of knowing exactly where these discussions will go. Pastors and leaders must be willing to move and adjust quickly.

Perc Church came in under half of our \$1,000 budget. If we had been required to purchase our own equipment, including a keyboard and a sound system, this cost would have been significantly more. Since our initial field-preaching experiment, we sponsored a service during Advent welcoming our largest crowd, a gathering of sixty-five persons. Another Perc Church is scheduled for Lent. With significant financial investment from First United Methodist Church or the Wisconsin Conference and additional pastoral help, Perc Church could have a promising future in Hartford.

Will this Thesis be Helpful to Other Preachers?

This thesis has the potential of assisting other preachers and congregations in a variety of ways. It encourages a rethinking of their outreach ministries. Are they doing everything they can to inspire those beyond their church? Are there ways they can take their preaching ministry to non-religious settings? Most congregations are in close proximity to an array of possible venues for ministry, including bars, restaurants and coffee shops. There are people in every community who will never set foot inside a church, but could be perfectly comfortable in these other settings. This thesis invites preachers and congregations to imagine new preaching possibilities.

If congregations are not willing or able to take their preaching ministries outside their building, this thesis helps them to see their own ministry differently. As discussed in Chapter Two, our secular age poses some interesting challenges. We live in a time when all faith is contested. Many of those, for example, who sit in our sanctuaries, are not as certain about their faith as they once were. All people have doubts.

Today's preachers can no longer assume any level of biblical literacy from everyone. Years ago, a preacher could have asked, "Do you remember the story of Jonah?" Everyone present would know all about Jonah. Not anymore. Now we have people in church who have difficulty distinguishing between the Old and New Testaments. All preachers—not just field-preachers—have an opportunity to proclaim a God who is willing to meet us in our doubts, our questions and even in our unbelief.

What Additional Steps can be taken to Follow-up?

After witnessing effective collaborative preaching at Union Coffee in Dallas, I want to give this a try. I will invite people from the congregation to participate early in my sermon preparation. While I doubt that I would ask church members to write out parts of sermons, I would be interested in learning how they hear a particular passage. What does it say to them? How does it challenge them? Does it give them hope or make them uneasy? As much as I try to know the pulse of a congregation, on many occasions the best I can do is make an educated guess. Could a collaborative style of sermon preparation make my preaching more effective?

Does This Thesis Suggest Additional Follow-up Studies?

Since this thesis utilized the *Exploratory Case Study Method*—which is often the first phase in a research process—there are several follow-up options. A more descriptive

study might be helpful. This thesis identified four field-preaching congregations. How many more are out there? United Methodists and other denominations engage in field-preaching ministries. The Salvation Army has done a form of field-preaching from its very beginnings. Could research be done that catalogs all these efforts? A nationwide or Protestant-wide study could offer a more complete picture. Is field-preaching an urban phenomenon?

A future researcher may want to conduct an Explanatory study. This could ask any number of questions, such as under what conditions are these ministries started? Is a certain type of leader required? Although this thesis suggests answers to these questions, my research was exploratory. A researcher could take my suggestions and test them. For example, “The research of Paul Johnsen suggests that field-preaching ministries will only be effective when led by a strongly committed and persistent leader.” The next researcher could pose a more structured and testable hypothesis with two variables, an effective ministry and committed leader.

A Longitudinal study might also be helpful. This would address questions that could only be answered over time. How do field-preaching ministries change? Is there a predictable pattern or life span? Do they start and stop depending on their leadership?

How Have I Grown During this Project?

As I worked through this thesis, I became more convinced of the importance of preaching. Most of those I interviewed told me how they looked forward to their pastor’s message. They asserted that it supports them. They think about it throughout the week. While I always believed that preaching plays a significant role in worship, I never realized that it mattered that much. As a pastor I have a unique opportunity and

responsibility each Sunday as I stand up and preach. While a sermon's effectiveness is never solely up to me, it demands my best effort. This thesis renewed my own commitment to this weekly responsibility.

Reading John Wesley's journals, diaries and his sermons, helped me reconnect with my United Methodist roots. Wesley held a deeply committed faith. He experienced great successes and innumerable failures. He offered the church a vision for a new future. He gave his life to this work.

Wesley had a relentless spirit. He passionately went out looking for lost souls. He took significant risks that jeopardized his life multiple times. Still he continued field-preaching. He ended up preaching more than forty thousand sermons.

In rediscovering John Wesley's influence, I became more aware of my own complacency in preaching. I have never been as daring as Wesley. Observing four present-day, field-preachers and experimenting with field-preaching myself, however, assisted me in discovering a newfound boldness.

Final Thoughts

When I began this thesis I wondered if a contemporary practice of John Wesley's field-preaching could help a dwindling church. Since its beginnings in 1968, United Methodism in the United States has lost members each year. My own Wisconsin Conference has had to close churches annually as far back as I can remember. New programs, emphases and clever ministry gimmicks have done little to change this overall decline.

This thesis challenged me to examine our work as a church. If United Methodists have little or no passion for finding disenfranchised souls, we can expect a further drop in

our membership numbers. If we remain committed to doing ministry the way we have always done ministry, nothing will change.

John Wesley watched as his Anglican Church suffered through a similar phase. Sanctuaries were far from capacity. Sermons rarely connected with congregations. There was little or no measureable concern for those with no faith. Wesley knew there had to be a better way. He became an accomplished field-preacher, preaching outside of sanctuaries, preaching where people lived and worked. In his preaching, he cared for the lost and loved them. He did everything he could to help them.

As important as it is for United Methodists to start new churches and develop rousing ministries, it is imperative to reclaim our passion for finding the lost. This is our Methodist heritage!

At the beginning of this thesis, I quoted Jesus' question in Luke Chapter 15. "Which one of you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?" For United Methodists we are no longer concerned with just one missing out of a hundred. Across our denomination we have lost thousands of members and countless churches. These people will not find their way back to our sanctuaries. Our great challenge is to go out and find them and others. Contemporary versions of John Wesley's field-preaching help us do just that. Whether we host preaching ministries in restaurants, coffee shops, bars or other venues, we must be willing to meet people where they are, accept them for who they are and love them.

Nearing the end of his ministry, John Wesley offered this reflection, “To this day field-preaching is a cross to me. But I know my commission and see no other way of preaching the gospel to every creature.”¹

¹ Stebbins, “Exploratory Research in the Social Sciences,” 47.

APPENDIX A

PASTOR INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

TOM ARTHUR, CHURCH IN A DINER, LANSING, MICHIGAN

I pick up the meal tab and we talk through some bits of the culture of our church and look at the hand out I give to them. We say if you are new to SC Church coming up next week or it's always on the fourth Monday of the month is meet and eat and it's an opportunity to meet Pastor Tom and get to know him and other new people then check on the back of your connection card that you're interested in meet and eat and come next week at 5:30 and the best part about it is Pastor Tom picks up the tab. These are small and intimate gatherings. We do it so regularly that it doesn't build up to huge groups. Sometimes it's just me and one person.

How did this Church in a Diner get started?

There are several roots to this. One of them is that I went out to Church of the Resurrection and I saw what they are doing with satellites which I'd been familiar with before but a personal friend of mine is the campus pastor of their downtown satellite and they've exploded lately, it going gangbusters. I went to their Leadership Institute but I mostly ditched the Institute and mostly hung out with Scott downtown and learned about what they were doing with this campus. And it was super cool to see that. We don't have anywhere near the resources of Church of the Resurrection....so it was one

of those moments where you have post traumatic conference syndrome and you're excited and then you come back and walk into your reality.

The second piece that played into it was that I was in a New Church Academy for church planters I met another guy in that academy his name is John Ball and he was at Brighton and the associate pastor and he was doing a faith community in a pub. And I think he was trying to do more of a missional faith community than this. What you will see tonight has more of all the components of what you're used to seeing on a Sunday morning and what he was doing didn't look anything like what we are doing. It was much smaller. And he was probably reaching more disconnected people from that church than we are. But what caught my attention was that he was meeting in this pub for free. It was like a pub/café where they closed at 7 and so they just had run of the place and one waitress stayed on and one cook, I think it was a friend of the congregation. So I came back and free sounded better than paying a full time elder and then I was talking to a student over on MSU's campus and she said, "I can't come on Sunday morning. Do you have a service on some other day of the week?"

And then the last little piece of it was when I started reading the Main line by Steven Compton. I'm part of the new church team for the conference so I think I read that book for the new church academy and the basic thesis of that book is that the main line church stopped growing because they thought they had saturated the market and so they stopped planting churches. And so he makes that argument that we are going to grow again primarily by planting new churches. And I thought, boy...so SC church had an awesome first six years and then they lost their worship leader who went down to Texas to some big church. And they were on a downward slide from that point on. And

I came in and it was kind of a church in crisis a little bit, it was hidden because the pastor was retiring rather than being reappointed. And so I came into a pretty demoralized church and I thought well denominations can grow by planting more churches why can't congregations grow by planting more satellites. So all of that came together and my leadership team came up with the crazy idea of doing seven satellites in seven venues on seven different days of the week. And this was the first one and we announced it to the church and we just about had chaos cause they were so tired from setting up and tearing down they couldn't imagine doing that again somewhere else. And there was a lot of miscommunication right up front but after we settled everyone down and I created a team of people who were not involved on Sunday morning and on the fringe of the church and in some cases weren't ever Christian and were not connected to the church. And they I rearranged with Jeremy, my staff person, took some responsibilities off his plate so he could be here every Monday night and streamlined the whole thing so that it's the same bulletin, same computer, same thing we present on Sunday morning we use here, little bits and pieces we have to adjust but its all very streamlined and we made it work. A new vision attracts new people and new energy.

What's the role of preaching?

Well that's an interesting part because that was something that John didn't have in his missional community that I thought was missing. And I thought that preaching was still a significant part. They are kind of more discussion oriented. And there would be a general topic. But he was trying to break away from the preacher as professional authority and create something that was more even. And there's absolutely a place for

that but that just wasn't what I was feeling called to do. So I just took what I preach on Sunday morning and I preach it here except it's way more interactive than it is on Sunday morning. These people talk to me like through the whole service. They may get quiet at times and we stop at different times in the message and I give them five minutes to talk at their tables which is very hard to do in a pew. But when you're sitting like this it's actually kind of comfortable to turn and talk to people. I usually do two questions, but tonight I'm only doing one because tonight we have this mixed prayer kind of thing, mixed with music and prayer. And I probably wouldn't talk about this with general people but since we are talking about preaching, there's some intentionality around the sermon design and when those questions fall. I assume you're familiar with Andy Stanley and his book *Communicating for Change*, and in it he proposes a sermon design that's Me, We, God, You, Us. He starts with a problem, what's a problem we're going to wrestle with tonight. That's what drives the whole thing and he starts with how do I wrestle with this problem, how do I have this problem. That's the me part. We is how do you wrestle with this problem. God is the part, so now lets turn to the Bible and see how does God have an answer for this problem or some direction at the least. And the you is now what do I want you to do about it now that you know about this. And then the last part the we or us is what would it look like if we all lived this way. And Stanley talks about that as a relational sermon design. It's about relationships in this community. I find that there is a natural break between We and God. So that where I'll insert a discussion point. You'll hear me talk about a problem of how it's awkward to invite people. Then I'll have them turn to their tables and say "What's been your experience? The good, the bad and the ugly in

inviting people to church or being invited to church. Talk about that for five minutes.” And I put a thing up on the screen, a timer, so they know it doesn’t last forever. And that timer helps...I have a mentor who says you can endure anything as long as you know when it will end. So if you’re not liking that the timer manages anxiety in the room because people know when that’s done. Some people just tune out, some people talk about whatever they want to talk about. But most people are engaging in it. So the next logical place is after I do the you part then I will often say, “Ok of these two or three things I said I wanted you to do, which are you going to do this week.” And so they turn and they talk about that. Then they say ok now I’m going to follow up and do this. Most sermons don’t give you the opportunity to think that through. So it adds...I did a workshop on this one time and a lady accused me of watering the gospel down. But I said I don’t think I’m watering it down. I actually think I’m making it more potent because I’m making them talk about what I’m talking about. So you can go to your church and you can listen and you can ignore it and not have to process it and just leave, but I’m at least creating space for that to happen.

How do people become more involved in the ministry of this diner or Sycamore Creek church?

The main thing, we use an assimilation process, from Nelson Searcy, if you’re familiar with his book Fusion? If you’re not you should be. It’s about how to move first time guests to be full time committed members of the church and it’s a very specific process to walk people through. And it begins with a connection card which you’ll see tonight. We make a big, big deal about the connection card, we’ll talk about it several times. And I’m actually going to do an extra little teaching on it tonight because

Easter's coming up and I'm creating a culture where everyone fills it out so when the guest comes and sees everyone filling it out they will fill it out too cause I can't follow up with a guest if they don't take the time to give me their follow up information. But on that connection card are all kinds of next steps that people can take into various forms of commitment. This is the gateway right here, meet and eat and we meet here. It's pretty informal but I have a rough outline in my head of what we do during this time. It's to help people get connected. But then on that connection card as well are things they can sign up for. On the one tonight is parking lot attendant. That's particularly for our Sunday morning building 'cause there's only 40 spaces around our building and then there's overflow parking at other businesses around it. And so we want people out in the parking lot. So they can check that. On the front of the card there's all kinds of things---they want to be baptized or if they are interested in becoming a follower of Jesus, with each one of those boxes they check there's a whole set of processes behind it, about how those cards get processed on Monday for Sunday and on Tuesday for Monday. And then a spread sheet goes out and all the people who are associated with those elements follow up with those people depending on what they've checked. And of course small groups are a huge part of that but that's a whole other thing.

We have a lot of unpaid staff who are pretty committed. They are bi-vocational. They get their paycheck for somewhere else and then they live out what they are called to do with us. I have one part time staff member who I will introduce you to later, she'll be the host tonight, she's our venue coordinator, Gretchen. Another way we get people involved is, she, Gretchen, networks in the room and is constantly pulling people into

things. This venue and the context and culture of the space is different than a Sunday morning. Sunday morning is much more structured. It's a little more suburban in feeling. The folks who come to this are more impulsive, more spontaneous. I can tap you on the shoulder and say, "hey would you greet tonight, Paul you've got a great personality, you're outgoing, people like talking to you would you hand out at the door tonight." On Sunday morning we have to have schedules, work with people's calendars, it's just a different feel, different group of people.

Now you've been at this for a while and I know you've thought about this but how do you evaluate the effectiveness of this ministry?

That's a great question. On each of my staff's job description we have a set of bench marks. So there's a responsibility and then there's a bench mark of what we're looking for with that person. So probably the primary way I evaluate effectiveness in this ministry is when I evaluate Jeremy and Gretchen which I do...Jeremy and I do evaluation once a month since he's a full time staff person, Gretchen and I do it every other month. So I'm looking at those bench marks. We don't do a once a year evaluation, it's ongoing evaluation. This wasn't all in place when I came here six years ago so we've got a lot of things going...this is fun...most people don't ask me this stuff...we just ask, "are we accomplishing what we are aiming at?" and so some of the tools we use are aiming to grow by 5% so we look at that. Another thing we look at is are we seeing our volunteers moving to the front of the stage, we have a front of the stage and a back of the stage set of expectations. We use that metaphor on Sunday morning with the band. I have the most expectations for Jeremy, he's the most front of the stage. The drummer...I don't even care if the drummer's Christian, I want him or

her to be reliable, I want them to resolve conflict peacefully, I want them to show up, I want them to not be drunk, for us that creates space for evangelism, Our drummer right now is quite committed, he's clearly front of the stage, but that give Jeremy space to be evangelistic to use the band to introduce people to Jesus—playing in the band to introduce people to Jesus rather than just playing the music. We have what we call an artist attraction plan for Jeremy. He plays in bars, I've actually made that part of his job. I've said, hey you need to go play gigs. I hired Jeremy not because he was an excellent guitarist, he was a great vocalist, he was an ok guitarist and we put a lot of money into guitar lessons for him. I hired him for his heart, chemistry, we're friends, he's the godfather of one of my sons which is awesome to work with someone who is such a good friend. He's got to the point where his guitar teacher has asked him to play gigs with him in bars around town, so it's a pretty big complement when your guitar teacher invites you to play gigs with you. So then that means he's out networking in the community. I said that's your job, you should be doing that.

As I look at Wesley's move outside the sanctuary, one of the arguments was to reach people that normally wouldn't come into the church. What do you know about the faith background of the people who come here?

We are reaching on Monday night and as a church in general we are reaching more disaffected Christians or de-churched Christians---or the nones. You've read about the rise of the nones? That's who we are reaching. We really aren't reaching people who have never had any connection with church. We are reaching some very committed Christians who their job doesn't allow them to worship on Sunday morning. We're reaching people who were really active in our church and then their job changes

and they can't come on Sundays any more so they shift to Monday night. We're reaching a lot of people here who've been burned by the church in the past and have dropped out of church for a period of time but there's still kind of a spiritual yearning that's there. They may have a relatively orthodox belief system but when they hear about the church in a diner they think well that's weird, that's different from my church that was really like a social club that kicked me out because they didn't like whatever about me. And then they come here and they find something that really surprises them. And then, one of the fun things, when I have that happen, I've got a couple people who are like Christian junkies, groupies, who go to every Christian everything and so this is on Monday night and they go to their church on Sunday morning and here on Monday night. It always kind of annoys me a little bit, this is not really what we're trying to do. So I always say, what friend of yours can you not invite to your Sunday service because they wouldn't fit in, invite them because at least they'd get a free burger. So I'm always challenging them to think evangelistically like that.

Do you let them know this is United Methodist?

We don't hide the United Methodism. If somebody asks me about it I tell them. And when I do my partnership classes I talk about that, that's what we call membership, we call them partners. So if you're going to make a commitment to be partners with us you'd better know about all the strings that come attached with that. Sometimes I talk about it, but we don't have all the United Methodist special offerings but I'm thoroughly Wesleyan.

What are the challenges of this ministry?

I think that one of the challenges is keeping it fresh. You know the idea is fresh for a while. It's the same thing as a church plant. It's brand new and then it's not brand new. So lots of energy now because it's still brand new but I can see that tapering off just a little bit. My teams not quite as invitational and they're not quite as apprentice oriented. They'd rather just do it themselves rather than equipping and empowering people to do things. I think that related to the preaching it's a challenging context to preach in. The average United Methodist manuscript preacher would be absolutely driven nuts in this context. I find it to be the funniest place I've ever preached. It's like preaching in the marketplace. There are distractions. People walking in front of me and behind me. I'm setting the communion table and people think that's the opportunity to get up and pay for their meal. I run into the waitress as I'm spinning around and she's behind me. I nailed some kid in the head one time with my iPad. I preach from an iPad. I'm just turning and this little kid was running by and it was at his eye level and I just nailed him. It was right in the middle of my sermon. At times it can be a pretty rowdy bunch. But that energizes me. I think a potential long term challenge that I haven't yet figured out, or hasn't hit me yet, but I'm expecting, would probably be like any pastor who starts a second service or third service, it's like, it's fun and energetic to begin with but how do you maintain that. You know I have a Monday night commitment, you know every Monday night. I remember when we first started this and I hadn't fully thought through all the implications of it and I went to plan vacation and I realized I can't leave on Sunday after church, because I've got to do this service on Monday night, so when do I get to leave. I guess I leave on Tuesday morning so how then...so

vacation week for me is from Tuesday to Monday which means I come back on Tuesday morning a day into the week. So every vacation means I come back with a short week. So that's kind of stressful. I aim to preach about 35-40 times a year. I fit those others with lay preachers, guest speakers, and occasional video sermons. Doing a Craig Groeschel series I get Craig Groeschel for one week. I just throw him up on the screen. I don't tell people ahead of time, hey Craig Groeschel is up on the video, you could watch this at home if you wanted to but you wouldn't get a free burger and fries. I surprise them with it.

MICHAEL BAUGHMAN, UNION COFFEE IN DALLAS, TEXAS

What's the role of preaching in your site, or how would you even define preaching or a message or anything like that to your ministry?

Those are probably two different questions but I'll be happy to answer.

Preaching in our context is a little different than most churches. There are a couple different things at play and several different ways that I believe we preach. One is through our Tuesday night gathering called Kuneo and that preaching style is very conversational. It's not uncommon for people to interrupt at points that I'm not really looking for them to ask a question. But they'll ask a question or offer commentary or things like that. And there are also times that the conversation is very participatory and takes the agenda in different ways. And that happens in two ways, one I have a design team and they plan all the worship events with me down to the sermon. So we write the sermon collaboratively. So there's the role of the community in helping to shape the sermon. It's not just me. But there are also times when I just can't wrap my brain around one thing I'm left with a question and what I've learned is not to force an answer but to take that question to the room and trust that the Holy Spirit is going to work through the congregation to find the answer. There are definitely times when my sermon has ended with "So what the hell does this mean." And it's amazing and humbling to allow the Holy Spirit to work through those questions and come up with answers. And at other times I've got halfway through the sermon and I've literally ditched everything I had prepared because clearly we had to go in a different direction. And so it's very humbling and frightening and exciting all at the same time. But there is also a beauty in the sermon being constructed by a roomful of people and not just me.

Which is one I think it encourages creativity. Second it makes sure the message speaks to our target demographic. Lastly it removes a lot of the stress involved in preaching in that you know if we have a great sermon then that's something we all celebrate. If it totally flops and falls apart it doesn't just fall on me. So there's a corporate responsibility for that which I think brings greater creativity. That's what it looks like on Tuesday nights. On Sunday nights we have sermons that are also prepared and developed as part of a team but execution is pretty different. It's pretty much me presenting ten minutes of a condensed sermon and there are different ways I've done that. Sometimes it's just a typical sermon but it's short just ten minutes. Other times I've used a pecha-kucha format. It's a style of presentation that where the person presenting is not allowed to read anything that's on the screen and secondly they are going to have twenty slides that are going to automatically advance every twenty seconds whether you are ready for them or not. And so it's a series of things, six minutes forty seconds. Very image driven with the screens in the background that amplify whatever you are saying. The point is you are not reading what's on the slides. They are just there to reinforce what you are saying. And so we've experimented with a couple sermons using that style. And that's been really successful, but incredibly stressful and difficult to put together. So we do that and then since we value conversation it's not going to just end with me talking. I talk for ten minutes and then it's five minutes talking to the people around you and we put discussion prompts up on the screen that people can use or ignore depending on what's more helpful to them. And then it's ten minutes of conversation all together. Where I facilitate whatever come up at the different tables. We try to put that together into something that makes sense or not. Sometimes we just

leave it with lingering questions for us to take out. So that's a more traditional expression of preaching at Union. And a third expression of preaching is on Friday night at the Naked Stage. We have an open mike, storytelling stage, completely uncensored for stories. We call it Naked which means no notes, no prompts, nothing on the screen. It's just you, your story and the audience. So that's a perfectly meaningful experience in a lot of ways but the way preaching enters into it is that because its uncensored there are stories told on a Friday night that you would never hear in a church on a Sunday. So that gives us the credibility to tell stories that say this is discipleship or something of that nature. If we did tell them on Sunday morning people would swear at the sermon. But because we have an uncensored stage on a Friday night in a coffee shop we have the opportunity to preach to people who don't go to church. And that's a powerful and incredible opportunity. So the preaching takes three different forms in the programming over a week. But then the role it plays is different depending on the worship services. The role it plays on a Friday night is to offer an alternative perspective on faith and the faith community. If I can just push the needle a little bit for people and their perception of church then that's a victory. On Tuesday night the function of the sermon is community building the role is also for empowering and education. I talk a lot about things that are happening in the city of Dallas and the next step is challenging, to live our lives different. Tuesday night has a big focus on healing because Tuesday night is made up of people who I would call church refugees. There's a lot of intentional focus on emotion and emotional expression and how it impacts our theology. Sunday night is very heavily focused on action, if this then we do what.

Because that worship gathering is focused primarily on corporate young professionals and the Dallas arts community all very action driven entrepreneurial type people.

Now what happens in all three services if there are people who came just for coffee and not for worship? Do they stay, do they listen in? How have you experienced that?

Now for a Tuesday or a Sunday night...now for Friday they wouldn't call it a worship experience. It's more a performance event or whatever. We never pray, we never read scripture, I wouldn't call it a worship experience on Friday night but I would still call it a sermon if that makes sense. People hang around and talk to each other afterwards on a Friday night. On a Tuesday night and Sunday night before the worship I will walk around to everyone in the room or a volunteer will walk around the room with a pretty set script. I will go up to somebody and say, "Hey, my name is Mike I just want to give you a quick heads up that at eight o'clock there's a worship gathering that meets here called either Studio or Canal, depending on the day and so I wanted to give you a couple of options. One, you could keep doing what you're doing, put your headphones back on, whatever you've been doing if you want to keep it up it won't bother anybody. Second, if you're looking for a space with no distraction there's a conference room set aside. Third, if you're looking for a break from whatever you are working on you are certainly welcome to join in. Hope it's not too much of an inconvenience and thanks for coming out this evening. So people follow all three of those. Some pack up their stuff and move to a space that's not going to be interrupted. Others will put their headphones in and keep doing what they're doing. Every week we have worship there are people who are studying or working on papers or doing

whatever in the background. So one thing I really like is that almost every week there are people in the background with their headphones on but they'll be singing along with us in worship. And the songs that we use on Tuesday night are the songs that people know from popular culture and we do that intentionally as an entry point for those outside the church. There's something very welcoming and powerful about singing together. And so we pick songs for the front end of our worship gathering that we think speak to the issue or whatever it is we are talking about. And so people will start from the place where they are just singing along with the songs and then they start listening in to things that they hear in the sermon. I can tell you stories of people who started by studying at Union on a Tuesday night and heard stuff that surprised them and interested them, came back the following Tuesday and didn't put the headphones on. And came back the following Tuesday and actually sat with the people. And once you see the set up of Union you'll see how people can be on the periphery as opposed to being where the worship is, to actually hanging up with us afterwards and going to the bars with us.

Now when people show up for these different experiences and participate how do you get them involved in the ministry of Union?

It varies a lot from person to person. At our different events we always highlight things that are going on that they can get involved in. On Tuesday night anyone who has announcements can Tweet them. It keeps the announcements short. Then we have one person who reads them out loud to everybody. That's the way people can find out who's MCing at the Naked Stage on Friday night. On Sunday night we have butcher paper out on all the tables and so people can just write down their email address and what they are interested in. Or they can call for more information. And a lot of it is

personal information too. If you want to hang out and talk to people afterward you can invite them to come to something in particular. And those who have been attending for a while and are interested in taking it to the next level, they will sign up for a couple different discipleship programs that we have. One is called (Mesa?) which is small groups that meet around tables, dinner tables in people's houses and they are micro small groups like four or five. Our goal is to keep them roughly that size. And the other thing that we do is actually our membership preparation process is something called the Union Way, which is a five month long discipleship process and once that is completed people can decide to join or not.

How long have you been at this?

We opened in November of 2012. We first started worshipping at the end of June, 2013. It was our Tuesday night gathering. Naked Stage started the end of November 2012, it was the program things that we did. And Studio started a month ago.

How do you evaluate the effectiveness of Union Coffee Ministry?

There are a lot of different aspects of what we do so there are a lot of different metrics and measures to look at. On a basic level we can evaluate the way other churches do. How many people gather for worship on any given night? Occasionally we'll do a survey to find out what our average age is. So we look at age demographics, we look at attendance numbers, the number of people who join. Things like that that are pretty standard. We look at the number of small group opportunities on any given week, mission opportunities on any given week. Those are all pretty straight forward numbers to look at. On a deeper level we look at how many people are connected that

weren't connected with any worshipping community before they connected with Union. Which is a little tougher to measure but we find different ways to tease that out. We look at who's getting involved in the worshipping community and is then stepping out to be involved in the larger community to make Dallas a better place. That's more anecdotal and story driven. One of the critical places for gathering these stories is at the Easter Vigil which we've started the past two years. We ask for resurrection stories. And then at all of our birth marks. We ask what are the stories of transformation that you can share. And so at the one year anniversary of the worship gathering and the yearly anniversary for Union opening we do similar work. Storytelling plays an important part in what we do so looking at those stories is a really important way for us to tell whether or not we are being effective. On the bigger picture though we are looking at things like—are more people walking in our doors this year than last year. That's an important indicator for us to look at. If we are providing something that's worthwhile to the community then they will sustain it with their dollars. We are also looking at giving levels and things like that. It's great getting people involved in worship but if they're not getting involved in mission then it's not a church. If they're not living their lives differently they we are just providing entertainment. So we look at donations and where are those donations coming from. And part of what we are looking at is that those donations will come from our worshipping congregation and from customers and away from grant sources. Hopefully that will increase as our footprint in the community grows.

Since you brought that up, what does this ministry cost?

Our startup costs were pretty high. It was something to the tune of \$200,000. That's a lot higher than I think future iterations of Union would be. And we are not yet to the point of being self-sustainable. My hunch is that now what we learned and knowing what we know now, we could replicate Union much cheaper and get it to the point of sustainability much faster. Because there is no road map for us to follow, because we are one of the first to experiment with something like this our initial costs are much higher. We knew, and the conference knew, that we would be much more expensive and we would make mistakes and our hope is that future iterations will be much less expensive. My hunch is that we could launch future iterations of this for roughly 100,000 to 150,000 which would include all labor and supplies for the first six months which you need to have. And I think we could get it to sustainability within 18 months to 2 years. We are not there yet in this location. There were a lot of mistakes that we made so it's going to take us longer. It's probably going to take five years before we are sustainable. But in the meantime we will probably invest in another location that should come together much faster.

What do you know about the faith backgrounds of those who participate?

It is across the board. Most of the folks are the burned and the bored.

Individuals who grew up in the church and left it either because they were really hurt by the church or because they are frankly bored by the church. The common thing that I hear from those who have left the church is that they went to vacation bible school, they went to youth group and they went off to college and they had new questions and new ideas about God and they went back to their home church or churches like it and those churches were still asking the same questions they asked when they were in high

schools and so they felt like they grew up and the church is still stuck where it was five or ten years ago, lacking innovation, lacking developing ideas, asking questions they aren't interested in, so they just get bored. They just have no interest in repeating the same old same old. So those are the bored folks.

The burned are the ones who have been hurt by the church because of scandals or things that happened in the church. Whether it's like the ways their parents used their faith like a stick or for a lot of our folks it's those who are part of the LBGTQ community or people who are close to that community and saw how the church damaged or hurt people in the LBGTQ population. So I would say that 20% of the people who worship with us on Tuesday night are part of the Gay and Lesbian community. And we have been a haven for them. I have read an article about that particular aspect of Union in the SMU campus newspaper a couple weeks ago. Out of all the campus ministries and I think there are 28 campus ministries at SMU which is just across the highway from us we are the only one who have made it open and affirming to our gay and lesbian population.

What are some of your immediate challenges in the coming year?

Improving coffee shop operations. The big draw of our coffee shop right now is a combination of the community we have created and the fact that 10% of our coffee sales goes to charitable causes. Those are big drivers for a lot of our customer base. Our coffee operations are good but they are not among the best and we need to crank it up a notch to be one of the best in Dallas. Our belief is that if our coffee operation is as strong as our community development then we will be unstoppable.

Secondly, we need to figure out this year, what ultimately does success look like for Union because honestly we've been really good at like five different things. But we need to see what one thing it is that we can really devote our time and energy into with maybe one of two secondary objectives. That's one of our really big challenges right now. We just launched a second worship service so we will want to see if that takes off.

JUAN GARAY, URBAN POIEMA, MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

As the pastor of this ministry what is the role of your message, your weekly preaching?

Our teachings are meant to empower people. This area is very depressed so its important to me to bring a message of hope. So my involvement with that is that everything we talk about, even if its hard subjects, ends with a message of hope.

There are a lot of things in this society and especially in the urban or city context that bring a lot of pain and needs to the table and their lives, the lives of people. So I know, not everyone, there are some new people here today, but most everyone I know some of their stories and so it's important for me to bring that message of hope and that they leave here understanding that every time they come through here that they can leave with a message that will empower them in their tough times and what they are going through.

At the end of your service you tell people to invite others. Do they do that?

Yes. In fact there are two people here that came because of a friend and he doesn't come very often but they come more than him.

What would be your normal school year attendance?

It goes up to 50 sometimes. We have had over a hundred sometimes depending on what we are doing. We try to make some splashy events every once in a while to do something different like this month or next month we plan on doing a Salsa worship service so we will bring a salsa band because that's the kind of community we have here. They like music. We will slide music in Spanish and English. That to me is a splash event because it's doing something different in order to invite new people in.

It's been a busy weekend...tired...

How expensive is this ministry? Do you get some help from the conference?

We get some help. For example, right now the most help we get is my salary. They cover that completely which helps because I can focus and concentrate on the ministry. But other than that we haven't received a whole lot of money. We received \$15,000 to buy equipment for sound but we have to pay that back whenever we get the grant that we're going for. My thoughts are, I wish we were able to get money for ministry. By the grace of God this place was given to us for free. So we don't pay to be here. But that was by the grace of God and by us creating community connections and making it happen. But it's a very scary proposition sometimes you never know when they're going to pull the plug on us and we're going to end up on the street somewhere. So its not easy. It's a constant worry. But it doesn't stop me either because I believe my job is to find solutions not just sit around and wait for money to pull out from somewhere. My job is to find the best ways that I can do the work of ministry and look for solutions for the problems that we have ahead. I think if we do that we become more self-sufficient quicker because then we rely on the conference less to help us with stuff. But saying that I do wish there was more up front financial involvement from the

conference. But I also know the conference is trying to slice the cake in a billion different ways. You get it but it's hard.

How did you get all these people involved in setting up this worship space?

I got some super heroes on my team. I think the most important thing for ministry is to not be afraid of asking. If you need something ask. If people believe in the ministry and what you're trying to accomplish they will respond. And so most of the people you saw here are part of the leadership or core group. Those are the people who are helping me build this ministry from the ground up. So those people have greater responsibilities than just marginal people who are just marginally involved. But as you heard me say I need help taking this down so even people who were brand new through the door put their hands on something and helped. I believe that people do that when they're blessed. And then they have a sense of involvement in the church. And they feel they were used for something.

How do you judge the effectiveness of this ministry?

I judge it by those who want to make a commitment to follow Jesus. Not follow Urban Poiema but follow Jesus. So the way we go about that is our baptismal, we are going to have a baptism on Father's day and already we have a person who is going to get baptized. We have six in Waukesha who are going to get baptized. We finish here and we go right away to Waukesha and do it again at 2 pm. So that's how I measure it. When I stop seeing people baptized, when I stop seeing people not getting involved in the work of ministry then I have nothing to measure the effectiveness of what God is doing in this ministry.

What do you know about the faith backgrounds of the people who come here?

I know some. Hispanics mainly come from two different backgrounds. They either come from a very Catholic background or very Pentecostal background. And both express their faith completely different. So that's why our worship is so lively, the way it is. As Hispanics we like lively emotional expressions of worship. That's why you get the people raising their hands and some people with their arms crossed. And we don't make anyone do anything. We just let them know Jesus can be worshiped any way you want to do it. For us it would be a cultural shock if we don't have a band or have loud expressions of music because that's what's expected in this area.

As you look into the future what do you think your biggest challenges will be?

I think it's financial and I'm also thinking space wise. I have hopes that we're going to fill this place up really quickly. And we don't have a lot of people flocking in because the space actually freaks some people out. It's a bar. So some people think, I want to experience that but it's really weird. So I'm thinking that the space is something we are going to have to discuss moving forward. I love it here. I have no problem here. I can see that we are having church here. The presence of God is felt. No qualms about what God is trying to do in and through this place. But we have several months to look and see if this is going to be effective in bringing more people in. But if you don't have finances then it's not easy to find places that might be available to rent or whatever.

EMILY MCGINLY, URBAN VILLAGER, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

How long have you been associated with Urban Village?

I came on staff in June of 2012 as a church planting pastor. For the next nine months I worked with a co-pastor at the time to do the foundation building that led to launching our south side location here with outreach to Woodlawn and Hyde Park.

How long has this site been here?

We launched in March of 2013. So we are about two years and some change.

As one of the pastors what do you see as the role of preaching in these Urban Village sites?

In the context of Chicago, because the neighborhoods are so very specific, I think that the role of preaching has to be deeply contextual. You have to really know the culture neighborhood in a lot of ways in order to be able to speak people's language and touch on the issues that are closest to their hearts. For us here, even though our congregation is about half and half, black and white, everyone here is committed to principles of anti-racism, anti-oppressionism. So for example last week with the shootings in Charleston, it's a travesty anyway but if I were to relegate it to just a side comment people would be very, very disappointed and maybe even angry that I didn't speak to it further. Those issues, particularly around "black lives matter," are at the heart of a lot of people's lives either because they themselves would identify as black or they have family members or the work in the context, a lot of them are teachers in schools where they see a lot of this stuff play out and they need someone who cannot just help make meaning but also speak to how faith intersects. Who is God if all these things are happening in people's lives, how do we begin to make sense of that through the lens of faith. And I see that in a significant way as my primary responsibility as a

preacher, to help people frame and understand and have hope in situations that really feel hopeless.

Do you and your other colleagues in Urban Village talk about what you are preaching on?

We have a sermon series that we all follow so this current one is about Coming Out Christian, evangelism and outreach, because summertime is when we do a lot of our outreach. So we follow the sermon series and we have our own kind of lectionary that we use with the series and a primary point that we're focusing on for each of those passages but we have the space and the freedom to develop it in whatever way makes sense for our particular community. So the focus for today was supposed to be how Samuel listened and through his listening he was able to know what to say, to speak God's word about his faith, but I had to sort of take a different tact because of the reality of what was happening in the world around us. So I stayed with the passage and I didn't really ignore that but there was a much bigger point that needed to be made about the passage for this particular community especially.

What can you tell me about the faith backgrounds of the people attending Urban Village?

A majority of the people who come here come from Christian backgrounds of some stripe. There are a couple of people who might identify as atheist or non-believers but find that this is a community that they want to be a part of. But we have folks from Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist, Pentecostal, non-denominational so it kind of runs the gamut in terms of Christian traditions in a lot of ways.

What's the Urban Village way in including them in ministry?

Most people come because they want to be part of a faith community that is welcoming to LBGTQ, either because they themselves are that way or they are tired of being in churches where that's frowned upon or not welcomed. Also people are here because they want to be part of a faith community that takes the Gospel commitment to justice seriously. And I would say that in terms of what we do in worship we really kind of try to pull from a lot of different streams, worship expressions, so some of its music, the kind of music that we sing, icons with candles that people get to light and take a moment to pray, that's familiar to folks from our Catholic backgrounds. Then we have a prayer that we offer to the side during communion, its familiar to other people, but we have communion every Sunday is familiar to other people. So there's a little bit of everything that helps folks at least have a hook that might be familiar and other things that are very different and unfamiliar to them. So everyone is kind of stretched in one way or another. So people it's an adjustment for them to adjust to my preaching style either because they're not used to people who preach from a manuscript or because of the deep exegetical work that I do is sort of a new thing for people, for other people maybe some of my delivery is a little bit different than what they're used to. So there is something that's familiar and something that's unfamiliar for everyone in worship.

As you talk with your colleagues, how do you evaluate the effectiveness of the ministry?

You know the primary way that we have evaluated it is just the annual reviews that the conference requires us to have. Jumping off of the measurements of effectiveness that the conference provides, our SPRC has added some of their own

markers and they survey people in the congregations to try to get a diversity of feedback, hopefully honest, its anonymous for the most part. That's really the only way that we have done any kind of qualitative measure of effectiveness.

This was the first membership class since the fall...they have an option to either just becomes members of Urban Village or become members of Urban Village and the UMC....

Does Urban Village get all its money from its participants or does it get support from outside?

We got significant support from the denomination initially to do the planting work. We couldn't have started without that but now we do get some outside support from folks who believe in what we are doing and want to make sure that we are able to keep going but the majority of our support is from the congregation.

What's the budget? You budget together?

We have one budget that I think is somewhere around 300,000. We rent this space.

We work from home or coffee shops. We meet for a weekly staff meeting at the Chicago Temple downtown. Small groups happen in people's homes or in restaurants or coffee shops. My work happens at home or the seminary library.

As you look to the next six months what are your biggest challenges?

Retention of people, because young people in urban settings don't stay very long. They have to go where the jobs are or because of life's circumstances they have to move and so it's hard to keep people for a really long amount of time. So in general that's a challenge ongoing, for us particularly here at Hyde Park-Woodlawn figuring

out how to live into our strategic map or ministry map in ways that are authentic to who we are as a community that is committed to communities of color particularly being on the south side and how do we do that in ways that are necessarily going to be different from the other UVC sites because those are predominantly white. And so how that gets lived out in Andersonville should be and is going to be different than how we do things because we are the only ones who are in a neighborhood that is predominantly people of color. It takes a little bit more extra interpretation for us to figure out how we do that, faithfully and authentically. So the next six months will be really figuring that out and then beginning to embody that and live that out.

APPENDIX B
SAMPLE INTERVIEWS
CHURCH IN A DINER

Interview with Dan

How did you get involved with Church in a diner?

A friend of mine Jim and Michelle who sat with us. They asked me to come. They learned about it from another diner, called Grumpy's. It closed down and came here and they were telling us about it. It was kind of a different experience for them and they thought maybe we'd like to come and try it out. So we did. We've been coming for a little bit more than a year.

What made you come back?

I think it was just the atmosphere. Just everything about it. As they said at the end of each month they have meet and greet and you meet the pastor, have a meal and get to know him and others that are going to be coming here too. The other thing I like is when he presents questions like he did today he'll talk about some of the personal things to get everybody else's ideas and give you some things to think about.

How does Church in a Diner affect your life?

I think it has me looking forward to coming every week. If that's an honest answer. I just like it. It's on Monday night and I know we can go to church on Sunday but this is just totally different and I like to try new things.

Had you originally been going to church on a Sunday?

For a while when we were first married. And then we just...I've been going to church on and off over the years and I've had some good experiences and some very bad experiences. But this one I've found is just comfortable, I guess.

And how important is the preaching to you?

It's pretty important. I try to think about what he's trying to tell us. I just try to comprehend what he's trying to say. And put something about my life into it.

Interview with Chrissy

You are on staff here and at SC but work at this venue mostly?

On staff I work mostly at the church on Sunday morning I work as nursery staff. But I also help out with the small groups and singing, I'm in the singing ministry and pretty much anything else they ask me to do. I'm one of those people if you ask me to do it I'm more likely to do it.

My research project is about churches that take their preaching ministry outside the typical church building. And so what would you say is the role of preaching in the church in the diner?

Well I'll tell you, my mom started coming here first and she kept telling me to come and come and come. I was going to a church that I thought I liked and she kept saying, come to church with me, come to church and I said, mom, church in a diner? Come on. So anyway finally I decided to come. I was having a bad night and I came and I just experienced God in a different way. Their baby was here for a first time and I got to hold the baby and it just was a blessing. Come to find out I wasn't as happy at this other church because they weren't engaging me to be a part of their family and that

was what I was really looking for. So I sort of just started submerging myself through church in a diner and started doing more and more things and I actually became a member before my mom.

So how did you get involved?

There was a position that was open on their nursery and they called and said, hey we think you'd be great at this what do you think? And I said, I'd love to. I love babies. And then I had an interest in singing so I talked to Jeremy about it. Jeremy said, let's get you an audition and see how you do and see how our voices blend. So I did that and got invited to be on the worship team and then they invited me to help with small groups. So they asked what kind of small groups I wanted to lead. The first one actually wasn't my favorite. I'm not a big reader but I did a book group. And the second one I'm doing now is this craft group with I love. So it's a fun way for me to fellowship with other ladies. And a new person today.

From your perspective how would you evaluate the effectiveness of church in a diner?

Very effective. I think it gives people a way to be in an interpersonal friendship without feeling really stressed. We have a lot of chances to talk to each other. Whereas you know a lot of churches are like shhhh... be quiet during the service. We have moments in the service where we actually have discussion time. Which I really like. It reminds me of when I was young and in small groups with church and we would meet together and do interesting things and talk about things. I just really liked that. I like to feel like I'm a part of something. I feel more a part of this than I have felt in any other church. It all started right here.

From your perspective what are the challenges of holding worship in a diner?

Sometimes we run out of room. Sometimes there's not a separate space for kids and they're loud. But also that's kind of a blessing in it too to see our place expanding. Parking...I don't know I don't think there's much that's bad about this. When you first think about a church in a diner people don't think it's a real church but when you come you experience that it's truly a church and we truly care about each other and want to be together.

Interview with Jim

How did you come here? How did you get involved in Church in a Diner?

Through a friend, through my girlfriend, Jennifer. I started dating her and one day she asked me if I wanted to attend and I did and I liked it. It catches my attention. I've been to plenty of churches growing up but it didn't catch my attention. But when I came to Jackie's and started to listen to him talk, he catches my attention. I want to listen to what he has to say. It's the way that he comes across; the way he projects his meaning behind things.

Are you talking about his preaching?

Oh yeah. Oh absolutely. He catches my attention. I want to listen. And when he's not here it bums me out cause I want to hear him. I really do.

And so is that what brings you back each week?

Yeah. Yeah. And the meaning. The concept behind the way that the church does things. It's different from what I experienced when I was a kid. To me, it brings out certain meanings of life experiences and a way to deal with that spiritually through the Lord. You know what I mean? And that grabs my attention. I want to know more.

How would you say this has affected your life?

I guess it brings it more excitement, more happiness. Knowing that I can come here with all these nice people and listen to something that has some meaning to it.

So is this your primary church experience?

Yes, yes.

UNION COFFEE

Interview with Jeff.

How long have you been a part of Union?

About two years.

How did you start?

A friend of mine was involved in getting this place off the ground and so we were having dinner one night the day before this opened and he said, hey this things opening tomorrow I want to show you something and I looked at the space and thought this could be something special. And so I switched all my coffee habits to be here. I'm a seminary student and I have a lot to study so I started coming here. We didn't start the worship service until the following June. We were open for a while getting our customer base and stuff like that I wasn't involved in the initial stuff with Kuneo but soon after...I think I started coming in August. And I started working with Mike on the storytelling stage. I wanted desperately to have a service I could come to and not have responsibility.

One of the differences here is that in a coffee shop you can get people to share their story which is different than in a regular church. We never hide what we're about. For a lot of our regulars we are a coffee shop that gives to charity and good Wi-Fi and

the nicest baristas in town. And that's fine but for the people that have a spiritual need, they are going to talk way more and that credibility that we have because we do good in our neighborhood gives us credibility when we start talking about their spiritual life.

How would you describe the role or the importance of the pastor's message?

I think what's cool about what we do here on a Tuesday night...it's very informal, we are talking to people who may or may not have a connection to faith at all. So the time to talk about things with someone with expertise is incredibly important. A lot of times our service is a lot more interactive. So it's important to hear the Gospel read and interpreted but also answer questions and be redirected when people push back. The willingness to engage and the willingness to accept their questions as valid...they want to understand---it brings a much deeper fulfillment of our Gospel. We are here not to have all the answers but to engage the questions. This is a good place for wrestling.

Interview with Mary

What's your role?

My side is the business and coffee shop implementation strategy. I do everything from doing the books, but for both the ministry side, so all the tithes and donations that come in, and the money that comes if from the coffee shop side of things. Everything bookkeeping except for taxes. And we have an outside source for payroll. But I do all the hiring of employees and purchasing of items, quality control, maintenance and upkeep. I'm the building facilitator.

The whole thing is a church and the profits from the coffee side help fund the church. I was brought in when Union wasn't doing well. This is a bifold ministry, that's

what the conference considers us. And to do that you need someone with business background.

I don't help Michael come up with concepts about what he preaches about. I take care of building, maintenance things like that. Michael does all the programming. We both meet the needs of the community and then we work together to make it work in the same space.

If you look at the socioeconomics of this country this generation that's coming up isn't going to have the ten percent to tithe. So we are looking into the future for other ways of funding ministry that still engages the community but also helps them. So if we alleviate some of the financial dependence on that ten percent tithe then we are helping the church survive. You have to live in this reality and meet the needs of your community. That's what a church should do.

When I came in this wasn't happening because it had never been done before. We are literally creating a new church model. You can't separate us, the church and the coffee. And that was the thought process for a long time...that you could. And it doesn't work that way. It's a church. It's one body but two things working together for the whole experience for the community.

We stay compliant on all things business and we submit reports for all things church.

There are some people in the North Texas conference who consider us the most successful new church start because we haven't had to go back to the conference for additional funding and outside fundraising need is actually going down because of the success of the coffee side.

I have 12 employees plus me and Michael has an intern and an assistant.

Do they have to buy into the mission of Union to be hired?

No, but for what we are trying to do ...can you be there for your community if you don't know what they need? Yes, but are you more effective if you know what they need? Of course, so some people just utilize us as a coffee shop. Some people just utilize us as a church. Some people utilize us as both. The bigger question is we have an answer to how to get people in the door. We went from having just over 30,000 people walk through our door in 2013 to 48,000 in 2014 and that's just sales at the register.

Now Michael mentioned to me that you don't have a drive through. For a coffee shop how significant is that?

For any business it's a 20% automatic increase in sales. We would never be able to have one here in this location.

Because we are a church, if we expand do we just do it on the coffee side. That would be like any other church opening a coffee shop to fund their mission. We could do that but we would have to look at what that means first.

Do you have a prediction of when you will be self-sufficient?

I'm not sure that we will ever actually be self-sufficient because of a lot of things. This is a large, large space in an expensive city for our profit margin.

We haven't taken any money from the conference since the original 250,000. We still do outside fund raising. But last year what we brought in in sales was more than what we had to do in fund raising. We have lots of people and churches that support us because they like what we are doing.

Is there anything else we need to know?

It's a lot of work. One of the things the board always tells me is, we didn't know we needed someone with such a gift of hospitality. And it's not something you necessarily think of.

I think that one of the great things about making a coffee shop part of your bi-fold ministry is that churches and coffee shops are both destinations. People will drive to get there. You can't compete with Starbucks and you can't be them. Independent business succeed in a community because the community decides to support them, same as a church. That's why it's so important to be plugged in and listening to what people need.

Anything else?

All of the employees are intentionally hired. They all bring something that you can't find anywhere else. They are really just fantastic young people. They need to bring themselves here when they come to work. That's why we don't have uniforms or name tags.

Interview with Scott

How long have you been coming?

I started coming to Kuneo about two years ago. I've been on the worship planning committee for not quite a year.

What brought you here?

Well two different things happened. I was part of a smaller traditional Methodist congregation here and I was coming here to the Union coffee house to study, I was in law school. So I started coming to the Tuesday night worship gathering. One of my friends was influential in forming this. And I really, really resonated with the kind of

ministry that's going on here. It's just so easy to talk about with someone at school or someone at the coffee shop. A lot of my classmates would study here and so its just natural to talk with them about what's going on here. It just felt so much more natural and a part of life than the congregation off in a church.

How has this ministry affected your life?

I have a very close knit group of friends at law school. But outside of that I don't have a community. I was part of a supportive congregation but they didn't know me very well because we just didn't have the opportunities to deepen those relationships. But through Kuneo and through Union there are just more natural times...like we are about to go across the street and have a beer together and I got to know people really well through that. We are very intentional about spending time together outside of the worship gatherings. We have this friends outside of Kaneo thing where you can go to sporting events and things like that together. My friend Jeff and I just started a small group ministry for Kuneo we just sit around a table have a meal together and talk about life. So it's kind of a support network and kind of a family. I'm from Iowa and all my family's back there so it's provided this family.

What's the role of the message here? How important is it to you?

It's incredibly important. I think the way that we do the message is central to the identity of Kuneo and Studio. It actually starts two Sundays before the Tuesday of the message we have our worship planning committee that meets for two hours and we walk through with Pastor Mike the sermon, the message. We start out with just this brainstorm when we talk about what we want to talk about. And we do that for a good hour shaping what the message will be two weeks out. And it's really awesome because

it's not just the pastor in his study writing it out. And then in the actual message its very discussion based. We leave room to pull from the audience, to get the feel of the room. And sometimes that makes it awkward and it gets uncomfortable. But we've learned how to embrace that and recognize that's part of the spiritual life. Sometimes we end with a question, we're not sure what to do next. A lot of the stuff that we struggle with are things we can't put periods on. There are a lot of question marks. And to be able to approach that as a community, rather than ok I'm going to give you three bullet points. This is what you need to think about and we're going to avoid all that uncomfortable stuff. Actually I should mention that sometimes it begins month before. We have a quarterly retreat and we sit down and plan out the next three to four months of our worship series where we sketch out what we want to talk about so when we get to the weekly worship meetings we aren't going, ok what shall we do? There's a story that we're writing, a direction we're trying to get.

Do you think there are people here who come to this ministry who wouldn't feel welcome in a regular church?

Yes, very much so. Kuneo especially is designed for a place for church refugees, people who have been burned by the church. I'm one of those. And there are several other LBGT folks who I've been about to invite into this that have been burned. We hear those stories regularly and not only are they welcome, there's a place for them to speak. But even more than that, people who have questions, people who have doubts or have been told they don't fit because they have questions. They are welcomed in and made an integral part of the community. There are people who just wander in, that

happens regularly. There was a mother and her daughter here tonight. They were in for coffee a few weeks ago and they just decided to try Kuneo.

There are people who might be studying in the conference room during Kuneo but then at the end we sing a traditional hymn and something connects and they come out and sing with us. They aren't part of the community but for that moment they can join in.

Anything else?

The band is tremendous. They are kind of a focal point of who we are. The music is purposefully secular. One of the things we are so about...we go out into the community and try to find where God is and make God manifest where the church has not make God manifest. We look into the community and say, that has the fingerprints of God, lets speak to that, lets speak to the healing, lets speak to the wholeness, lets speak to the creativity that's in this community and show people that God is in this place. People will surely see God in you when you see God in them---that's kind of a criteria of how we approach things.

URBAN POIEMA

Interview with Angela

How long have you been involved with Up church?

Since it started in July.

And what brought you back?

I like that it's not a traditional church and it might be appealing to people who don't know Christ and it might be a way for them to be introduced to something that they wouldn't normally go to. The Up Ones which is the monthly service that we do for

the community is what also brought me back because I like they actually want to help the community actually do something in the community and reaching out to them.

How has this ministry affected your life?

I guess really opening my eyes about going out and telling people about Christ in different ways and showing them not just by coming to church but helping in the community is a way to show the love of Christ.

Tell me about the pastor's message. How important is that to you?

Well it's very important. His message is what makes it meaningful and gives you the knowledge to go out there and be disciples.

Is there anything else?

I think it's a great ministry. I think that it's something that other churches should try to do as well to be outside the four walls of the church and go into the community where it's really needed and bring church to them rather than having them come to church.

Interview with D'Angelo

How long have you been involved in Urban Village?

Two years

What brought you here?

Initially my wife. She was looking for a church home and I was following her along and we found Urban Village through a couple of different web sites. I think the start of it was MeetUp and then it kind of went on from there.

Do you remember your first impression?

My first impression was good. I went to the downtown site. I felt like the message was good. I didn't even pay attention to the fact that it was outside of a church but later I became more aware that like we're doing this outside of a church, this is not a typical thing. So very much different. I didn't come to pay attention to that until later.

Did you have a church background before coming here?

I had a church background until about age 14. About 14 till about 24, nothing. As a young person I went to church. I attended church camps, did many things, got involved. But after a while my passion for it dissolved.

How has this ministry impacted your life?

I think it's made a very huge impact on my life. I feel like as much as I was following my wife curiously I was also seeking, something new, but I didn't know that the thing I was seeking was a closer relationship with God. And that just happened to be a part of what my wife was going through. It created a very healthy bond in our marriage. It's also something that brings some structure to your life. You just do it. It's routine. It's just something we do every week. And it's a good routine. We go to church every Sunday or at least we try to go to church every Sunday. It's a very good thing. But it's also helped me get back on track with what I believe in the beginning. When I started it was just like everything was completely falling into place. It felt so right. I feel good about it still today.

Interview with Efrain

How long have you been involved in the ministry here?

About six months now.

And how did you get involved?

I actually was asked by the pastor to come in and help with the translating. And I've known the pastor and his wife since I was 4.

Is this your church?

This is my church. I translate at two different churches. I'm also at the pastor's wife's father's church. That's the church I've been in since I was 4.

I volunteer to come here every week to set up and to translate during the service whenever there is somebody who is monolingual, Spanish speaking only.

You came the first time, but then why did you come back?

It's a sense of belonging. I belong to my church but here, it's like we are important. You need to do something and be involved. I came back because everybody's really loving. Everybody kind of engulfs you and you are part of a family and that's really important.

How has being involved here impacted your life?

Well the community is really united and the word that the pastor brings is really down to earth, very realistic and I can apply it to my own life and that's really important to me. The church I usually go to is a little bit more traditional, a lot more people but it's not so impactful like this. It always speaks to one of my needs, one hundred percent of the time.

How important would you say the pastor's message is?

For me it's almost always from a 9 to a 10. Always very important. The worship could be amazing but if the word is not relevant to your needs then you're like, ok I had a good worship time but I didn't have a good word that went with it.

How important is the preaching or the pastor's message?

It's really important. I came here a little late today. Urban Village preaches, bold, inclusive, relevant. And we talk about the relevance of what happened this week and you bring that to the sermon today and how relatable it is. Everybody knows what's going on and everybody is angry about it and it's definitely something we should be talking about. I'm sure a normal church would talk about it but not in as much detail and not with as much passion. It's something tangible that we can do as Christians to overcome what's going on out there. The message is very important. I don't think anyone here comes to church just to be in fellowship we come to get that message.

Anything else you'd like to tell me?

It's a great church, a great church.

URBAN VILLAGE

Interview with Tracy and Partner

How long have you been involved?

I've only been coming here about two months.

What brought you here?

Research on the internet. I was looking for a church that was inclusive of the LGBT community and they are kind of few and far between so this was one church that proclaimed that on their web site and this was the closest campus to where we live.

What brought you back?

It was really a void that I felt in my life. I grew up in church and I continued to look for a church once I came out as a lesbian. But it was mostly coming, showing up and leaving. I wasn't able to become a member or really share who I was with anyone in the church without that judgment. And so I found myself going less and less because

of the fact that I couldn't really become as involved as I wanted to be. We found this place. We decided to try it out and I think from the very first time we came we knew we would continue to come back.

Partner: I initially came to UVC to support Tracy. It was a void in your life and I'm her partner and I wasn't head over heels about coming at first. It was more to do something for Tracy to show I supported her. But I felt very moved by my first experience here and I think I was able to buy into it more than I anticipated I would. I was even very vocal about wanting to come back and make it a routine in our lives. And we've enjoyed coming here ever since.

How has this ministry impacted your life?

Tracy: I think it's given us a different level of relationship because the spiritual side of things wasn't something that we shared or talked about much. This gives us the opportunity to do that as well as meet and interact with and develop relationships with other people who have that same desire of getting involved in the community and growing our relationship with Christ. To me it's encouragement and one of the reasons I decided to become a member is I need that accountability in my life. For so many years now I've just been going, sitting and leaving. I think it's going to take some encouragement and accountability to push me to that place of getting involved again. And so I think that it's personally strengthened me and given me an avenue to get back to a better place with God, as far as comfort and prayer and thinking things. I think any personal growth I can have is only going to help our relationship as far as being partners.

Partner: I would just say it's helped me understand a side of Tracy that I never understood before. And I would go to church with her before and we went to another church where we were accepted. But it was really hard to feel included and act like ourselves. So it has given me a new perspective of why church is important. And it's also opened up that possibility for me as well. I grew up in a Catholic church, very strict in my family and once I became an adult I grew apart from it for a long time and that just became comfortable and a new norm in my life. And it's nice to be able to feel a part of something, part of a community and I'm excited about all the opportunities they have for us to get involved in and help out in the community.

How important is the pastor's message?

Partner: Well growing up Catholic I used to gauge mass on the length of the sermon. We used to get excited if we got our in under an hour. And the church that I went to prior with Tracy, the sermon was often an hour long and it was very hard for me to stay engaged and interested in what was being said. I've never experienced that problem here and I think it's because they try to be relevant and they try to tie scripture to things that are happening today. I think that's a piece that captures my interest. I also have gotten a personal message every week from that scripture.

Tracy: I would say the actual sermon is not the reason why I come. I grew up Baptist I feel like I know the Bible pretty well. So it's not necessarily that I'm coming to learn something new about the Bible but more for the relationships that can be built. We're both teachers so I call myself a lifetime learner. So I'm always looking to engage my interest or what can I learn from this. I'm also a coach so I'm always looking for things I can use with my team as well. I view it as an opportunity for a new thought to

kind of challenge me every week but I wouldn't say that's the main focus of why I come. It's more the whole entire environment of the site.

Anything else?

Tracy: I feel like this part of it, where they invite you to come and hang out and talk afterwards is really cool. It doesn't seem forced. It doesn't seem like an obligation, like we have to stay. But really genuinely people want to get to know you and get involved with your life. That's a different experience for me.

Interview with Patrick

How long have you been involved in this ministry?

I've been coming with my sister off and on for about two years.

And how did you start?

My sister was doing her confession, where they stand up and speak in front of the church and she invited me and my mom out to the church. And it was totally different so I wanted to keep coming back because it was different from any religious thing I'd ever seen before.

Is your sister still involved?

Yes, she is somewhere here.

So in the two years how has this ministry affected your life?

It's let me see religion in a different way. My entire life religious was a super formal thing and it always seemed forced. And I came here and I can wear a t-shirt and jeans, come as I am and just experience it. The first time I showed up Pastor Emily talked about the relationship between Mary and Jesus and she quoted Will Smith Parent's just don't understand. And I thought this is completely different, I like this

now. It's new and different. It's shown that religion doesn't have to be so formal and forced.

How important are the sermons for you?

Every week is something different that it makes me think until about Tuesday or Wednesday about what I was hearing. Sometimes I end up thinking about it for a long time and start thinking about what's coming up next week. It's something that helps me think about it and also look forward to it.

Anything else?

It seems like everyone really does like each other. It's not forced. It's kind of cool to see that.

Interview with Daniel

How did you get involved with Urban Village?

I found it on a Yelp review. I had recently relocated back to Chicago after moving away for a number of years and I was looking for a church.

So you came on your own after you found the review?

I did and then I started attending a bit regularly, kept in the background for the most part, really didn't do a whole lot but then started getting involved with groups like the Faith in Action team at the site I was at.

What's that?

Faith in Action is social justice focused. Urban Village church is part of a church consortium, that's more than churches, it's faith based groups. They are a community organizing group that includes more than 90 churches. They organize around five key issue or platform areas every year that are voted on by the council of

the churches. So they do a couple of events over the course of the year. MLK day they always hold a rally. There are both state and local issues they are trying to inflict change on, including how the criminal justice system works in the city of Chicago, raising the minimum wage, school funding. We also do a day of action down in Springfield with the legislators. So that's where I gravitated towards.

When you came here the first time did you know you wanted to come back?

No. I grew up Presbyterian. I hadn't been going to church in the seven plus years I lived away. And even prior to that I hadn't been going to church. But I liked the core messaging around Urban Village at that time. The core values: bold, inclusive, relevant really resonated with me. And some of their justice work and their commitment to church without walls and their service issues kind of got me interested.

In what ways has this ministry impacted your life?

I think I try to be a little bit more deliberative. I think I am finding a community I wouldn't have otherwise found. My church growing up was very, very cultural in the sense that it was ethnic. We went to a very large Korean church and my racial identity was tied into my church community. So I wanted something different at this point in my life. And so I have met a very diverse group of Chicagoans I wouldn't have otherwise met which I am very grateful for. Because it just increases my world view and perspective a bit.

Just one more question, for you each week how important is the pastor's message, the sermon?

Our pastors are fantastic preachers. I really crave the message and look forward to the message.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW WORKSHEET

After reading all the transcribed interviews, I read through them again highlighting and underlining key words and phrases. Below are my worksheets that I used to record how many times each theme was mentioned or addressed.

Church in a Diner

Missional	(Three people)
Filed-Preaching/Preaching outside a church	(Nine people)
Primary Church Experience	(Three people)
Importance of small groups	(Two people)
Invited to come	(Five people)
Faith Backgrounds	(Formerly Christian, de-churched, had a bad experience with church)
Importance of preaching	(Most indicated that it is important to very important.)
Interactive preaching	(Six people)
Committed Unpaid staff	(Church in a Diner dependent on these people.)
Cost	(\$5,000 to \$7,000/ Annually)
Challenge	(Space and keeping the service fresh.)

Union Coffee

Missional	(Two people)
Field-Preaching/Preaching outside a church	(Thirteen people)
Primary Church Experience	(One person)
Importance of small groups	(One person)
Invited to come	(Seven people)
Faith Backgrounds	(Burned and the bored, formerly active who fell away from church during college.)
Importance of preaching	(Six people indicated that it is very important.)
Interactive preaching	(Four people—preaching very conversational.)
Committed Unpaid staff	(Eight people)
Cost	(\$250,000. Union Coffee does outside fundraising annually)

Challenges (Turnover of participants, fundraising)

Urban Poiema

Missional	(Five people)
Filed-Preaching/Preaching outside a church	(Sixteen people)
Primary Church Experience	(Ten people)
Importance of small groups	(Not mentioned)
Invited to come	(Six people)

- Faith Backgrounds (Mainly Roman Catholic and Pentecostal. Hispanics like lively, emotional expressions of worship)
- Importance of preaching (Five people said very important. “Pastor is down to earth.”)
- Interactive Preaching (Not mentioned)
- Committed Unpaid staff (Ten people)
- Cost (Salary and benefits covered by Wisconsin Conference of United Methodist Church-\$70,000-\$90,000/annually. They received a \$15,000 start-up grant for equipment. They do not pay rent.)
- Challenges (Location both good and bad: five people)
- Urban Village
- Missional (Four persons)
- Filed-Preaching/Preaching outside a church (Ten persons)
- Primary Church Experience (Nine persons)
- Importance of small groups (Four persons)
- Invited to come (Four persons. These persons made it clear that they are welcoming of the LBGTQ community.)
- Faith Backgrounds (Christian, Evangelical, Atheist, Non-believers.)

Importance of preaching (Ten persons said Very Important. One person said not important)

Committed Unpaid staff (Three persons)

Cost (\$70,000 start-up, Urban Village sites rely on \$300,000 annual budget.)

Challenges Retention of members-Pastor.

APPENDIX D

PERC PLACE SERMONS

SEPTEMBER 14, 2015

“If God is so good and so loving, why is there so much evil in the world?”

Good evening and welcome to the New Perc Place and to the Perc Church.

We live in a time when most people, perhaps all, have doubts. Not only do we have doubts about much of what we hear, we have doubts about our faith. We have doubts about God. People who come to church have doubts. People beyond the church have doubts. Surprisingly, even atheists have doubts too.

Evil, as much as anything else, causes us to doubt. With evil all around, why doesn't God do something? Anything?

Tonight I encourage us to think about this question: how can God be so loving even when evil consistently shows up.

Music Three Songs

Brief reading from Job 1:1-5

Evil is all around us. If we knew all that happens, we probably could not handle it. It would be too much to take.

Real life examples of evil:

A child was in an Intensive Care Burn Ward because his mother doused him with lighter fluid and lit him on fire because he would not go to sleep. EVIL.

A Puerto Rican father hooked his teenage daughters on drugs so he could prostitute them. Then he would have to work. EVIL.

Corpses of African men, women and children who starved to death are piled on top of each other within eyesight of storage silos filled with food that their government impounded. EVIL.

A teen girl and her brother were sold into slavery to human traffickers because her younger siblings were healthier and would cost less to raise. EVIL.

A Thirteen year old cognitively disabled boy was beaten to death by four Christian boys who saw him wearing a Barbi t-shirt. They thought he was gay and wanted to teach him a lesson. EVIL.

A young woman gave up on church because three times during her teenage years, she was molested and forced to have sex with two different youth pastors. EVIL.

A man poisoned his wife and three children so that he would be free to marry a woman he met and fell in love with. EVIL.

Another man had sex with his daughters for years while his wife stood by doing nothing. EVIL.

“If God is so loving and so good why is there so much evil in the world?”

The answer that I have heard repeatedly is that God has given us the freedom of choice. We can choose to love or choose to hate. If we love that love spreads. If we hate that hatred spreads and provokes more and more hatred. Evil flourishes.

Jews and Christians point to one of the creation stories in the Bible. The man and the woman live in paradise. They have everything they need. Their garden is like the Hartford farm market in peak season. God told them that they can have whatever

they want, anytime. The only catch is that they cannot eat the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden. What do the man and the woman do? They eat that fruit. God gave us free will. That free will gave God an opening into our life.

My issue with this response is that we can have good days where we are loving, kind, generous all day long. We can live like that as a community for a whole day and even then with all that goodness and all that love, we are no match for evil that surrounds us. By ourselves we cannot stop the evils of ISIS or the leader of North Korea.

Others concede that they have no explanation for all the evil in the world. They say, "God must have a reason for it." First of all, I do not believe that evil comes from God. Think of all those examples of evil I listed, I cannot fathom what God's purpose could be in any one of those examples of evil. Think of the evil of poverty. Today there are 2.1 billion people world-wide who live on less than the equivalent of \$1.25 a day. This number has actually improved. Ten years ago it was 2.6 billion people. Those people live in agony for their entire life. What could possibly be God's purpose?

The Book of Job wrestles with the question, if God is so good why is there so much evil? Job has everything: a loving wife, seven sons, three daughters and he is the richest person around. More important to Job is his faith. He does everything he needs to do to stay close to God. When his children go out on the town, Job falls on his knees and prays. He begs God for forgiveness should any one of his children commit a sin. Even God brags that there is no one as blameless as Job.

Then Job loses everything...everything. His wife and children die. He loses his wealth. And, he is covered with a dreaded skin disease. The only place he can live is at

the garbage dump. Job has some friends who try to explain this evil to him. You must have sinned. You must have done something really bad or God would not have done this to you. Or, Job maybe you did something really bad and you did not realize it. Just admit it.

Job does not accept their explanations. He demands a conversation with God. He wants to argue his case before God Almighty. God gives Job that opportunity. God listens carefully. But then God answers Job. “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know.”(Job 38:4-5) God’s speech goes on for some time. Essentially God says to Job, I am God and you are not. Job accepts that. He cannot explain all that happened. He does not understand all the evil. But he accepts God's response. Then at the end of the story, God blesses Job with twice as much as he had at the beginning.

I do not have a satisfactory answer for why there is so much evil in this world. But, I do believe that ultimately, evil will be defeated. Every time people choose love and that love spreads, evil knows that its days are numbered.

Response Time

God does not solicit our advice. We are happy to give God advice all the time, especially when we pray and want God to do something very specific. For the purpose of discussion, if God came to you tonight and said, “Alright I hear you. You want me to do something about evil, what do you suggest? What would you say? Any ideas?

What would be the implications of that?

Is there anything that we can do?

Other questions?

Music

Sending Forth.

SEPTEMBER 21, 2015

“Is there really a hell?”

Opening

My youngest son struggles with faith in part because of an experience he had at church camp. One night, campers and counselor sat around the camp fire. The counselor had the boys put their hands as close to the fire as they could without burning their hands. And then with all these boys circling the fire, the counselor said if you go to hell it will be a thousand times hotter than that!

After the boys sat down on the logs around the fire, the counselor went on to explain that hell would last as long as it took a single ant to carry all the sand from the east coast of the United States to the west coast, one grain of sand at a time. So you better say yes to Jesus tonight. No one knows when they are going to die. You don't want to go to hell.

That did not make sense to my son. He always heard his parents talk about a loving and forgiving God. Although that camping experience happened twenty years ago, he talks about it as if it happened yesterday.

Tonight I invite us to consider the question: Is there really a hell?

On your worship card, there are a couple of discussion questions for later. 1. What are your impressions of hell? 2. If God is so loving, why did God create hell?

Music

In the Old Testament the closest we get to the word hell is Sheol which is believed to be a dark and mysterious place. In the New Testament, the word we translate as hell is used twelve times, almost exclusively by Jesus. The Greek word that gets translated as hell in English is the word “Gehenna” “Ge” means valley and “Henna” means Hinnom. The Valley of Hinnom was a valley on the south west side of Jerusalem. Gehenna in Jesus’ day was the city dump. Gehenna was an actual place that Jesus listeners would have known.

Gehenna--the town garbage pit.

There are two other Greek words used in the New Testament that are associated with Hell. Tartarus taken from Greek mythology, refers to the underworld. It is found once in the New Testament.

The other Greek word is Hades. It is defined as a dark obscure place.

Hear these words.

Read Luke 16:19-31

Sarah and I have two sons. We love them both very much and we always have. We know that they love us. Now we have a daughter-in-law and a grand dog who love us!

As a father, I never said to my sons, “You better love us and choose to love us or there will be Hell to pay! We never threatened them. In fact, we would love them even if they did not love us. In the creation story at the beginning of the Bible, we are told that God created us in God’s image. Male and female, we are created in the image of God. Do we really believe that God would say to all his children, love me or there will be hell to pay?

Having said all that, I believe there are times when we live through hells. At other times we may even create our own hell.

In high school I remember overhearing a conversation between two of my classmates. They were talking about their religion class. This was a Catholic High School. One said to her friend. "Do you believe in hell?" "Yes," she answered, "I am living it right now."

If you have ever listened to a woman talk about her experience of surviving and recovering from rape, you heard her story of hell. Or, the police officer informs a woman that her husband just committed suicide. They have a five year old daughter. The officer watches as the woman begins her walk through hell. In Hartford we can look into the eyes of an addict hooked on heroin. Their only hope is their next fix. They live in hell.

We live through all kinds of hell in this world. We find ourselves at "Gehenna" at the garbage dump.

Jesus tells the story of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man has a wonderful life. He gets everything that he wants. Lazarus lives at the gate of his house, hoping to eat the food the rich man throws away. The rich man ignores Lazarus. Both Lazarus and the rich man die. The angels carry off Lazarus to be with Abraham. The rich man is buried in the ground and goes to Hades.

The rich man calls out to Abraham. "Command Lazarus to come over here and dip his finger in the water and cool my tongue." Even in Hades, after death, the rich man sees himself as rich and powerful. People like Lazarus should serve him and do whatever he asks. In his mind, their roles have not changed. When Abraham tells him

that is not possible, the rich man pleads with him to send word to his brothers so they can change. But Abraham responds, “If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.”

This story ends with a prediction of the resurrection, something that Jesus was going to experience very soon.

The story of Lazarus and the rich man must have been a sharp warning to Jesus’ first audience. Jesus challenges them to rethink how they view the world, for there will be consequences for ignoring the Lazaruses outside their gates.

Jesus teaches that death leads to life. When you lose your life, you find it. The rich man in this story has not figured that out yet. He still clings to everything that he has. He still cannot let go of everything that mattered so much to him. He is in Hades but he has not died the kind of death that brings life.

Often we think of hell as lasting for all eternity. The closest the Bible comes to talking about forever is the Hebrew word Olam. This can be translated to the vanishing point or in the far distance or that is which is beyond the horizon. From olam to olam is considered to be a long time.

We live in this world for a relatively short period of time. Is God going to punish us for a long, long times for bad choices that we make here?

I wonder if for some people, heaven will be hell. Think of it this way, for the one who has been rich and powerful, the one who calls the shots in this world—like the rich man in Jesus’ parable—heaven may be an unwelcomed surprise. He may find that he is like everyone else. And everyone else is just like him. They are equals. For the rich man, at least initially, heaven may be hell. It is a world that he does not know. And

yet for one of the refugees trying to find a home in Europe, that may be a very appealing.

In the book of Acts in the New Testament, we learn that the first followers of Jesus, lived together in groups, almost what we call communes. When people made money, they put it into the general pot. When they had a need that need was covered. For Americans, for those of us who like owning our own stuff, that is not too appealing. We don't want to live like that. What if that is an earthly image of what heaven will be like? Would that be for us a heaven? Or a hell?

Response time:

What is your impression of hell?

If God is so loving, why did God create a hell?

Tonight I have presented just a few ideas on hell. As I have thought about this over the last few months, it occurred to me that I could teach an entire course on hell. I can imagine two students talking to each other. What did you sign up for this semester?" "I signed up for hell."

I am concerned about this. The way we have talked about hell has driven people—like my youngest son—away from the church.

Over the years of my ministry, I have been invited by funeral directors to lead a service for one who had no church affiliation. Sometimes the funeral director will say that they used to drive by a United Methodist Church every day. If I am able, I officiate at these services. Quite often I feel as though I am talking to a wall. I have this sinking feeling that nothing I say makes any difference at all. But then, all of a sudden, the

grace of God is at work in that place. I cannot explain it. I did not see it coming. God's grace is there among a group of people I thought were far, far from the faith.

Music

Sending forth.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2015

How good do we have to be?

Opening: No one is perfect. But too many of us demand perfection of each other and ourselves. The result is guilt, anger, depression and disappointment. How good do we have to be?

Scripture: Mark 10:17-23

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, 'Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: "You shall not murder; you shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother." ' He said to him, 'Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.' Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, 'you lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money* to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

How good do we have to be? Pretty good, fairly good, perfectly good?

The rich man thinks he is pretty good. He keeps all the commandments. He follows the letter of the law. He has done so ever since he was young. But he wants to know what more he needs to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus tells him to sell all that he has, give the money to the poor and come and follow me. The rich man believes that he is a good person, but not that good. He bows his head. Sadness overwhelms him as he walks away.

Jesus' encounter with the rich man reminds us that life is incredibly complicated. Each of us, for example, has made thousands of decisions just today. We decided when to get up, what to wear, what to eat, what to do, what to think, the best way to get from one place to another. We constantly make decisions and choices. There will be times probably each day when we do something or say something that hurts others. Or, there will be times when we are just not aware of how much someone needs us.

Regardless of how hard we try, we are not perfect. In our heads we know that no one is perfect. We get that. But far too often we demand perfection in ourselves and those close to us.

When I became a parent, I was determined not to make the same mistakes that I thought my parents made. After watching my two sons grow up and leave the home, I must confess that I wish I could have a few do-overs. Parent Teacher Conferences. For our oldest son, the parent teacher conferences were pretty much the same, from kindergarten all the way through high school. The teacher would start by saying, "I just love having Ben in my class. He is a nice, kind, polite, considerate, helpful, friendly boy. But, I just wish he would do his work." As a father I failed to pay attention to the power in the first sentence. I focused on the negative. In hindsight, I wish that I had praised him more for the multitude of his many qualities rather than focusing on a few things he could do better. Despite my fathering skills, he has turned out to be a nice, kind, polite, considerate, helpful, friendly man. These traits have served him well.

We think we see perfection all around us. We see perfect looking people on television and on the covers of magazines. They just look perfect...we know they are not.

There have been studies done on very talented athletes. They found that athletes who obsess over their mistakes and beat themselves up do worse than athletes who simply say, "That wasn't very good. I'll do better next time."

As we focus too much on being perfect, guilt and shame become bigger parts of our lives than are necessary. Guilt is the judgment we pass on ourselves when we feel bad over something that we did. Shame is that sense of being judged by others and feeling bad over who we are.

To some extent guilt and shame are necessary. The psychopath who has no guilt or shame and hurts or kills without even thinking or realizing what he has done. When we are overloaded with guilt and shame our lives become miserable.

We can atone for the things that we have done or failed to do more easily than we can change who we are. But human nature being what it is, we move so easily from one to another. We hear a criticism over something that we have done and translate it to a comment about what sort of person we are.

Roy was a retired chemistry professor in one of the churches that we served. He was such a nice man that I told him I wished I had had him for chemistry. Chemistry was not my strongest subject. He said that over the years of teaching he discovered that there are some people who don't do well in chemistry no matter how hard they try.

Roy told me that whenever he handed back exams or before he gave out the grades at the end of the term, he told his students that the grade they get is not a

reflection of who they are as a human being. It is simply a judgment of how well they mastered the material in this class. He told me that some of the finest people he met were students who did not do all that well in his class.

I think of the students at the high school--especially those who do not read well or write well or don't score well in math or science. They think they are dumb. They are not as good as others. Their struggles in school define who they are.

Life is complicated. We make mistakes. We are not perfect. That does not define our whole life.

Most of our heroes from the Bible were less than perfect. Abraham had two wives and a son with each of them. When his wife Sarah became jealous, he sent Hagar and their son Ishmael packing. To them he became like a deadbeat dad. And yet through his faithfulness he became a father of a great nation.

King David is still celebrated as one of Israel's greatest kings. He had many wives and even more concubines. He still found a way to commit adultery. Then he had a man killed to cover it up. David repented of this evil. God forgave him. Through David, God did great things.

For Abraham and David it wasn't their goodness that made the difference, it was the power of God in their life that made all the difference.

Matthew is a very talented man. In high school he was the class valedictorian. He went to Harvard where he graduated magna cum laude. One of his college papers was published in a professional journal, which is almost unheard of for an undergraduate. Best of all, his favorite professor had offered him a fellowship to work on some ground breaking research. But Matthew was afraid of accepting this offer. This

professor was like a father figure to him. He was everything that Matthew wanted to be. But he said, "I am afraid that if I work closely with him for the next two years, I will disappoint him. He will find that I am not as special as he thinks I am."¹

His rabbi said to him, "Matthew I promise you that you will both disappoint each other. You are both talented but neither of you is perfect. Why don't you just make up your mind that that's going to happen. But don't let that keep you from accepting a promising opportunity.

We are not perfect. The people around us are not perfect. Truth is if we and everyone around us were perfect, life would be pretty boring.

Life is complicated. We make mistakes. It will be to our benefit to be honest about that.

Response time:

In what ways do you feel pressure to be perfect?

When we mess up and make mistakes, why is it so difficult for us to forgive ourselves?

Closing

Every so often he hear inspiring stories of people born into a depressed situation. Somehow, some way they managed to get out and live a meaningful and successful life. When we compare these stories with others there always seems to be one common element. Somewhere along the line, someone took them by the hand and believed in them.

¹ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, v.3,479.

Several weeks ago, our son competed in the Wisconsin Iron Man competition in Madison. The experience amazed me. There were thousands of people cheering for all the competitors. The athletes come in all shapes, sizes and ages. Some athletes were more talented than others. It didn't matter. The crowd cheered and encouraged everyone.

There are people all around who try to be perfect. When they discover that their best is not good enough, they become devastated. These people need someone, anyone to take them by the hand and believe in them. They need people to cheer for them. Perhaps tonight God invites us to be that person.

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