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Congregations as Systems for Empowering Missional Leadership: a Lutheran Hermeneutic for Leading in Mission

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by

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ABSTRACT

Congregations as Systems for Empowering Missional Leadership:
A Lutheran Hermeneutic for Leading in Mission

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What are the cultural dynamics within a congregational system that are vital to the empowering of missional leadership? Do Lutherans have anything to contribute to the missional church movement in the United States? These two questions were primary for this dissertation and emerged out of two gaps identified in the missional church literature. Seeing congregations as complex, open systems, missional leadership within congregational systems was studied using a grounded theory, qualitative research approach. The five ELCA congregational systems in this study were identified by their peers as excelling in helping their faith community discover their calling as disciples of Jesus and empowering them to live their faith in the world. They were studied using primarily the ethnographic methods of field observation, focus groups, and journaling. The particular cultural dynamics of each congregational system were identified first, and then those that were common among them were articulated. These eight common cultural dynamics included: an active view of God, the world as the horizon, discipleship as a way of life, congregational systems as a network of people, the dance of leadership, tension of ministry and mission, a vibrant Lutheran identity, and a changing and adapting posture.

From these cultural dynamics, a Lutheran hermeneutic for leading in mission was proposed. Using Craig Van Gelder's four part hermeneutic, this proposal was shaped around: communicatively discerned, biblically and theologically framed, theoretically

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informed, and strategic action. The foundation of this hermeneutic of leading in mission was a missional theology, with a missional view of God, church, and ministry tied to a missional, Lutheran understanding of baptism and vocation. To this foundation were added several theoretical perspectives: grounded theory; ethnography; cultural anthropology; complex, open systems theory; and organizational leadership theory. The qualitative, grounded theory research findings, having sought to capture the *what* and *why* of the faith communities with a missiological inquiry of discovering God's intent, were woven throughout. The addition of qualitative research provided the opportunity for the lived experiences of missional congregational systems to speak into the missional church conversation in the United States offering a Lutheran voice, while also keeping theology and theory central.

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God has been at work in my life through people. Words will never do justice to the gratitude I feel, but let me express sincere thanks to a few. First, my thanks to the people of faith in the congregations in which I have participated for their nurture and support. In particular, thanks to the people of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Burnsville, MN for a twenty year journey together. God's people in community have formed and shaped me in a way that I have always known God's love and been empowered to serve as one of God's followers. Thanks for showing me grace, leading me to places I could never have imagined, and for giving me opportunities to lead.

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a colleague. To my dissertation readers, Dr. Marc Kolden and Dr. Alvin Luedke, thanks for your patience and words of wisdom. I truly value the investment you made in me. To my adviser, Dr. Craig Van Gelder – thanks is not enough. Dr. Van Gelder helped me discern that Luther Seminary was the place for a Ph.D. and that I was capable of doing it. Dr. Van Gelder walked alongside a group of us students, teaching, coaching, editing, listening…and at some point I emerged as a scholar and a friend. Thank you for believing in me, for challenging me to reach beyond my limits, and for allowing this process to have a human element.

Finally, I am forever grateful to my family, without whom I would not understand Luther's sense of vocation. They supported me, even when it was hard, they believed in me, even when I doubted, and they loved me, even when I was having a bad day. My heart overflows with thanks, for they allowed space to be created in my life for God to work in amazing ways. To grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins…thanks for your extra hands and for living through chaotic time. You were grace! Mom and Dad, I couldn't have done this without you. Thanks for letting me do it on my own, but always offering an outstretched hand. Eric, Jordan, and Elizabeth you know the journey! It's been a rollercoaster, but you've jumped in, helped out, learned when to stick up for yourself, and when to give space. We've come to the end of the ride. What an adventure! Thanks for being courageous and taking this risk with me. I love you more than you know!

And so as we begin, it is "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." May this work give glory to God!

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CRA	Centering Resonance Analysis
CWME	The Commission on World Mission and Evangelism
ELCA	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
GOCN	The Gospel and Our Culture Network
IMC	International Missionary Council
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version

DEDICATION

To two important men in my life: my husband and my dad.

I love you both!

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Research Interest

Statement of the Problem

Imagine, if you will, this absurd scene: You are on a weeklong backpacking trip with a group of colleagues, hiking through beautiful forests and along trails in a national park. Everyone is enjoying the scenery, the fresh air, the peace and quiet, the chance to reflect on oneself in God's wondrous creation. On the fourth day, the leader of your recreational expedition, for the first time, pauses in the trail and appears uncertain. Looking around in several directions, he takes off his hat, scratches his head, digs through his fanny pack and pulls out a multi-folded map. Then he begins to scrutinize the details of the map, glancing up now and then to survey the scene ahead of your party. This ritual continues for a few minutes. Members of the party begin to murmur quietly to each other at first. Before long, one of your group members steps out of line, walks up to the deliberating trail guide, squats down and bends over the map with him. A few seconds later, she jumps to her feet and exclaims, "This will never get us where we are headed! It's a map of downtown Kansas City!"[1]

Many church leaders from across the United States are stepping out of line and are asking questions. They have noticed that the maps they've been relying on for guidance no longer fit the landscape in which they find themselves. The church in the United States is not where it was fifty, thirty, or even twenty years ago. The 21st century church finds itself in a new time; a time when the terrain increasingly does not match the maps its leaders possess. At the dawn of the 21st century, it is time to take a deeper look

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[1]George B. Thompson, Jr., "Leadership for Congregational Vitality: Paradigmatic Explorations in Open Systems Organizational Culture Theory," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 2, no. 1 (2003): 53.

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at the church and its surrounding context, making sure the maps we are using properly reflect the current terrain.

The shifts being experienced today started as rumblings decades ago. One of the primary figures who first recognized these shifts in the Western Church was Lesslie Newbigin – pastor, bishop, missiologist, and world leader. Acknowledging that there is no "culture-free gospel,"[2] he challenged the church to consider creating a "genuine missionary encounter between the gospel and culture that is shared by the people of Europe and North America."[3] Taking seriously Newbigin's call to develop a "domestic missiology,"[4] a missional church conversation was ignited by a group of scholars, denominational leaders, and practitioners who formed The Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN). For the better part of nineteen years the GOCN has been about the task of reigniting the missionary nature of the church in United States.[5]

The work of the GOCN has converged with others and currently there is a missional church movement taking place in United States. Many shifts are now being recognized, three of which will be discussed here. First, it is time for the church in the United States to rediscover its missional nature. This is an issue of identity. There is

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[2]Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1986), 4.

[3]Ibid., 1.

[4]George R. Hunsberger, and Craig Van Gelder, ed., *The Church between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 1.

[5]Lois Y. Barrett, et al, ed., *Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), James V. Brownson et al., *Stormfront: The Good News of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), Hunsberger, ed., *The Church between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America.* The tag line for this series reads "A series to foster the missional encounter of the gospel with North American culture."

growing literature, both within the GOCN and beyond, which supports the idea that the church will find its hope for the future within a missional identity.[6]

Second, congregations are the primary agencies in the missional church movement. Congregations have the ability to be on the frontline of life, adapting and transforming as needed. They also have the ability to tend to the communal needs of people in tangible ways, being an incarnational witness to the gospel as they recognize the unique aspects of their particular location and time in history.[7] As Newbigin believes, "the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it."[8]

Third, congregations will be led by leaders who understand the missionary nature of the church and have an eye toward the changing world around them. Missional leaders wrestle with how to connect faith with the rhythm of everyday life as well as how to nurture it within a community of faith. "The task of ministry is to lead the congregation as a whole in a mission to the community as a whole,"[9] says Newbigin. "It means

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[6]Some resources include: David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 18th ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000).

[7]Support for these ideas can be found in: Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, Mike Regele, *Robust Church Development: A Vision for Mobilizing Regional Bodies in Support of Missional Congregations* (Rancho Santa Margarita, CA: Percept, 2003), James P. Wind, and James W. Lewis, ed., *American Congregations. Volume 2: New Perspectives in the Study of Congregations* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

[8]Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*, 227.

[9]Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1989), 238.

equipping all the members of the congregation to understand and fulfill their several roles in this mission through their faithfulness in their daily work."[10]

The missional movement that emerged out of Newbigin's challenge is on target, but the work is far from complete and needs to be developed further. One of the most recent works, *Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness*, tried to do just that as it took twelve indicators (developed in the *Missional Church* and from the author's own experience)[11] and studied congregational models of the missional church, making attempts at putting flesh on their missional assertions. Eight missional patterns emerged from their deep listening and observations.[12]

The move of *Treasure in Clay Jars* was based on the right impulse, but several things were underdeveloped. First, their work was not based on any particular research method and did not seek to be grounded in social science research.[13] Second, the researchers entered these sites seeking to find evidence of the twelve missional attributes that they had already identified. This approach sought to prove predetermined missional attributes rather than to discover the missional attributes already present within the congregations. Third, one area not specifically addressed in *Treasure in Clay Jars* was the development of missional leaders within a congregational system. Hence, while *Treasure in Clay Jars* moved the missional church ideas forward by sharing concrete

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[10]Ibid.

[11]Barrett, ed., *Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness*, x.

[12]Missional vocation, biblical formation and discipleship, taking risks as a contrast community, practices that demonstrate God's intent for the world, worship as public witness, dependence on the Holy Spirit, pointing toward the reign of God, and missional authority. Ibid., xii-xiv.

[13]Admittedly this team did not account for their findings as social science research, as they simply set out to "gather stories of the Spirit's activity" among congregations that "would reflect in great measure the scriptural imperatives" discussed in *Missional Church*. Ibid., 155.

narratives, there remains a need for research built upon an intentional and well-developed social scientific methodology, one which allows the missional nature of congregations to emerge from within, rather than being placed upon them. This research seeks to address all three of these concerns.

"But what do Lutherans have to offer specifically and theologically to the renewal of the churches in mission?"[14] Historically, Lutherans have not set out to create such a way or to be key players in the missional conversation.[15] Their stance, as Richard Bliese has stated it, has been "reactive reform,"[16] reforming other missiological thinking to the Lutheran tradition and theology, when the times call for an "innovative initiative,"[17] where Lutherans take initiative in creating their own missional theology. Yet, the question remains, "Does Lutheran theology in North America lend itself to the creativity and innovation needed to think missiologically in our changing environment?"[18]

Some work has been done in this area recently,[19] but overall Lutherans are late in the missional game and underdeveloped in providing a missiology which draws upon

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[14]Viggo Mortensen, ed., *The Role of Mission in the Future of Lutheran Theology* (Aarhus, Denmark: Centre for Multireligious Studies University of Aarhus, 2003), 8.

[15]Although there have been Lutheran missiologists. Some examples are Carl Braaten, James Scherer, as well as the work of Lutheran World Federation. Few are actively working on a Lutheran missiology for North America.

[16]Mortensen, ed., *The Role of Mission in the Future of Lutheran Theology*, 11-30.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Richard Bliese and Craig Van Gelder, eds., *Evangelizing the Church: A Lutheran Contribution* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), Richard Cimino, ed., *Lutherans Today: American Lutheran Identity in the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), Patrick Keifert, "The Return of the Congregation: Missional Warrants," *Word & World* 20, no. 4 (2000), Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, *Public Church: For the Life of the World* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), Mortensen, ed., *The Role of Mission in the Future of Lutheran Theology*, Craig L. Nessan, *Beyond Maintenance to Mission: A Theology of the Congregation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), Cheryl M. Peterson, "The Question of the Church in North American Lutheranism: Toward an Ecclesiology of the Third Article" (Ph.D. diss,

their tradition and theology. This researcher, however, believes that some Lutheran congregations are living into and living out of a missional view of church, engaging their context with the gospel. As a result, these congregations are awakening and empowering missional leadership. What can be learned from such communities of faith? To what extent is this a source from which an innovative Lutheran missiology can emerge?

Purpose of the Study

This dissertation was born out of impulses which were shaped by a deep commitment to advancing the missional church movement with an eye toward Lutheranism, and by attending to the cultural shifts already named. These impulses are: (a) an assertion that to advance a missionary movement of the church missional leadership is needed; (b) a core belief that communities of faith are significant in shaping missional leadership;[20] and (c) a curiosity about why some Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) congregations cultivate more leaders with a missional mind-set than others.

Underneath these impulses lie some core beliefs. First, now is a time when the Mainline Church has become largely institutionalized. In many ways, it is unable to respond faithfully and effectively in an increasingly pluralistic society to people in the diverse contexts currently present in the United States. Therefore, a missional movement needs structures that are flexible and takes seriously the dynamic relationship between

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Marquette University, 2004), Gary Simpson, *Critical Social Theory: Prophetic Reason, Civil Society, and Christian Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).

[20]While congregations may be the primary form of these faith communities, congregations have become defined by a particular set of ecclesiological practices and polity. Hence, using the concept of faith communities is intended to highlight the communal nature of God's people sharing their life together, while setting aside some of the ecclesiological trappings that accompany the word congregation. Yet, with that said, congregations are the entity studied in this research.

God, church, and the particularities of being located geographically and within history. This is an issue of ecclesiology.

Second, the lived experiences of congregations already attending to these intersections, both implicitly and explicitly, have much to offer the missional church conversation. While their input may not result in overarching principles or approaches, they can help confirm, enhance, or deny the work done thus far and provide insights into tending to contextual realities. This is an issue of what sources inform the missional church conversation.

Finally, at the heart of missional leadership is a blurring of the lines between the church and the world. The established church era with clear boundaries is over. What is emerging is God's people who are loose in the world, empowered by the Spirit to participate in God's creative and redemptive mission. This is an issue of redefining and re-imaging the church.

These impulses and core beliefs led to the formation of the primary research question of this dissertation: *What are the cultural dynamics within a congregational system that are vital to the empowering of missional leadership?* Connected to this primary question is a secondary one: *What commonalities, if any, exist between various ELCA congregational systems with regard to these vital cultural dynamics for empowering missional leadership?*

This study is primarily focused on missional leadership; therefore, it needs to be stated explicitly that leadership issues are embedded within ecclesiology. Leadership here is viewed from a communal perspective, within a particular denomination, not from an individualistic one. Hence, missional leadership will be the primary focus, but

ecclesiological concerns will always be on the horizon. Addressing the ecclesiological

dimension requires addressing not only the ministry of congregations, but also the nature

of the church and the particular view of God embedded within it. Therefore, this study is

concerned not only about the cultural dynamics of missional leadership, but also about

framing the dynamics theologically, with an eye toward ecclesiology.

Accepting the challenge for Lutherans to offer an innovative missiology, this

dissertation sought to discover a Lutheran hermeneutic for missional leadership. Rooted

in a missional view of God, church, and ministry, and framed within Lutheran theology,

this work took seriously the voices of ELCA missional congregational systems. Using a

grounded theory, qualitative research approach, ELCA congregational systems were

studied for the purpose of discovering what congregational cultural dynamics are vital in

empowering missional leaders.

Definitions

It is important to define some key terms before moving ahead. The first is

missional leadership. Mission, according to David Bosch, is undergoing a transformation.

This transformation, Bosch would argue, is in fact at the heart of what Christian mission

is all about.[21] God is a missionary God inviting all people into communion with God's

self and sending God's people into the world to share in God's transforming message.

This is the core of a missionary's work and being a missional leader. Yet, missionary

leadership has been narrowly focused and to often assumed to be the sending of leaders

to disciple people in places outside the Western world or traveling evangelists in the

United States. This perspective, however, is now changing. Once a missional view of

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[21]Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, xv.

sharing the gospel was reserved for those with specialized calls; now the understanding

has shifted so that a missional view of sharing the gospel is the call of all Christians. It is

now argued that a missional imagination is an imperative for all Christian communities.

The mission field, once confined to certain areas of the world, is now located throughout

the world. It is on every continent and in every country, including the United States.[22]

Simply stated, "Christian mission gives expression to the dynamic relationship between

God and the world."[23]

Leaders throughout the Old and New Testaments lived into and out of this

dynamic relationship in their contexts. For example, Moses led differently then David

who led different then Paul. All of these leaders actively sought new ways of leading

God's people based on the particularities of their time. Christendom, the period in

Christian history that developed between the 4th century and the 20th century, however,

distorted this dynamic relationship. Leading God's people became static and more

uniform, overlooking the unique elements of time and place. The missional church

movement is seeking to reignite this dynamic relationship and implant within the Western

Church a missional imagination.[24] People of God with a missional imagination seek to

continue to give expression to God's dynamic relationship with the world, and to

intentionally engage the world with the message of the Christian faith as they themselves

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[22]The Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) at its first gathering in Mexico City in 1963 declared that "God's mission was not geographically bounded; one should talk of 'mission of six continents.'" Stephen B. Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 260.

[23]Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 9.

[24]Two key sources addressing this are: Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1995).

seek to embody Christian community. Hence, missional leadership is a continuation as well as a rediscovery of leadership expressed in the Old and New Testament, and in the early church.

Leaders in the Bible and in the early church were varied and diverse, so too missional leadership manifests itself today in various forms. Missional leadership will include, but not be limited to, ordained clergy, paid congregational lay staff, Christians serving in ministry areas inside the church, and Christians serving in leadership in vocations outside the church. The characteristics of missional leadership used here are the following: *persons who understand their calling as disciples of Jesus Christ, who see themselves as equipped by God with certain gifts to be shared with the larger body of Christ, and who believe they are empowered by the Spirit to engage the world through participating in the creative and redemptive mission of God.*

Second, the term *congregational system* will be used when referring to any congregation in this study. By using this term, this study will seek to keep the complexities of faith communities/congregations at the forefront. As will be articulated in more detail later, all systems have subsystems while existing within larger systems. Systems must interact with these other systems in order to sustain themselves. In addition, any system is both influenced by and influences these other systems.

Congregations, like other organizations, are by nature a system. They are a group of people held together by values, commitments, and traditions that live within various systems which also have their own subsystems. Yet, congregations also live within other systems. Like other organizational systems there is the continual need for congregational systems to give attention to the external environment in which they are found for their

own health, vitality, and even survival. Congregations, however, are also different than other organizational systems. Congregations have a peculiar calling that sets them apart.[25] In addition, they are voluntary associations which require the continual recruitment of members.[26] This multifaceted reality creates immense complexities within all congregational systems. Hence, the term congregational systems will be used in an effort to *highlight the nature of congregations as complex, open systems.*

The third definition relates to *cultural dynamics*. Culture, according to Clifford Geertz, "denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic form by means of which men [*sic*][27] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life."[28] These varied, and often abstract, dynamics are significant and are at the heart of what this research seeks to discover. Richard Shweder[29] says that a "cultural account thus assists us in explaining *why* the members of a particular cultural community say the things they say and do the things they do to each other with their words and other

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[25]Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America.*

[26]R. Stephen Warner, "The Place of the Congregation in the Contemporary American Religious Configuration," in *American Congregations. Volume 2: New Perspectives in the Study of Congregations,* ed. James P. Wind and James W. Lewis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 54-99.

[27]Many of the quotations referenced throughout this work will refer to *people* as *man* or *men.* While these references will not be changed to make them more gender inclusive, let it be noted that this is not the view of the author.

[28]Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 89.

[29]Drawing upon the work of many cultural anthropologists like Kroeber and Kluckholn, Redfield, Geertz, D'Andrade, and Berlin.

actions" (emphasis mine). [30] It is through identifying and naming cultural dynamics that

one can begin to understand *why* particular congregational systems do what they do and

what it is that gives them life.

This study will seek to find out *what* congregational systems do (words and

actions) as a way of uncovering *why* congregational systems do what they do (the

meaning of). It is not only words and actions, however, that provide meaning in a culture.

Space is also important. Margaret Wheatley states that when one shifts to systematic

thinking there is much to be learned from the space between and the relationships of one

part to another.[31] This fluid, yet powerful aspect of congregational systems also plays into

meaning-making and sustaining life. Cultural dynamics, then, in this study will refer to

any dynamic (words, action, space, or relationship) that shapes the meaning of the

culture, influences its members, and perpetuates its life together.

Theological and Theoretical Perspectives

In qualitative research the researcher is the primary agent, so it is important to

explicitly name one's perspectives. The work of this dissertation is informed by and

embedded in various theological and theoretical understandings. In an effort to be

transparent about some of these driving influences, a few brief comments on each

perspective will be shared in this introductory chapter.

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[30]Richard A. Shweder, *Why Do Men Barbecue? Recipes for Cultural Psychology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 11.

[31]Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World,* 2d ed. (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1999), 10.

Theological Perspective

While social science research is a key part of this dissertation, the foundation for this research is theological. The theological inquiry begins with a missional view of God and the church, and, as a Lutheran seeking to empower the people of God, a missional understanding of baptism.

Missiological View of God and the Church

Missiology is theology with a particular bent, a bent toward God's mission. Missiologists believe that God is a missionary God and that the mission of the church is to participate in God's mission. God is at work in the world, always has been, and will continue to be in the future. The church is sent by God to participate in the unfolding of the creative and redemptive reign of God's kingdom in the world. This concept is what is at the center of the *missio Dei*. The work of missiology cares deeply about the universal theological conversation about God that has been going on in faith communities for over two thousand years, but also takes seriously the particular aspects of each Christian faith community, including its location historically, geographically, and culturally.

Missiology, as a discipline, is evolving, and many definitions currently exist.[32] There are several key aspects of missiology that are critical for this dissertation. First,

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[32]Some definitions: World Christian Encyclopedia (1982): *Missiology* is the science of missions, missionary history, missionary thought, and missionary methods. Alan R. Tippett (1987): *Missiology* is the academic discipline or science which researches, records, and applies data relating to the biblical origin, the history (including the use of documentary materials), the anthropological principles and techniques, and the theological base of the Christian mission. C. Peter Wagner (1989): *Missiology* is the study of cross-cultural communication of the Christian faith. Jan Jongeneel (2002): *Missiology* is the academic discipline which, from a philosophical, empirical, and theological point of view, reflects on the history, theory, and practice of Christian world mission as a means for both preaching the gospel, healing the sick, and casting out 'evil spirits' (active in idolatry and immorality), for the glory of God and the well-being of all human beings. Jan A.B. Jongeneel, *Philosophy, Science, and Theology of Mission in the 19th and 20th Centuries: A Missiological Encyclopedia. Part 1: The Philosophy and Science of Mission*, 2d ed. (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 64.

missiology is interdisciplinary. Seeking to ground itself within the ongoing story of the church and God's activity in the world over time, missiology sees as its primary conversation partners theological disciplines like church history, biblical studies, and missionary practices. Alongside these primary partners are secondary ones, including such disciplines as sociology, linguistics, and anthropology. These disciplines assist missiologists in taking seriously the particularities of each geographic, historical, and cultural location. This dimension of missiology influenced the researcher drawing upon various disciplines in the research design. It also played itself out in her theoretical/theological development.

Second, missiology has both universal and particular dimensions. David Bosch talks about mission defined around two concepts – its dimension or essence and its intention or activity.[33] The interdisciplinary focus of missiology emerges from this commitment to both the universal and the particular, to the essence and the activity. The essence is mainly tied to many of the theological partners; the activity is mainly tied to the other partners like sociology and anthropology. This dissertation will seek to maintain the tension created between the essence and activity of the missional church.

Third, the *missio Dei*, God's mission, is central to missiology and it operates under the assertion that God is missionary by nature and, hence, so should the church be.[34] As stated earlier, God seeks to be in relationship with all of creation and invites God's people to participate in God's mission in the world. Hence, God's creative and

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[33]David J. Bosch, "Theological Education in Missionary Perspective," *Missiology* 10 (1982): 25.

[34]Carlos F. Cardoza-Orlandi defines missiology as the theological and critical reflection of mission, with mission defined as "*the participation of the people of God in God's action in the world.*" Carlos F. Cardoza-Orlandi, *Mission: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 14-15.

redemptive mission in the world is the mission to which the church is called to

participate.[35] This core belief means missiology is not just a discipline of and for foreign

missions, as it once was believed to be, but is a discipline for all the church.[36] The

missional theology and practices that once were taught only to those actively sharing the

gospel in lands outside the Western world is now seen as critical to the health and well-

being of all the church. This missional understanding is still new within the church in the

United States. Hence, this dissertation seeks to advance this understanding.

Baptism

The freedom that is ours as baptized Christians, and the call to serve one's

neighbor, seem to have become disconnected from many within the church. How might

these two ideas be reattached? Lutherans have a rich theology of baptism, yet Lutheran

practices have not always drawn upon this rich theology, and rarely with a missional

understanding. For example, baptism is commonly understood as the entrance into a

community of faith, as a time when one receives the gift of the Holy Spirit, and as being

joined to Christ's death and resurrection.[37] These elements of baptism are real and true.

However, as Lutherans who live on the other side of their own baptism, what difference

does this new reality have for one's life on earth? In other words, is there any connection

between baptism and how one lives? If we, as Lutherans, believe that in baptism we are

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[35]This concept will be unpacked in more depth in the theological chapter of this work.

[36]One source that makes this argument is: Word Council of Churches, *The Church for Others: Two Reports on the Missionary Structure of the Congregation* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1967).

[37]One example is: Oscar Cullman, *Baptism in the New Testament*, trans. J. K. S. Reid (London: SCM Press LTD, 1950).

freed from sin and death and freed for serving one's neighbor, then what do we do with that freedom?[38]

It is peculiar to this researcher that the gift given at baptism seems to remain unwrapped for many people within the Lutheran church. Unlike the sacrament of communion, which for most Lutherans is embedded into the common fabric of community life, baptism tends to remain a mystery that has to do with the afterlife and seems to have little or no impact on one's daily life. Both its communal, corporate realities and its individual, empowering and releasing nature remain untapped. For a church that professes the priesthood of all believers, it seems time to connect Sunday to Monday.[39] What would a missional view of the baptized include? This study seeks to connect a missional theology of baptism with the life and ministry of the Lutheran church.

<div align="center">Theoretical Perspective</div>

The second perspective which guided this dissertation is a theoretical one, one that is informed by several schools of thought. The overarching approach is grounded theory. This influenced the choice of using a qualitative method, with the primary methodology being ethnography. This in turn is informed by an open systems theory perspective.

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[38]Martin Luther, *Three Treatises*, 2d, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970).

[39]Centered Life, a ministry of Luther Seminary, seeks to partner with congregations, not only to awaken within the church a full theology of vocation, drawing upon Lutheran's core conviction of justification by faith, but also to awaken, call, gather, and send God's people into the world *through* congregations. The main mechanism has been to help congregations connect Sundays to Mondays, or one's life in a congregational systems and one's life in the world.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is rooted in the commitment of the researcher to let the ideas and views of the participants create the categories from which theory can emerge.[40] Instead of starting with a theory to prove (or disprove) or to extend an existing line of thought, a grounded theory researcher begins with an area of study or phenomenon. John Creswell places grounded theory as one of five broad categories of qualitative inquiry.[41] The foundational question of grounded theory is, "What theory emerges from systematic comparative analysis and is grounded in fieldwork so as to explain what has been and is observed?"[42] This systematic comparative analysis approach to fieldwork fits well as one studies the *what* and *why* that give meaning and sustain life within a system. It gives the key voice to the system being studied, rather than to the one researching. Hence, "grounded theory approach is a qualitative research **method** that uses a **systematic** set of **procedures** to **develop** an inductively derived grounded **theory** about a **phenomenon**."[43]

The four central criteria for judging the applicability of grounded theory are fit, understanding, generality, and control.[44] While rigor is important, adaptability and creativity are also required, making the grounded theory approach to research viable and

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[40]John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 2d ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), 14.

[41]Ibid., 183.

[42]Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 3d ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002), 125.

[43]Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (Newbury, CA: Sage Publications, 1990), 25.

[44]Ibid., 23.

preferable for many disciplines.[45] Tending to the words and actions of the congregational systems, as well as their space and relationships, was critical to this research and required the adaptability and creativity that grounded theory offers. The exploratory nature and systems approach of grounded theory, the inductively derived theory development, as well as the allowance for creativity and adaptability served this research well as it sought to discover the cultural dynamics for empowering missional leadership from the views and ideas of the participants.

Ethnography

Ethnos means "people" in Greek. Hence, the core question for ethnography is: "What is the culture of this group of people?"[46] In an effort to discover the cultural dynamics of a congregational system, studying the culture of a group of people, ethnography is an important discipline to draw from. Ethnography influenced the choice of doing field work as a participant-observer and conducting focus groups.

For the purposes of this research, several elements of ethnography serve this study well. First, ethnography observes people within their natural environment.[47] From this perspective culture is studied not from afar (or in an artificial environment), but in the people's own context, placing the researcher in the real time, lived experience of the

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[45]Ibid., 31. Businesses are utilizing grounded theory. One a good example is Karen Locke, *Grounded Theory in Management Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001). Behavioral science is working with grounded theory on the organizational level, i.e. Susan Albers Mohrman, "The Role of Networks in Fundamental Organizational Change: A Grounded Analysis," *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 39, no. 3 (2003). And for the growing interest in grounded theory, there is The Grounded Theory Institute, a nonprofit organization for supporting grounded theory research (www.groundedtheory.com) and an international journal, *The Grounded Theory Review* (www.groundedtheoryreview.com).

[46]Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 81.

[47]Thomas A. Schwandt, *Qualitative Inquiry: A Dictionary of Terms* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997), 101.

people. From a missiological point of view context is vital. So, to understand

congregational systems living missionally means taking the particular location of

congregations seriously, as well as seeking to understand their relationship with the

greater context. Therefore, one key aspect of this research means the researcher went into

the congregational systems being studied and engaged them as a participant-observer

seeking to understand their life together as well as their context.

Second, ethnography is flexible, allowing the researcher to adapt and respond as

needed while doing fieldwork.[48] A true ethnographer is open to surprises. This aspect fits

well with the grounded theory approach chosen, for it is not possible to anticipate all the

elements one encounters ahead of time. In addition, from a missional perspective, there is

a belief that God is alive and active both within each congregational system and in the

world around them. This element allows room for mystery and surprise to occur within

the research itself and for the researcher to respond as needed throughout the study.

Finally, ethnography attempts to capture everyday experiences and frame these in

the language of the people themselves.[49] It was the desire of this researcher to capture the

empowering of missional leaders from within a congregational system in their own

language. It is a belief of the researcher that the particular, local lived experience

embodies a significant part of the grand story of the church in that time and place and,

perhaps, more authentically than its formal documents. It was the presupposition of the

researcher that the ordinary, everyday aspects of a cultural system are what gives a

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[48]Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 14.

[49]Ibid., 200.

community meaning, illuminates its view of itself and of the God they follow, which in turn contributes to the universal, ongoing story of God's people throughout history.

Systems Theory

The final theoretical school is open systems theory. Systems theory's founding is credited to a German biologist, Ludwig von Bertalanffy,[50] who in the mid-1920s "presented a theory intended to explain all scientific phenomena across both the natural and social sciences."[51] General systems theory was born out of his work. System theory, since the 1950s, has itself morphed into its own constellation of theories.[52] Believing that the parts of a system are more together than they are apart, systems theory sees things holistically.

All systems, and systems theories, however, are not the same. Kenneth Boulding, an economist, recognized the complexity of systems and developed a hierarchy, with his goal being to create a way for various disciplines to communicate with and draw upon one another's work. Ultimately, the higher up a system is in the hierarchy the more able it is to deal with complexity. One key differentiation is between levels three and four, with

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[50]Mary Jo Hatch, *Organizational Theory: Modern, Symbolic, and Postmodern Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 34, R. Paul Stevens, *The Equipping Pastor: A Systems Approach to Congregational Leadership* (Washington, DC: Alban Institute, 1993), xxi.

[51]Hatch, *Organizational Theory: Modern, Symbolic, and Postmodern Perspectives*, 34.

[52]A sample of some of the first generation of writings on systems theory, including some work in congregations: Charles H. Kepner and Benjamin B. Tregoe, *The Rational Manager: A Systematic Approach to Problem Solving and Decision Making* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), Alvin J. Lindgren and Norman Shawchuck, *Management for Your Church: How to Realize Your Church's Potential through a Systems Approach* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1977), James G. March and Herbert Simon, *Organizations* (New York: John Wiley, 1958), E. Mansell Pattison, *Pastor and Parish: A Systems Approach* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), John A. Seiler, *Systems Analysis in Organizational Behavior* (Homewood, IL: R. D. Irwin, 1967), Ludwig von Bertalanffy, *General System Theory: Foundations, Development, Applications*, rev. ed. (New York: George Braziller, 1998).

what is now known as closed and open systems.[53] Closed systems are self-maintaining and open systems rely on the environment to sustain their life. While science has come a long way since Boulding's hierarchy, he captured some very key notions that are still being worked with today.[54]

In the 1970s systems theory began finding its way into the study of congregational life,[55] and in the two decades that followed the intersections between systems theory and congregational life grew exponentially.[56] Systems theory has contributed to the advance of congregational studies, yet the bulk of work to date has drawn largely upon family systems theory, with the two primary figures being Edwin Friedman and Peter Steinke.[57] Some new works are emerging;[58] however congregational

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[53]Kenneth Boulding, "General Systems Theory: The Skeleton of Science," *General Systems Yearbook of the Society of General Systems Research* 1 (1956): par. 2, 15-24, www.panarchy.org/boulding/systems.1956.html (accessed December 31, 2006), Hatch, *Organizational Theory: Modern, Symbolic, and Postmodern Perspectives*, 36-37.

[54]These notions include: division of labor, self-awareness, self-reflexivity and awareness of time, interrelations of one system to another, and unknownables. Boulding, "General Systems Theory: The Skeleton of Science," par. 15-24.

[55]Pattison, *Pastor and Parish: A Systems Approach*.

[56]A sample of this wave of writings on systems theory within congregations includes: Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: Guilford Press, 1985), George D. Parsons and Speed B. Leas, *Understanding Your Congregation as a System: The Manual* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1993), Gilbert R. Rendle, *Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1998), Ronald W. Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), Norman Shawchuck and Roger Heuser, *Managing the Congregation: Building Effective Systems to Serve People* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), Peter L. Steinke, *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach* (Washington, DC: Alban Institute, 1996), Stevens, *The Equipping Pastor: A Systems Approach to Congregational Leadership*.

[57]Their two main works are: Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, Steinke, *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach*.

[58]Alberto-Laszlo Barabasi, *Linked: The New Science of Networks* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing, 2002), James Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science* (New York: Penguin, 1987), Dee Houck, *Birth of the Chaordic Age* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 1999), Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday/Currency, 1990), Mark Ward, *Beyond Chaos: The Underlying Theory Behind Life, the Universe, and Everything*, U.S. Edition, 2002 ed. (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2001).

studies' use of systems theory has not advanced at the same rate as the development of systems theory.[59] Some of the most recent developments of systems theory include working with complex, open systems. This dissertation will study congregational life informed by a complex, open systems perspective.

Methodology

As already articulated, a grounded theory, qualitative research method was used for this dissertation. It focused on identifying common cultural dynamics for empowering missional leadership in the purposeful sample of the ELCA congregational systems.[60] While the overall research design will be described in the next chapter, a few key areas will be highlighted here.

Selection of the Congregations

The selection of the five ELCA congregational systems happened through a three-stage discernment process. Nominations for ELCA missional congregational systems were solicited from various ELCA leaders.[61] Once names of congregational systems were submitted, a preliminary list was created, and a letter was e-mailed to a select group of congregational systems stating the purpose of this research project and inviting them to

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[59]Richard S. Ascough, "Chaos Theory and Paul's Organizational Leadership," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 1, no. 2 (2002), Steve M. Lyons, "Leading in Congregational Conflict: A Family Systems Model," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 43, no. 2 (2001), Thompson, "Leadership for Congregational Vitality: Paradigmatic Explorations in Open Systems Organizational Culture Theory."

[60]These five ELCA congregational systems were spread throughout the United States and identified as effective in empowering missional leaders. The definition of missional leadership articulated earlier in this paper was given to each leader.

[61]The key issue was: name a congregation that excels in helping their faith community discover their calling as disciples of Jesus and empowers them to live their faith in the world. Twenty-four congregational systems were nominated.

consider being a participant.[62] From the group that responded, phone interviews with the lead pastor were made clarifying the purpose of the study, the expectations of the congregational system's participation, and determining their availability within the given timeline of the research.[63] After the phone interviews were completed, five congregations were selected.

Four Sources of Data

Four sources of data were collected for each congregational system: a congregational profile, an on-site ethnographic visit over an extended weekend, four focus groups, and a journal by the researcher. The on-site ethnographic visits were the primary source of data, with the other data sources serving as supplementary. This approach strove to identify the cultural dynamics of the congregational system based on the lived experience of the people themselves.

In an attempt to place the congregational system within a larger context of geography and time, the researcher created a profile of each congregational system before the ethnographic visit. This profile included: demographics of the county in which the congregational system was located; an eight-year history of the congregation's membership, budget, and giving; an overview of the mission, vision, and ministries of the congregation; and notes from a phone interview with the lead pastor. This congregational profile served as one stream of data.

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[62]E-mail letters were sent to eleven congregational systems inviting them to participate.

[63]Phone interviews were conducted with all nine of the eleven congregational systems that expressed an interest in participating in the research study. With regard to the schedule, every attempt was be made to schedule congregational visits within the same season of the year, i.e. summer, and during a time when some programming was taking place. This timeline was modified a bit and the actual time frame was between July 29, 2006 and October 1, 2006.

As a participant-observer, the researcher engaged each congregational system in an on-site ethnographic visit. The researcher participated with and observed members of each congregational system in their natural setting and attended as many activities as possible within the extended weekend. While these activities varied from one congregational system to another, the following served as the baseline for each visit: worship, staff gathering, and congregational activity. Field notes were gathered from the activities as well as from general observations and impressions both while at the congregational site and in the greater area. These field notes generated a second source of data.

A third source of data was gathered from focus groups. Four focus groups were hosted at each site: lay persons currently serving in official leadership capacities (i.e., church council), persons currently involved in other leadership, persons known for living their faith through their vocations in the world, and staff.[64] Notes from the focus groups were transcribed and served as the third source of data.

A fourth source of data came from the researcher herself. In order to gather as much of an emic perspective[65] as possible, the researcher kept a journal of her own experience throughout the research. While direct observation and focus groups sought to capture much of the explicit cultural dynamics, journaling added another perspective, that of one with an outside-in vantage point, and one seeking to *read* the actions, space, and relationships, as well as the words spoken. The researcher's journal served as the fourth source of data.

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[64]Persons for these focus groups were gathered by the staff and church council.

[65]An emic perspective is the insider perspective "[c]apturing and being true to the perspective of those studied." Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 84.

Data Analysis

The data from each of the sources of research were analyzed both separately and comparatively. While all sources of data served to create the descriptive findings in chapter three, the focus group transcripts were the primary source for the deeper analysis presented in chapter four with other sources serving as secondary. Analysis was done in various ways. An initial reading of the transcripts, in preparing the congregational summary report, identified sets of themes for each focus group and each system as a whole. After this initial analysis, a deeper analysis was done by coding key words and phrases in an effort to create key themes. These key themes were then compared with the themes identified by two blind readers and the influential words as identified by Crawdad software.[66] The research design and the analysis drew heavily on the qualitative part of The Exemplary Youth Ministry Study.[67]

Once individual site analysis was completed, the findings were compared with the data from other sites in an effort to discover commonalities between the various congregational systems. These four sources of data from five sites were triangulated with theme coding, blind readers, and Crawdad software which provided a rich source of information on the empowerment of missional leadership and congregational systems.

Significance of the Study

As articulated already in the statement of the problem section of this chapter,

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[66]Steven R. Corman and Kevin Dooley, *Crawdad Text Analysis System 2.0*, Chandler, AZ: Crawdad Technologies LLC.

[67]The qualitative method used was outlined in an article: Thomas Berkas and Hal Weldin, "The Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry: How the Qualitative Study Was Conducted," www.exemplarym.com/docs/worddoc/spiritdoc/2cqualitativeres.doc (accessed February 27, 2007). See www.exemplarym.com for more information.

there is a need for congregational systems to understand themselves as being missional. Within this broad need, there is also a need for missional leadership in the Mainline Church in the United States. This dissertation seeks to lay out, from the primary location of congregational systems, the vital cultural dynamics that are present in a purposive sample of ELCA congregations empowering missional leaders. These findings are significant for congregational systems, for those working in theological education seeking to equip missional leaders, and for denominational leaders seeking to ignite, challenge, and support congregational systems as they strive to be faithful in the 21st century. It is anticipated that this study will add to the missional church literature with qualitative research findings on congregational systems and missional leadership.

Second, this work adds to the study of congregations from a complex, open systems approach within a disciplined theological and theoretical frame. While previous work has tended to focus on one of these aspects, this work has sought to intentionally bring both together, offering new thinking within each of these areas, specifically with regard to congregations. It is the hope of this researcher that this dissertation could open up new areas of study for scholars and students of missiology, congregational vitality, and leadership development.

Conclusion

Cartography is the craft of creating maps. Mapping new territory was a valued occupation some two hundred years ago as people within the United States moved into the frontier. The maps that were created during that time served the pioneers setting out on adventures in that time, but also guided the way for others to follow. Today in the United States one can pick up a Rand McNally city, state, or national map at most gas

stations. Or one can create their own map using MapQuest[68] to find one's way to any location, choosing the level of detail desired. With these tools readily available, have we lost the craft of cartography, the ability to read the current landscape and create new maps for ourselves?

This dissertation argues that mapping the current landscape requires more than updating an atlas or doing a MapQuest search. As leaders of a church that finds itself in a new place, it's time to relearn cartographic skills so we can map the continually shifting territory and discover, for ourselves, where we are, so we can make our way in this time and so that others may follow. This dissertation seeks to be a contribution to the cartographic work being done in the church in the United States in the beginning of the 21st century. Drawing from various disciplines (Lutheran theology, missiology, systems theory, sociology, organizational theory and others), this work is a mapping with each chapter contributing various aspects of the map.

Chapter two, bringing in the sociological component, provides the methodological frame and describes the details of the research aspect of this dissertation. Highlighting key questions and the research design, as well as ethical issues, this chapter provides the foundational framework of this mapping and for the findings that follow.

Descriptive in nature, chapter three familiarizes the reader with the five congregational systems studied. This chapter compares the systems contextually and by their congregational make-up before describing each individually, adding the first layer of detail to the mapping framework. Chapter four builds on chapter three, analyzing the

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[68]MapQuest is Copyright 2006 MapQuest, Inc. The MapQuest name and logo, and all related product and service names, design marks, and slogans are the trademarks or registered trademarks of MapQuest, Inc.

findings and reporting the cultural dynamics of the five systems individually, as well as the eight common ones that were discovered. This chapter adds the second layer of detail to the map. The third layer of detail comes in chapter five. Putting the findings into conversation with theology and theory, chapter five addresses Bliese's challenge and lays out a Lutheran hermeneutic for leading in mission. This chapter, honoring the congregational voices, seeks to understand the genius that has already been articulated, while helping the church understand the what and the why of these missional faith communities.

Finally, chapter six lays out the conclusions of this dissertation, along with the limitations and suggestions for future study. In the end, it is the hope of the researcher that the reader may both gain a deeper understanding of the current state of the terrain in which the United States Mainline Church finds itself, as well as learn more about what skills are needed to be a cartographer in the church in the 21st century.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

This dissertation seeks to map missional leadership within ELCA congregational systems. This chapter provides the foundational frame, describing the qualitative methodology used for this work. It is divided into four sections: the key research question, research design, role of the researcher, and ethical concerns.

Key Research Question

As noted earlier, this study was born out of three impulses: (a) a curiosity about why some ELCA congregations cultivate more leaders with a missionary mind-set than others; (b) an assertion that missional leadership is needed to advance a missionary movement of the church; and (c) a core belief that communities of faith are significant in shaping missional leaders. These impulses led to the formation of the primary research question of this dissertation: *What are the cultural dynamics within a congregational system that are vital to the empowering of missional leadership?* Connected to this primary question is a secondary one: *What commonalities, if any, exist between various ELCA congregational systems with regard to these vital cultural dynamics?*

Discovering the cultural dynamics present within missional congregational systems was the primary concern of this research, with cultural dynamics defined as the words, actions, relationships, and space that shape the meaning of the community's life, influence their members, and perpetuate their life together. These cultural dynamics in

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congregational systems were looked at individually for their genius as well as through

comparing the findings of each system for commonalities. These findings were then put

into conversation with theology and theory in an effort to create a Lutheran hermeneutic

for leading in mission.

Research Design

In seeking to discover what cultural dynamics stand out as vital to the

empowering of missional leaders in ELCA congregational systems, a qualitative,

grounded theory approach was chosen,[1] using primarily ethnographic methodology. The

"term 'grounded theory' is often used in a nonspecific way to refer to any approach to

developing theoretical ideas (concepts, models, formal theories) that somehow begins

with data."[2] Yet, Thomas A. Schwandt reminds the qualitative novice that grounded

theory "is a specific, highly developed, rigorous set of procedures for producing

substantive theory of social phenomena."[3]

Sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, developed the grounded theory

approach combining their two distinct influences, the University of Chicago and

Columbia University.[4] Some of their commitments which influenced the development of

this theory, align with the commitments of missiology and this dissertation in particular.

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[1] Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (Newbury, CA: Sage Publications, 1990), 23-32.

[2] Thomas A. Schwandt, *Qualitative Inquiry: A Dictionary of Terms* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997), 60.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Strauss and Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*, 24.

They are:

> (a) the need to get out into the field, if one wants to understand what is going on; (b) the importance of theory, grounded in reality, to the development of a discipline; (c) the nature of experience and undergoing as continually evolving; (d) the active role of persons in shaping the worlds they live in; (e) an emphasis on change and process, and the variability and complexity of life; and (f) the interrelationships among conditions, meaning, and action.[5]

The short definition already stated in the introductory chapter defines grounded theory as an approach that "is a qualitative research **method** that uses a **systematic** set of **procedures** to **develop** an inductively derived grounded **theory** about a **phenomenon**."[6] This is done by allowing data analysis and theory to inform each other[7] throughout the research process so that the lived experience may be honored and theories may be developed. The theory development aspect of grounded theory, growing out of the lived experience of people, is the main reason for using this research approach. With missiology still finding its way within the United States there is a need for theory to be developed about missional practices within the church.

The design of this grounded theory approach to studying missional leadership is reviewed in detail in this section. This research design drew heavily on the qualitative study methodology of The Exemplary Youth Ministry study[8] which "employed ethnographic data collection methods"[9] during a short site visit in an effort to gather

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[5]Ibid., 25.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Ibid., 23.

[8]See www.exemplarym.com for more information.

[9]The qualitative method used was outlined in an article, Thomas Berkas and Hal Weldin, "The Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry: How the Qualitative Study Was Conducted," www.exemplarym.com/docs/worddoc/spiritdoc/2cqualitativeres.doc (accessed February 27, 2007).

information on the genius of the sites visited.[10] This design will be outlined around three key aspects: selection of the congregational systems, sources of data, and data analysis.

Selection of the Congregational Systems

Having been connected to the Lutheran Church all of her life, the researcher chose to select a small, purposeful sample from within her own denomination, the ELCA, for this research. The five ELCA congregational systems were selected through a three-stage discernment process. First, nominations of missional congregations were solicited from various ELCA leaders. The various ELCA leaders invited to nominate congregational systems included Luther Seminary professors, ELCA bishops, parachurch leaders, and ELCA pastors from around the country. These leaders were asked to suggest a congregational system that excelled in helping their particular faith community discover their calling as a disciple of Jesus and empowered them to live their faith in the world. Twenty-four congregational systems were nominated. Systems with which the researcher had prior experience or knowledge (either with the congregational systems themselves or with their leadership) were removed from the list in an effort to create a common point of naiveté for each. From these nominations, a preliminary list of eleven eligible congregational systems was created. These systems were spread throughout the United States and ranged in size and pastoral tenure.[11]

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[10]Ibid.

[11]In addition to taking out congregational systems in which the researcher had a previous relationship with the pastor or congregation, initial information was gathered about the congregational systems from their website (all were current) and ELCA trend reports. The researcher looked at their mission and vision, key ministries, and the make-up of the congregation. Based on this initial inquiry, all of the congregational systems on the list demonstrated a commitment to discipleship among their members and equipping them to live their faith in the world.

Second, a letter was e-mailed to all congregational systems on the preliminary list stating the purpose of the research project (see Appendix A and B) and inviting them to consider being a participant. Of the eleven all but two responded with interest. Phone interviews with the lead pastor of each congregational system were then conducted between June 27th, 2006 and July 12th, 2006 (see Appendix C). The purpose of the phone interview was to see if the congregational system fit the study (being a congregational system that empowers missional leadership) by gathering additional information about the congregation and clarifying the purpose, expectation, and timeline of the study.[12] All nine of the congregational systems interviewed fit and were willing to participate.

Upon reflection and consultation with other colleagues, six congregational systems were selected as an A list.[13] This list represented the most diversity based on size and location of the congregational systems, on the tenure of the lead pastor, and on any other unique characteristics they might have. While this sample was not intended to be representative, it was the desire of the researcher to have as diverse a sample as possible. From the A list, four congregational systems were able to be scheduled within the established research period. To create a sample of five, two additional congregational systems were contacted, with one additional visit scheduled. So, the final five congregational systems were selected and all of the visits were conducted between the ten week period of July 29th, 2006 and October 1st, 2006.

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[12]The phone interview simply sought to confirm the fact that the description of congregations being studied (helping their particular faith community discover their calling as a disciple of Jesus and empowered them to live their faith in the world) indeed fit with who they saw themselves to be.

[13]Those consulted were two members of this dissertation reading team, other Ph.D. colleagues involved in their own research, as well as several Luther Seminary professors who have conducted similar qualitative research.

Sources of Data

This qualitative, grounded theory research is designed around studying five congregational systems by collecting four sources of data: a congregational profile, an on-site naturalist-style field study over an extended weekend, hosting four focus groups, and journaling by the researcher. The on-site ethnographic visits were the primary source of data, with the other data sources serving as supplementary. The aim of gathering data from these four sources was to identify the cultural dynamics of the congregational system based on *the lived experience of the people themselves.* The remainder of this section will more clearly articulate what was included in each of these data sources.

In an attempt to place the congregational system within a larger context of geography and time, the researcher created a *profile* of each congregational system before each ethnographic visit (see Appendix D). This profile included: demographics of the county in which the congregational system was located; an eight-year history of its membership, budget, and giving; an overview of the mission, vision and ministries; and notes from the phone interview with the lead pastor.[14] The congregation profile served as one source of data and was shared with the scribe who accompanied the researcher on each visit prior to the visit.

As a participant-observer, the researcher engaged in an ethnographic visit of each of the congregational systems in their natural setting, attending as many activities as possible within the extended weekend visit. While the activities varied from one system to another, the following served as a baseline for each visit: worship, staff gathering, and

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[14]This profile was created by reviewing demographics of the county in which the congregational system was located from census data (www.census.gov), each congregation's website (all had current websites), ELCA trend reports, and annual reports.

a congregational activity. *Field notes* were recorded to gather general observations of the time spent both at the congregational system and in the greater community. The notes were collected by the researcher and shared with the accompanying scribe as a way of *testing* the researcher's observations, with another's ideas and observations. These field notes generated a second source of data.

A third, and the main, data source was gathered from the four *focus groups* held at each site. The four focus groups consisted of the following: persons currently serving in official or elected leadership capacities within the congregational system (i.e., church council), persons currently involved in other leadership within the congregational system (i.e., teaching confirmation or leading men's ministry), persons known for living their faith in their various vocations in the world (i.e., a woman working with children's program as part of hurricane relief efforts or applying faith principles in their business practices), and available staff.[15] Each focus group had a similar rhythm, but the researcher, seeking to capture the ideas of the congregational members themselves, allowed each focus group dialogue to have its own flavor. Between the four focus groups at each site the researcher sought to address four general questions (see Appendix E).

A scribe accompanied the researcher on each visit. The main role of the scribe was to capture in written form the focus group dialogue. This was done in two ways. First, the scribe sat in on each focus group and transcribed the dialogue into a laptop computer while the focus group took place. Second, each focus group was tape recorded, with the recordings used after the visit to fill out and clean up the original transcript

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[15]Persons for these focus groups were gathered primarily by the church staff with the help of some lay leadership. Focus groups aimed at having six to eight persons in each group.

created during the site visit. The transcribed notes from the focus groups were then used to identify themes.

The fourth, and final, source of data came from the researcher herself. In order to gather as much of an emic perspective[16] as possible, the researcher kept a journal of her own experience throughout the research. While direct observation and focus groups sought to capture much of the explicit cultural dynamics, journaling added another perspective, that of one with an outside-in vantage point, and one seeking to *read* the actions, space, and relationships, as well as the words spoken. While the field notes sought to capture the hard data, the researcher used the *journal* to record more of the soft data, including impressions, curiosities, and intuitions.

Data Analysis

The data collected from these five congregational systems was analyzed first *separately*, putting the various sources from within a system into conversation with each other, and then *comparatively*, putting the findings of each congregational system in dialogue with the others. In an effort to capture the genius of each system, all sources were used for analyzing the systems separately. In comparing systems, however, the focus group transcripts[17] were the primary data source, with the other sources serving as supplementary or the backdrop of that analysis. Both perspectives sought to capture the

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[16]An emic perspective is the insider perspective "[c]apturing and being true to the perspective of those studied." Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 3d ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002), 84.

[17]As will be described later, the transcripts were actually modified transcripts. Having articulated the process for modifying the transcripts in this section of the methodology chapter, the word transcripts will be used throughout the rest of this dissertation with this definition.

cultural dynamics of congregational systems that empower missional leadership and contributed to a deeper understanding of these missional systems.

Various methods were used to analyze the data. First, as the researcher worked with the data after each ethnographic visit, cleaning up the field notes, listening to the tapes, cleaning up the transcripts, and then preparing the summary report (see Appendix F),[18] *two initial cuts were taken at identifying themes.* As part of preparing the summary report, a section was created at the end of each focus group transcript that identified the initial themes that had been extracted from that focus group. After all the focus group transcripts' initial themes had been identified, an initial two-page executive summary of the focus groups and field notes was created using Scott Moreau's seven dimensions of a comprehensive contextualization of the faith.[19] These seven dimensions (doctrinal, mythic, ethical, social, ritual, experiential, and material)[20] were used as a frame for developing a missiological description of each congregational system.

Second, three people participated in *theme analysis* of each of the focus group transcripts, identifying key words, ideas, and themes.[21] The primary analysis was done by the researcher who identified the themes that emerged from coding and clustering key words and phrases from the focus group transcripts and was based on first and second order clustering. In addition word frequency, particularly within categories, was used to

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[18]The summary report included the field notes, transcripts of each focus group, initial themes extracted from each focus group, and a two-page executive summary of the whole visit.

[19]Scott Moreau, "Contextualization That Is Comprehensive," *Missiology: An International Review* 34, no. 3 (2006). Scott utilizes Ninian Smart's seven dimensions as an overarching model for understanding religions of the world, as he proposed a comprehensive contextualization of the Christian faith.

[20]Ibid.

[21]Having studied The Exemplary Youth Ministry qualitative research process, the researcher had a training session with the study's director, Dr. Roland Martinson.

supplement and interpret this clustering work. The researcher's theme analysis was then

compared with the findings of two blind readers who had also served on the Exemplary

Youth Ministry qualitative research team. The blind readers read through all of the focus

groups transcripts seeking to identify themes, both individually and comparing

congregational systems. These initial findings were then put into conversation with the

themes identified by Crawdad software.[22]

Finally, themes were identified through the use of *Crawdad software*,[23] a

qualitative analysis software. Crawdad, like the blind readers, provided a means for

triangulating the researcher's findings. Out of this three-way conversation cultural

dynamics were identified, both for each congregational system and comparatively.

Three important things need to be noted about the Crawdad software and the

process used to prepare the transcripts for this program. First, a brief word about the

Crawdad software program and what it seeks to discover. Qualitative software differs in

many ways, with one difference being what they seek to identify. Crawdad software

seeks to identify themes by analyzing the influence that noun phrases have within a

sentence.[24] Mining the text, Crawdad software treats texts as a network of interconnected

words and generates a Centering Resonance Analysis (CRA) network.[25] Based on

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[22]Steven R. Corman and Kevin Dooley, *Crawdad Text Analysis System 2.0*, Chandler, AZ: Crawdad Technologies LLC.

[23]Ibid.

[24]Steven R. Corman et al., "Studying Complex Discursive Systems: Centering Resonance Analysis of Communication," *Human Communication Research* 28, no. 2 (2002): 173.

[25]Crawdad Technologies LLC, "Crawdad Text Analysis System 2.0: About Us," Crawdad Technologies LLC www.crawdadtech.com/html/04_about.html (accessed November 14, 2006). CRA is a "text analysis method that has broad scope and range, and can be applied to large quantities of written text and transcribed conversation. It identifies discursively important words and represents these as a network, then uses structural properties of the network to index word importance." Corman et al., "Studying Complex Discursive Systems: Centering Resonance Analysis of Communication," 157.

linguistic theory, Crawdad estimates "a word's influence"[26] and "measures the extent to which a word creates coherence in a text."[27] In addition to identifying key themes and relationship of words within a given text, Crawdad software can also compare texts to one another.

A second thing worth noting is how the texts were prepared. Verbal and written communication often exhibit different patterns. For example, written communication is most often presented in complete sentences using correct grammar. Verbal communication, on the other hand, is often not presented in complete sentences or even in a linear manner, especially if it is conversational in nature. The dialogue within the focus groups of this research was conversational in nature, with people interrupting each other and building on each other's thoughts. While group participants can gather meaning from this style of communication, direct transcripts of this type of verbal communication, in a word for word written format, does not capture the same meaning. Hence, the researcher, based on the transcripts created during the focus group and the tape recording, reviewed each focus group transcript in order to create a readable, coherent written document that was based on the verbal dialogue and true to its content.[28]

Tending to this process served two purposes. First, since the researcher committed to share a copy of the full summary report (including transcripts, themes identified by the researcher, field notes, and the researcher's executive summary) with each congregational system, creating a readable written document allowed the summary to be more readily

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[26]Crawdad Technologies LLC, "Crawdad Text Analysis System 2.0: About Us."

[27]Ibid.

[28]This process including taking out words that were repeated as thoughts were started, interrupted and then picked up again, as well as empty words that were often repeated but did not add value to the conversation. Often these empty words were part of the dialogue that was cut off and restarted.

accessible to those who did not participate in the groups themselves. In this phase, minimal changes were made to the verbal dialogue and every attempt was made to stay true to the words and convictions of the people, as well as the spirit of the group.

Having committed to keeping the names of the congregational systems and focus group participants confidential, names were also eliminated and in their place several options were utilized. First, the name was simply eliminated and nothing added if there was no impact to the text itself (i.e., when participants shared their name as they introduced themselves). Second, names of people in leadership positions were replaced with the leadership position title (i.e. council president or pastor). Third, *he* or *she* was used to replace a name if it was clear who he or she was referring to in the sentence. Finally, there were many reference made to the pastors by name. In the reports sent back to the congregation, *Pastor* was used. For processing in Crawdad, the term *PastorAnn* was used in each of the congregational systems, no matter what the pastor's name was. By using the term *PastorAnn* throughout all the data, consistency was gained throughout all congregational systems studied and allowed for *PastorAnn* (reference to the pastor by name) to be identified separately from any general reference to the role of pastor. The same thing was done with the name of the congregational system and any reference to the location of the congregational system. In the reports sent back to the congregation, *this congregation* and *this area* were used. For processing in Crawdad the terms *thiscongregation* and *thisarea* were used. Making the terms one word, rather then two, allowed Crawdad to identify them as one concept and not two separate words. Initial Crawdad reports were run after this phase. Reports included a master of all focus groups, council, lay leadership, living one's faith, staff, field notes, and journal.

Role of Researcher

Missiologist

As stated earlier, this researcher took seriously the lived experiences of the people and the context in which they live. As one studies people and context as a missiologist there is a centering principle always at work as one studies the demographics of a community, reads the history of a congregational system, learns from the focus group participants, and experiences a faith community's life together. That centering principle is mining the question, *What is God up to in this place?* Missiology is inter-disciplinary in nature, but its foundation is theologically centered on the idea that Christians believe in a missional God, active and alive in the world. Hence, as a missiologist, one is continually seeking to identify, name, and learn from God's activity among God's creation in any particular time in history.

Terry Muck asks, "What is a missiological description of an event?"[29] Extending Clifford Geertz's thick description,[30] the Event + Human Intention, Muck pushes theologians and missiologists beyond merely sociological descriptions to describe the Event + Human Intention + God's Intention, which he names as the missiological description.[31] Said differently, added to *what happened* and *why did it happen* is another question, *what was God's intention for this event?* In a nutshell, that is what this researcher seeks to discover in this study.

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[29]Terry C Muck, "The Missiological Perspective," *Missiology: An International Review* 34, no. 3 (2006): 307.

[30]Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 10.

[31]Muck, "The Missiological Perspective," 308.

Ethnographer

As stated previously, in ethnographic qualitative research the researcher is the primary research tool. *Presuppositions,* named or unnamed, come with the researcher and play into their role as a qualitative researcher. While bias cannot be eliminated, it can be named and attended to. In this section several presuppositions will be highlighted in an effort to state explicitly about realities of the researcher herself. First, having been involved in the Lutheran church all her life,[32] there are certain ideas about the ELCA that the researcher brought into this research. Clearly these ideas are both an asset and a liability as one studies one's own denomination. While every attempt was made to not let this bias skew the data, it needs to be noted outright that this reality exists and the researcher sought to be attentive to it.

Second, as already alluded to, a presupposition exists that God is alive and working in the world and in ELCA congregational systems empowering missional leaders to actively live out their callings in the world. While the researcher does not have a particular idea of how this activity manifests itself, it needs to be noted that this underlying assumption exists for the researcher. The main focus in this research was not *if* this exists, but rather *how* this activity was embodied within congregational systems and missional leaders.

Third, there exists for the researcher a presupposition that indeed some cultural dynamics exist within each congregational system, with a hope that there are some common cultural dynamics across congregational systems. While the research may

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[32]The researcher has been a member of a Lutheran congregational system all of her life, has served on staff in an ELCA congregational system for sixteen years, has served on staff in an ELCA synodical office for three years, and has attended both a Lutheran college and seminary.

disprove this presupposition, it was what this researcher sought to validate as she entered into the process. In an effort to curb these presuppositions, a second observer, serving as a scribe, accompanied the researcher on each site visit. Each of the site visits had a different scribe, which kept each visit fresh. Protocols were developed to which the researcher and scribes adhered for each visit (see Appendix G). At the end of each visit the researcher used the scribe as a second lens of interpretation, checking the field notes with him/her.

The role of the researcher in *field observation* is to carefully observe the physical environment, the interactions between people, the language used, the spirit of the group, and any other factors deemed important. The researcher used the field notes to put into written form what was seen, heard, and experienced. The field notes, in other words, were intended to be a reporting tool. Notes about possible conclusions or intuitions were not included in the field notes; they were placed in the journal.

As a participant-observer it goes without saying that the presence of the researcher does not go without being noticed. This aspect of field work cannot be eliminated, but its effects can be reduced. In an effort to reduce the impact of the researcher and the scribe both fully participated in all of the activities they were observing during the on-site visits. Activities where chosen on the basis of appropriateness of outsiders attending and observing, as well as representative of the ministry of that congregational system. Without exception the researcher and scribe were welcomed into each activity and able to participate.

One of the clues that ethnographers are fulfilling their role is that they are open to being surprised and are not only seeking to confirm their hunches. While much of the

work did confirm the hunches of the researcher, there were many time throughout the research where surprised surfaced. These surprises were both affirming and enlightening as part of the discovery element of the ethnographic process.

<div align="center">Focus Group Facilitator</div>

"The purpose of interviewing…is to allow us [researchers] to enter into the other person's perspective."[33] Focus groups are, simply put, a group interview seeking to enter into another group's perspective. The goal of the focus groups in this study was to create a space in which an outsider could gain, as closely as possible, another's perspective. Four general categories of questioning were established, each with sub-questions, as a way of opening up dialogue about the congregational systems (see Appendix E). It needs to noted, however, that the process was more important than the questions themselves. The researcher, serving as the facilitator, used the questions to facilitate similar dialogue in each congregational system visited, but all had their own rhythm and feel. The facilitator continually held three things in tension while facilitating each focus group: guiding the conversation, letting all participants make their contribution, and getting the kind of data that was significant to the subject of missional leadership.

Prior to the first ethnographic visit, the focus group questions and process were tested with a trial group. One of the scribes accompanied the researcher and the focus group operated as if it was in the study. After the trial run, questions were refined and protocols established. These protocols, as noted earlier, were created as an effort to offer as much consistency between congregational visits as possible with different scribes

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[33]Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 341.

accompanying each visit, and also to clarify the responsibilities of the researcher and of the scribe (see Appendix G).

<center>Journaler</center>

With the researcher being a participant-observer, the experience of the researcher was another source of data. Journaling was used to capture and articulate emotions, impressions, personal reflections, as well as the lived experience of the researcher herself. The researcher, as journalist, attempted to capture snapshots and the sentiment of her experience throughout the research process. As said earlier, while the field notes reported the happenings from the initial phone interview through the analysis, the journal became the place to capture hunches, intuitions, inquiries, and emotions. In addition, while the other sources of data attempted to be as objective as possible, the journal was the place to explicitly lay out hunches. As a researcher, this was one way of tending to and staying in touch with one's own personal attachments and reactions during the research.

<center>**Ethical Issues**</center>

<center>Concerning Congregations</center>

Anytime one is studying human behavior ethical issues arise. In studying congregational systems the issues are compounded by the sheer number of people involved. In an effort to tend to the ethical issues in this research the following processes were adhered to. First, letters detailing the purpose and methodology of the study were e-mailed ahead of time to the lead pastor of each congregational system. In addition, copies were available to all focus group participants. This was an effort to offer full disclosure of the researcher's intentions and the purpose of the study (see Appendix B). Second, each

focus group participant signed a consent form. This consent form highlighted the purpose and methodology of the study and clarified how the information would be used (see Appendix H). It was reinforced that the name of the congregation would not be reported, nor would names of the participants. Third, a copy of the overall findings was made available to the lead pastor in each congregational system. The leadership within each congregational system was given liberty to use the data as they saw fit within their own congregational system for the purposes of enhancing their own ministry. Finally, it was noted that data from this research would be presented in, but not limited to, the researcher's dissertation, as well as additional scholarly articles, papers, presentations, and publications that might arise.

Concerning Data and Data Analysis

Ethical issues also exist concerning data, data analysis, and data storage. As stated earlier, as a way of protecting the congregational system and focus group participants, the original names or locations were not used. In the reporting of the data each congregational system received a new name and individual names were not referred to. Access to the data is limited to the researcher and members of the research team whom she supervised. Upon completion of this research, the field notes and transcripts from the focus groups will be stored in a lock box and destroyed after ten years.

Concerning the Researcher

Since the researcher is a life-long Lutheran, it is important to exercise precautions with regard to working within the ELCA and in particular in the selection of ELCA congregations. In an attempt to curb bias, the researcher did not study any congregations

of which she had been a member, served on staff, or worked with when she was on staff in an ELCA synod office. In addition, the researcher omitted all congregational systems with which she has prior in-depth knowledge of their ministry or their staff.

An additional ethical consideration is with whom the results will be shared. At the conclusion of the study, each congregational system had access to the overall research findings of their own congregational system and a condensed report of the comparative findings. Beyond that the research is the property of the researcher for the purposes of studying missional congregational systems.

With the research question defined, the research design laid out, and the role of the researcher explicitly stated, it is now time to attend to the findings. *What are the cultural dynamics within a congregational system that are vital to the empowering of missional leadership?*

CHAPTER 3

FIVE STORIES, ONE BODY:

FINDINGS OF FIVE ELCA CONGREGATIONAL SYSTEMS

Five new territories to discover, five plane excursions, and five different local street maps to navigate, yet one church body. The missional church viewed through the snapshots of five ELCA congregations uniquely witnessing to the gospel message; each distinctly living into and out of their own identity as the people of God in a time in history, yet each fully the body of Christ and the ELCA in that particular location.

What do these various living, breathing ELCA congregational systems tell us? What can be learned from these communities of God's people? What do the learnings say to the church at large? These are the questions that guide this cartographical work. This chapter is descriptive in nature, beginning by comparing and contrasting the five congregational systems and then profiling each individually, all in hopes of beginning the process of sketching a map. The next chapter will move from description to analysis, seeking to more fully flesh out the details of this map.

Comparing Congregational Systems

Before landing at each site, it is helpful to have a bird's-eye view comparing the contexts and congregational make-up of these five congregational systems. Each congregational system has been given a name solely for the purpose of this project which seeks to capture its unique personality.

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Contexts

Several things can be noted about the contexts of these five congregational systems (see

Table 3.1). First, these five ELCA congregational systems are dispersed across the United

States, located in three different states, and from four different *metropolitan areas*. Yet,

the size of the metropolitan areas vary. Using the county size as one barometer, the

largest to smallest metropolitan area is as follows: Casa para Todos, New Wine, Bread

for the Journey, Cross in the Road, and Mission Central. These numbers, however, are a

bit deceiving. Being from metropolitan areas, four of the five are located in areas in

which there are several counties adjacent to one another that make up the whole

metroplex. In this way the numbers do not tell the whole story. With that said, all of the

congregational systems are located within large metropolitan areas.

Table 3.1 - Population[1]

Casa para Todos	Bread for the Journey	Mission Central	New Wine	Cross in the Road
3.6 million	998,000	361,000	2.9 million	492,000

Second, four of the five counties in which these congregational systems reside

were *average to above average economically* when compared to the United States

average (see Table 3.2). Three factors demonstrate this fact. The median income of all

congregational systems but Casa para Todos were well above the United States average,

with Casa para Todos being slightly below. The median monthly housing mortgage was

above the United States median in four of the five counties, with Casa para Todos being

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[1]Demographic data were collected on the counties in which each of these congregational systems was located. This demographic data was from the U.S. Census Bureau, "American FactFinder," Fact Sheets available at http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en and based on 2005 statistical reports (accessed between July 2006 and September 2006).

the closest to the national median. Four were radically below the United States average

poverty level, with Casa para Todos being above.

Table 3.2 - Economic

United States	Casa para Todos	Bread for the Journey	Mission Central	New Wine	Cross in the Road
$44,684 median income	$43,639	$67,823	$56,754	$64,416	$62,155
$1,212 median monthly mortgage	$1,272	$2,120	$1,389	$1,983	$1,412
13% below poverty level	15%	10%	7%	9%	3%

Third, several of these counties stand out as *highly educated* (see Table 3.3).

Bread for the Journey, Mission Central, and Cross in the Road were in counties that were

above the United States average in the percentage of people with a high school diploma

or above, New Wine was close to the national average, and Casa para Todos was below

the national average. With regard to bachelor degrees and above, all were above the

national average with Casa para Todos being only slightly above. With regard to the

dropout rates of 16 to 19 year olds, the counties of Bread for the Journey, New Wine, and

Cross in the Road were below the national average, Mission Central was equal to the

national average, and Casa para Todos was above the national average.

Table 3.3 - Education

United States	Casa para Todos	Bread for the Journey	Mission Central	New Wine	Cross in the Road
84% w/High School diploma or above	76%	90%	86%	83%	96%
27% w/Bachelor degree or above	28%	36%	34%	33%	49%
8% dropout rates 16-19	12%	4%	8%	5%	3%

Fourth, three of the counties were more *ethnically diverse* than the United States average, yet each county had its own unique ethnic make-up (see Table 3.4). Casa para Todos, Bread for the Journey, and New Wine were in counties with below average percentage of Whites. All but Casa para Todos were in counties that were below average with regard to African Americans. New Wine, Bread for the Journey, and Casa para Todos were in counties above average with regard to percent of Asians, with Cross in the Road being average and Mission Central below average. And all but Cross in the Road were in counties that were above average with regard to percent of Hispanic. These diversity factors also translated into diversity in language; Casa para Todos, Bread for the Journey, and New Wine were in counties that had above the United States average of populations whose primary language is other than English. Casa para Todos, Mission Central, and New Wine had higher than the United States average of people whose primary language was Spanish.

Table 3.4 – Ethnicity/Language

United States	Casa para Todos	Bread for the Journey	Mission Central	New Wine	Cross in the Road
77% Whites	68%	64%	90%	63%	90%
12% African American	18%	10%	4%	2%	3%
4% Asian	6%	14%	1%	16%	4%
14% Hispanic	37%	21%	15%	33%	5%
19% primary language other than English	40%	29%	12%	42%	11%
61% primary language Spanish	81%	56%	84%	62%	41%

Finally, with regard to religious make-up, all were in counties that had *unclaimed religious affiliation* as their largest population (see Table 3.5). The second largest religious affiliation was split between Roman Catholics and Evangelical Protestants; Bread for the Journey, New Wine, and Cross in the Road had Roman Catholics and Casa para Todos and Mission Central had Evangelical Protestants as its second largest population. All but Cross in the Road were in counties that had either Roman Catholics or Evangelical Protestants as third, while Cross in the Road had Mainline Protestants as third. This meant Cross in the Road was in a county with the highest ranking of Mainline Protestants. Overall, however, this assessment highlights the fact that all of these ELCA congregational systems were located in places in which they were a *religious minority*!

Table 3.5 – Religious Make-up[2]

County	Casa para Todos	Bread for the Journey	Mission Central	New Wine	Cross in the Road
Top	Unclaimed 1,687,367	Unclaimed 579,837	Unclaimed 146,307	Unclaimed 7,852,298	Unclaimed 221,875
Second	Evangelical Protestants 696,465	Roman Catholics 204,070	Evangelical Protestants 81,303	Roman Catholics 5,688,811	Roman Catholics 96,095
Third	Roman Catholics 618,649	Evangelical Protestants 74,449	Roman Catholics 39,230	Evangelical Protestants 1,164,540	**Mainline Protestants** 62,145
Fourth	**Mainline Protestants** 278,383	Other 48,191	**Mainline Protestants** 21,271	Other 1,065,974	Evangelical Protestants 55,147
Fifth	Other 111,412	**Mainline Protestants** 40,234	Other 5,657	**Mainline Protestants** 561,560	Other 15,824

Congregational Make-up

Having briefly described the contexts, which were more similar than different, let us now compare the make-up of these congregational systems. First, *placed within the ELCA*, these five systems were from four different synods and varied in size when placed within the whole of the ELCA (see Table 3.6). Using a 2004 ELCA report on congregation size based on worship attendance,[3] these five congregational systems represent four different categories, with four falling in the top 90 percentile of the ELCA. For ELCA congregations, they are large. In addition, all but Cross in the Road were in one of the states in which 80% of all ELCA congregations are located (see Table 3.7).[4]

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[2]Religious affiliation was by county from the Association of Religion Data Archives website, "U.S. Congregational Membership: Membership Reports," http://www.thearda.com/mapsReports/reports/selectCounty.asp?state=20&county=01001 (accessed between July 2006 and September 2006).

[3]ELCA, "How Large Is Your Congregation Compared with All ELCA Congregations?," www.elca.org/research/rptlist.html (accessed January 13, 2007).

[4]Kenneth Inskeep, "The Context for Mission and Ministry in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America," ELCA.org, www.elca.org/research/reports/re/context5.pdf (accessed April 4, 2007).

Hence, these congregational systems not only rested primarily within the top percentile,

they also came from states that were most heavily populated with ELCA Lutherans.

Table 3.6 – Placement within ELCA in 2004[5]

Size in Ave. Attendance	Number of Cong	Percent of Cong	Percentile	Name
1,000+	47	.40%	100.00%	
750 to 999	59	0.60%	99.60%	Bread for the Journey
500 to 749	215	2.00%	99.00%	Mission Central Cross in the Road
350 to 499	407	3.90%	97.00%	
200 to 349	1,439	13.60%	93.10%	Casa para Todos
150 to 199	1,956	10.00%	79.50%	
100 to 149	1,856	17.60%	69.40%	New Wine
75 to 99	1,370	13.00%	51.80%	
50 to 74	1,748	16.60%	38.90%	
35 to 49	1,113	10.60%	22.30%	
20 to 34	881	8.40%	11.70%	
1 to 19	356	3.40%	3.40%	
Total	**10,547**	**100.00%**		

Table 3.7 – Baptized Membership in States Accounting for 80 Percent of the Total ELCA Membership[6]

State	ELCA Membership	Percent of ELCA Membership
Minnesota	852,994	16.69%
Pennsylvania	612,660	11.99%
Wisconsin	463,357	9.07%
Ohio	301,752	5.91%
Illinois	279,510	5.47%
Iowa	267,445	5.47%
North Dakota	174,494	3.42%
California	171,030	3.35%
New York	169,448	3.32%
Michigan	160,805	3.15%
Texas	154,792	3.30%
Nebraska	128,570	2.52%
Washington	127,690	2.50%
South Dakota	121,690	2.38%
Maryland	103, 032	2.20%

[5]ELCA, "How Large Is Your Congregation Compared with All ELCA Congregations?"

[6]Inskeep, "The Context for Mission and Ministry in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America."

Comparing these congregational systems *numerically* provides another perspective (see Table 3.8). Three of the congregational systems, Bread for the Journey, Mission Central, and Cross in the Road, are similar in size (depending on which indicator is used) and represent the high end of the scale. New Wine is clearly the smallest and represents the low end of the scale. In the time period of 1998-2005 all five congregational systems grew in confirmed membership[7] and all but Bread for the Journey grew in baptized membership. These are churches growing numerically. While there is no way of documenting how many of these members are active, worship attendance might give some clue. In 2005 two congregational systems, New Wine and Bread for the Journey, reported a high percentage of members worshipping, with over fifty percent, and the other three were closer to one third. Over the same 1998-2005 time period, however, the two high percentage congregational systems both experienced significant growth in this area, while two experienced a decrease (with one being very marginal), and one experienced slight growth. Mission Central, one of the congregational systems that experienced a decrease, birthed another congregation in the area during that same time period, and another, Casa para Todos, had space issues until last year when they moved into a new facility, in which they then experienced growth.[8] In addition, all five systems experienced an increase in income and giving and four of the five systems experienced an increase in mission support, with Bread for the Journey being the exception. So, not only have these congregational systems grown, their income and giving also increased.

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[7]It is worth noting that two congregational systems, Bread for the Journey and New Wine, call their members mission partners. With that noted, this study will use the term members for the sake of consistency.

[8]Casa para Todos had flat worship attendance for two years (244-250) and when they moved into their new facility saw an increase (279) from 30.3% to 31.6%.

Table 3.8 – Membership and Financial Patterns[9]

	Casa para Todos	Bread for the Journey	Mission Central	New Wine	Cross in the Road
Baptized membership	1998 – 751 2005 – 882 **+17.4%**	1998 – 1,449 2005 – 1,348 **-7.0%**	1998 – 1,465 2005 – 1,825 **+24.6%**	1998 – 178 2005 – 253 **+42.1%**	1998 – 985 2005 – 1,449 **+47.1%**
Confirmed membership	1998 – 483 2005 – 514 **+6.4%**	1998 – 983 2005 – 1,115 **+13.4%**	1998 – 1,049 2005 – 1,349 **+28.6%**	1998 – 146 2005 – 171 **+17.1%**	1998 – 678 2005 – 1,035 **+52.7%**
Worship attendance	1998 –220 (29.8%) 2005 – 279 (31.6%) **+26.8%**	1998 – 577 (39.8%) 2005 – 804 (59.6%) **+39.3%**	1998 – 518 (35.4%) 2005 – 515 (28.2%) **-0.6%**	1998 – 79 (44.4%) 2005 – 166 (65.6%) **+110.1%**	1998 – 391 (39.7%) 2005 – 556 (38.4%) **+42.2%**
Income	1998 – $333,272 2005 – $426,872 **+28.1%**	1998 – $836,000 2005 – $1,626,559 **+94.8%**	1998 – $762,471 2005 – $1,193,286 **+56.5%**	1998 – $140,357 2005 – $281,655 **+100.7%**	1998 – $425,250 2005 – $419,394 **+96%**[10]
Giving	1998 – $224,638 2005 – $388,159 **+72.8%**	1998 – $836,000 2005 – $1,626,559 **+94.8%**	1998 – $664,877 2005 – $968,286 **+45.6%**	1998 – $96,993 2005 – $250,000 **+157.8%**	1998 – $269,177 2005 – $587,109 **+118.1%**
Mission Support	1998 – $13,886 (6.0%) 2005 – $30,840 (6.7%) **+28.5%**	1998 – $67,000 (8.0%) 2005 – $2,500 (0.2%) **-96.3%**	1998 – $83,109 (12.5%) 2005 – $121,048 (12.5%) **+45.6%**	1998 – $2,747 (2.8%) 2005 – $6,222 (2.5%) **+126.5%**	1998 – $22,373 (8.3%) 2005 – $47,987 (8.2%) **+114.50%**

History is another way of comparing these congregational systems (see Table

3.9). These systems range in age from forty-seven to twenty-two, with New Wine being

the oldest and Casa para Todos the youngest. Pastoral tenure ranges from sixteen years to

one year, with Cross in the Road having the longest tenure and Mission Central the

shortest. New Wine is the congregational system that has experienced the highest number

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[9]Information on congregational membership and financial patterns was obtained from each congregational system's 2005 ELCA trend report.

[10]In three separate years within this period of time, this congregational system brought in over two million dollars, so these two numbers alone do not show the whole picture.

of lead pastors, with the others having very few (two to four) throughout their lifetime.

Hence all of these congregational systems were organized before the ELCA was formed

and vary in pastoral tenure.

Table 3.9 - History[11]

	Casa para Todos	Bread for the Journey	Mission Central	New Wine	Cross in the Road
Year organized	1984	1965	1970	1959	1982
Pastoral tenure	Since 1996	Since 1999	Since 2005	Since 2003	Since 1990

Staffing and programs within these congregational systems vary (see Table 3.10).

The number of paid staff range from six to twenty serving part or full time within the

congregational system. Bread for the Journey has the largest staff, both lay and pastoral,

with twenty. Mission Central has the second largest with seventeen, including two pastor

emeriti. New Wine and Cross in the Road both have nine staff members, and Casa para

Todos has the smallest staff with six. All but Mission Central have first-call pastors

currently serving. Cross in the Road, Bread for the Journey, and New Wine all have

interns, with Cross in the Road and Bread for the Journey seeing themselves as teaching

congregations.

Cross in the Road, Mission Central, and New Wine all have preschools.[12] Cross in

the Road and New Wine have ethnic-specific worshipping communities sharing their

facilities and are finding ways to partner with these ministries. Casa para Todos is in the

beginning stages of launching a Hispanic ministry, including a Spanish worship service.

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[11]The year each congregational systems was organized was obtained from the ELCA trend report and the pastoral tenure was obtained in the phone interview with the lead pastor.

[12]The preschool director was included in the staff numbers, but the teachers and other administrative staff were not.

Mission Central has birthed three other congregations in the area, two since 1997, as it

has intentionally sought not to become a mega-church. Bread for the Journey is in the

process of looking at the possibility of adding a second site. All of these are ways in

which each system is intentionally dealing with their particular ministry location.

Table 3.10 – Staff Leadership/Ministries[13]

	Casa para Todos	Bread for the Journey	Mission Central	New Wine	Cross in the Road
Pastors	2	4 + intern	2 + 2 Emeriti	1+ intern	2 + intern
First call pastors	Associate	Executive Pastor		Pastor	Co-pastors
Total Staff	6	20	17	9	9
Preschool			Yes	Yes	Yes
Other	Hispanic ministry/Spanish worship	Thinking of second site	Birthed three congregations	Partner with Korean Ministry	Partner with Laotian Ministry

While the contexts surrounding these congregational systems are ethnically

diverse, four of the five congregational systems *did not have an ethnically diverse*

membership (see Table 3.11). Bread for the Journey was the only ELCA trend report that

showed much diversity, with 236 of their 1,345 members (17.5%) being non-White. Yet

Casa para Todos, the weekend of the research visit, was the most ethnically diverse, with

about one-fourth of the worshipping population being non-White. With that said, none of

the congregational systems was all White, but only three systems had a non-White person

participate in a focus group (as discussed in the next chapter).

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[13]Staff Leadership/Ministries information for each congregational system was obtained primarily through their websites and then verified during the on-site visits.

Table 3.11 – Ethnic Diversity[14]

	Casa para Todos	Bread for the Journey	Mission Central	New Wine	Cross in the Road
White	1999 – 772 2005 – 857	1999 – 1,458 2005 – 1,109	1999 – 1,622 2005 – 1,788	1999 – 173 2005 – 253	1999 – 1,081 2005 – 1,431
non-White Total	1999 – 18 2005 – 25	1999 – 17 2005 – 236	1999 – 21 2005 – 37	1999 – 2 2005 – 0	1999 – 10 2005 – 28
Black	1999 – 4 2005 – 9	1999 – 0 2005 – 10	1999 – 0 2005 – 4	1999 – 0 2005 – 0	1999 – 8 2005 – 14
Asian	1999 – 0 2005 – 4	1999 – 6 2005 – 65	1999 – 0 2005 – 2	1999 – 2 2005 – 0	1999 – 2 2005 – 4
Latino	1999 – 0 2005 – 3	1999 – 7 2005 – 70	1999 – 6 2005 – 11	1999 – 0 2005 – 0	1999 – 3 2005 – 0
Multi	1999 – 0 2005 – 9	1999 – 0 2005 – 91	1999 – 0 2005 – 3	1999 – 0 2005 – 0	1999 – 0 2005 – 0
Other	1999 – 14 2005 – 0	1999 – 4 2005 – 0	1999 – 15 2005 – 17	1999 – 0 2005 – 0	1999 – 0 2005 – 0

Worship varied within these congregational systems (see Table 3.12). Cross in the Road was the most traditional liturgically, yet they drew from various worship resources, including a liturgy that they have composed and written. Cross in the Road and Mission Central were the only two without video projection. Bread for the Journey was the most contemporary, yet still had a central place for hymns and the organ, while also incorporating a band and technology. New Wine and Casa para Todos incorporated a mixture of contemporary music and traditional liturgical elements. Bread for the Journey, Mission Central, and Cross in the Road all served communion every week as a central part of their worship life together. Overall each congregational system had its own flavor of liturgical worship.

[14]The ethnic composition of baptized members of each of these congregational systems was taken from their trend reports as reported on the ELCA website.

Table 3.12 – Worship[15]

	Casa para Todos	Bread for the Journey	Mission Central	New Wine	Cross in the Road
Worship services	3 service mix of styles traditional - contemporary	2 services same style blended	3 services mix of styles traditional – contemporary	1 service blended	2 services same style traditional
Weekly Communion		Yes	Yes		Yes
Projection	Yes	Yes		Yes	

Congregational System Profiles

Let us now take a deeper, on-the-ground look at each of the congregational

systems.[16] This section, seeking to create "missiological descriptions,"[17] is framed around

the seven areas Scott Moreau has proposed for a comprehensive contextualization of the

Christian faith.[18] These seven dimensions are doctrinal, mythic, ethical, social, ritual,

experiential, and material.

Casa para Todos Lutheran Church

Having left the highway of this expanding metropolitan area we made our way

toward the church, passing numerous office buildings and apartment complexes, large

areas of green space, and several new housing developments. After several miles we

reached Casa para Todos, a home for all, Lutheran Church. Had we not had the directions

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[15]Information on worship was gathered at each on-site visit.

[16]A resource used for creating the descriptive profiles was Harry F. Wolcott, *Writing up Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001).

[17]Terry C Muck, "The Missiological Perspective," *Missiology: An International Review* 34, no. 3 (2006).

[18]Scott Moreau, "Contextualization that is Comprehensive," *Missiology: An International Review* 34, no. 3 (2006), 325-334. Scott Moreau utilized Ninian Smart's seven dimensions as an overarching model for understanding religions of the world.

in hand we could easily have passed it. The concrete building, set next to a driving range and across from a nursery, looked like a smaller version of a nearby elementary school. Their name, subtly carved into the top corner of the building, helped only after we passed by. Past the church, driving down another major artery, the newer part of the community met the old. Several new commercial buildings had just been added right next to some tired businesses. This area was not only a mixture of old and new growth, but was ethnically diverse as well, mostly Hispanics and Whites.

Doctrinal

There is a theological core to Casa para Todos – they are Christian first and Lutheran second; Christian in that Christ is their center and Lutheran in that a theology of grace clearly lives and breathes within this community. Word and sacrament defines this ministry, for the sacraments are central and the Bible is "the primary and authoritative witness to the church's faith."[19] Their mission is indeed what they seek to be about: "God's love comes TO the church in order for that same love to flow THROUGH the church to the world."[20] While the members cannot recite this mission statement verbatim, it is embedded in their thinking, within their hearts, and in their way of living together. Their grace-filled, sacramentally-focused, biblically-centered doctrine is what provides the rudder for the ministry at Casa para Todos.

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[19]From their website.

[20]Ibid.

Mythic

"A Home for All,"[21] the theme of their recent building campaign, has become a metaphor of their life together. For Casa para Todos this phrase has three dimensions. First, this congregational system is a *home* to all its members, and just like everyone in a home has to contribute, so do the members. Home is used to talk about the issue of ownership within the people of this community of faith. Second, this is a home for *all*, not just those who worship on Sunday or are official members, but for all. The church building is a space that continually opens its doors to the community. By their framing it as a stewardship issue or simply serving as their modus operandi, for the people of this congregation their building is an embodiment of their missional spirit. Finally, a *home for all* has implications for their future, a future that is still open. The people of God at Casa para Todos have their eyes set on the future, not on the past. They know that the community is changing and growing and they want to embrace these changes. What drives them? They know, first hand, that the people in their community are yearning to experience God's grace, because they were once seeking this grace themselves. A *home for all* is a metaphor which articulates that they have been welcomed unconditionally by God and want to be a community living in real time that keeps such a welcoming spirit alive today and in the future.

Ethical

Least evident of all the seven, two venues lift up the ethical dimension. The first is how the people of this congregational system regulate their own behavior. As people are assimilated into the community there is a shaping and modeling which occurs around

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[21] A phrased used many times by focus group participants.

four things: being an outward facing community, open to persons not yet there, being friendly to all, both those known and those they have yet to meet, and doing the work of ministry together. Since the ministry is in the hands of the people, it is critical that this theological DNA lives within each person. The second is witnessed within the vision of their two new ministries – the Hispanic outreach and recovery ministry. These two ministries express their desire to seek out people in need and not allow themselves, as a community, to become complacent. The ethical dimension is subtle and emerging in greater depth.

Social

The social dimension functions somewhere between being associates and kin; the relationships are not formal, but the connections run deep. This social reality stems from a solid core identity. This congregation knows who (and whose) they are, which allows them, as a community and organization, to be very adaptable. It has allowed them to withstand a lot of change, both externally (in the community) and internally (within the congregation). One of the key elements of this dimension is that its main leadership, its pastoral leadership and volunteers, have been steady. For example, there have only been two lead pastors in their twenty-two year history (with the recent addition of a new associate). While not pastor-driven, the longevity of both lead pastors has allowed them to stay the course of mission and to ride the waves of change. The pastors have been the mouth-piece of their vision, challenging the people to get in and participate, yet the primary mechanisms for caring out the ministry have always resided in the people themselves.

Ritual

      Rituals at Casa para Todos help define what it means to be faithful followers of

Jesus together – it is their joint discipleship journey. The people live with the tension

between being leaders and followers, or in their words being *servant* leaders, with the

emphasis on servant. Worship is central, both in shaping the DNA of this community and

in modeling the paradox of the people of God being both saint and sinner. Worship has a

bold focus on God's Word combined with helping people translate their faith into action.

The language is accessible, be it by using story or just language that people can relate to.

The action includes ministry directly connected with Casa para Todos, like working with

the youth or caring for others in the congregation, or serving in the greater community,

working with Habitat for Humanity or at the local food shelf. Woven throughout is a

humble, playful spirit; this community does not think too highly of themselves or take

themselves too seriously.

Experiential

      God is up to something in the world and this community knows it and wants to

participate in it. In addition, they believe God is up to something within their own

community of faith and within the lives of the people there. Several people talked about

the callings within their own lives and about the congregation, in official and unofficial

ways, helping them discover how God has created and gifted them. The non-staff leaders

are a diverse group of people that step into leading with the faith that God will equip

them as they go; there isn't the need to have it all figured out first. There exists a quiet

confidence that God has been faithful in the past and God will provide what they need

when they need it, so they move forward, trusting and eager to learn and grow. This

creates an environment in which it is acceptable to make mistakes while also acknowledging God's work among them.

Material

The worship space, which also serves as a gym, is one of the ways their spirit is embodied. The space is accessible, fresh, and versatile, as is their worship, and in many ways, as are their people. Worship is offered in three different styles on a continuum of traditional to contemporary. All aim at being accessible to newcomers as well as regular attenders. With the words projected on the screen, even at the traditional service, one can easily make their way through any of the services, Lutheran or not. The preaching, offering two different styles each week, is solid, thought-provoking, and relevant. The people come to *be* present with and for each other, not to be seen; they come to be the church, not to marvel at the church facilities. What they do and the space that they do it in are simply the mechanisms for ministry; the material things themselves are not the focus. Like their name subtly engraved onto the top edge of the building, this congregation is not a flashy church that calls out for your attention. Rather, it is engraved into the hearts of several hundred people that come together on a regular basis to *be* in each other's lives, *encourage* each other, and *go* into the world in Jesus' name.

Bread for the Journey Lutheran Church

Having missed much of the afternoon traffic on the interstate, we emerged out of the heart of the city into the foothills of a beautiful valley; this is the setting of Bread for the Journey Lutheran Church. Once rancher territory, this community is now filled with high level banking, offices for many well-known businesses, and the finest medical care in the region. Growing at a record pace, this community has tried to balance commercial

development with preserving the natural resources that first brought people here. The biking/walking paths and neighborhood/regional parks are signs of their success.

Nestled into a neighborhood just off one of the main streets in town, this church, large by ELCA standards,[22] is easy to miss. The small piece of real estate populated with several buildings amidst mature trees and greenery made it hard to spot in the moderate housing development. This aspect of Bread for the Journey's campus is both its asset and its curse. In a community that is well above the national average in household income this humble setting reminds the people to keep it simple and to keep their focus on the things that matter the most. Yet, as they continue to be a welcoming community, growth has occurred, and they currently are pushing up against their boundaries, parking being just one example. Why are people coming? Because in an area that is seeking authentic community and meaning, this congregation is offering bread for the journey of life.

Doctrinal

Bread for the Journey Lutheran Church sees itself as Christian first and Lutheran second, just like Casa para Todos. These Lutheran Christians are rooted in the Word of God, as witnessed in their preaching and learning opportunities, have a high value on discipleship and equipping people for a life of faith, and hold the sacrament of Holy Communion with high regard. This core, embedded within Lutheran theology but expressed in various forms, keeps Christ at the center, while keeping their arms open wide. Their theology of welcome catches people as they first encounter this community, but quickly invites them into a deeper discipleship journey. Ask any of the mission

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[22]This congregation had the largest worship attendance of the five congregations visited and was in the 99.6 percentile of ELCA congregations using an ELCA report published in October 2004.

partners[23] (the name for members at Bread for the Journey) one encounters on a Sunday

morning and they will attest to it. Leadership within Bread for the Journey – clergy, staff,

and lay – are solidly grounded in their faith, the mission and vision of the congregational

system, and the discipleship journey they profess, and live. Their passion and

commitment is contagious. Two concepts highlight who they are. They are about

empowering people for ministry and helping people understand the God they worship.

The leadership recognizes the spiritual hunger among the people of the greater

community and continues to seek ways of inviting people into a community in which

they can come, learn, and be challenged. The pastors are the primary teachers and shapers

of the theology, but the people also have a key role, for as they come with questions they

in turn shape the teaching and create a dynamic, ongoing dialogue. This community can

live without clear answers, but wants to be engaged intellectually, as well as spiritually

and relationally.

Mythic

Bread for the Journey has a story, a collage of stories actually. One of the stories

centers on when the previous Senior Pastor suddenly became ill and the members of the

congregation decided to lead themselves. That became one of the defining moments for

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[23]Mission partner is an intentional term and has embedded within this congregation a particular view of themselves. Mission Partner means - God is calling us to be partners on a mission: to invite ourselves and others into a relationship with the Living God, to grow and be equipped to be fully devoted followers and missionaries, to serve the needs of the Body of Christ and all people that God is calling to join this missionary movement. Expectations include: Worship - the central place where our church family gathers each week is in worship. We expect mission partners will be in church every Sunday that they are in town. Find a place to belong – the key to feeling like one "belongs" is involvement beyond Sunday morning. God wants every mission partner to be involved in a Bridge Builders group, two sessions per year. Support the work of the ministry – with prayerful considerations, we ask that each family in the congregation tithe (giving 10% of their income to God's work, primarily through this congregation). If one is not able to tithe, it is asked that every family consider giving at least an equal share (the budget divided by the number of families = $78 per week). This information came from their website.

this community. It created a value around strong lay leadership, gave them confidence in their own abilities, and forced them to rely on the Holy Spirit.[24] Stories from its history are one important part of Bread for the Journey, but its current story is also important. This is an alive story; a story that lives in the here and now. Lay leaders continue to have a strong influence in the life and direction of this congregational system; they initiate ministries, invite others from the community to participate, and believe they are the church. This initiative and confidence has stayed true within the congregational system despite changes in pastoral leadership. Yet they also continue to write their story.

Another aspect of their community is their welcoming spirit: Youth, with or without their families, are invited; youth, churched or unchurched, are invited; outside community organization are invited; non-Lutherans are invited; mixed-marriage families are invited; and homosexual couples are invited. Does this cause chaos? No, actually, it doesn't. Sure it is messy, but they have kept the main thing the main thing. If you look different, or live in a different community, or have a different background, or don't know all the "Lutheran terms and rituals," that's all just fine. The welcoming spirit within this community is evangelical, but more importantly it is framed around a spirit of hospitality and a sense that they are a blessed people. This dynamic is shaping them as a community. It is also shaping their future story, one that they know is yet to be written but one which they have no need to control, for the people of this community believe God is alive and working among them.

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[24]In 1991 someone did a study on this congregation and said, "This was the most lay led congregation that he had even been in."

Ethical

The ethical dimension is present in many ways, for Bread for the Journey challenges its people to be God's presence in the world. One of the focused ways is through its outreach ministries. People within the congregation continually are being challenged to see the needs around them, and once they see them to do something about them. And they do; they respond. In a fairly *cleaned up* part of the world, often called suburbia, these people could sit back and live the easy life, but they don't. People start ministries, with some support from the congregational leadership, but mostly on their own. Faith at this church is an active faith, a faith seeking to be expressed in the world. Outreach ministries, however, are not the only way this is expressed. There is also an internal ethic operating. People within this congregation believe they are to be, in many ways, counter cultural. This plays out in how they treat each other and how they, as a church, respond to the needs of the community. Being welcoming is one way, but they also strive to be a diverse congregation. This is one of the things that drive their spirit of hospitality and openness, of making space for those not yet present. How they use their facilities is one tangible way, like doing funerals for people from the community that have no church home. But there are other ways as well, like how they spend their money and time. Decisions within Bread for the Journey are driven by their core congregational values.

Social

Relationships are critical to their journey; this is a social place. The sacraments are social, the welcoming is social, the missional initiatives are social, and the people of Bread for the Journey stay connected through small groups. This congregational system

works because people are connected and have many ways for people to stay in touch even as they become larger and more diverse. They have fun together and enjoy each other! This cluster of social networks has weekly worship as its hub, but is fueled by rotating small groups and other communal events. These networks have flattened the organization and power is widely distributed and shared. The staff views themselves as the equippers and direction setters; the mission partners see themselves as frontline ministers, on and off the campus.[25] Ownership is widely dispersed among older and newer participants, as well as young people and adults. It isn't long after one gets involved at Bread for the Journey before one is sharing in leadership in some capacity. In addition, Bread for the Journey has become an equipping community for future leadership. Having partnered with many pastoral interns, they have come to appreciate the two-way learning that takes place from such an experience and are excited to launch these leaders into future ministries.

Ritual

Worship is the primary, but not the only ritual. There are many rituals that Bread for the Journey practices. Some come from relationship with the greater community, like hosting the annual Jewish dinner and *invite* events for young people in the community. Others are part of the rhythm of the calendar year and are programmatic in nature, like children and youth weekly programming, VBS, Bible camp, and small groups. These gatherings provide the opportunities for people to come together *and* also support spiritual growth. These ritual gatherings fall within a practice of seasons; as the seasons

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[25]This is the living out of their mission statement: To INVITE people to faith in a living God. To GROW and EQUIP people to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. To SERVE others by the Holy Spirit.

change so do the learning opportunities and so do the opportunities to serve. There is no such thing as an off season for Bread for the Journey. This rhythm keeps the community alive and moving with many points of entry and contact.

Experiential

Small groups and worship are two, but not the only key elements mission partners need for their journey. Another element is prayer. Prayer is foundational for the overall ministry, as well as for the leadership, as they continually seek to be open to the Holy Spirit. Believing God works through people, members watch for what God might be up to in their midst and in those around them. While planning is important, it is also acceptable to be surprised and to change things based on the leading of the Spirit. Part of this is driven by the fact that they believe God is not stagnant, but they recognize the world is changing and want to be a part of God's activity in the changing world. Podcasting sermons is just one example of how they are addressing this.

One other aspect of the experiential dimension is permission for people to come into this community as real people, with all of their brokenness, quirks, and scars. As this freedom is spoken about and exercised, a humble spirit is created and emotionality let loose. The humility is witnessed in their staff leadership. They are dynamic and capable people that seek to duck out of the way so one can see the cross. The emotionality is most explicitly witnessed during communion. Communion is not a quiet, self-reflective time. It is community time – time for hugs and tears and smiles and connection. The people of Bread for the Journey come each week seeking food, companionship, and hope. They leave inspired to be God's people living in a hurting and broken world, prepared and willing to share the good news of the gospel.

Material

Music is one of the material ways they express what they believe. The musical

blend combines excellence on the organ with traditional hymns and contemporary songs

of praise led by a group of musicians young and old. But music is not the only

expression; they are open to other expressions as well. The farmer's market of baked

good, jellies, and produce is another way; a sharing of the gifts from the people of God

for the people. The light-hearted, real life drama inviting men to the men's retreat was

another. While growth could take place within this area, this congregational system is

open, not closed to various ways that they can share their abundance in tangible ways.

Bread for the Journey Lutheran church would see a boy with a small basket of loaves and

fishes in the crowd and invite him in. In the midst of their gathering, as people became

hungry, they would give him the opportunity to share, take the gift, give thanks, and

distribute it. As they did, all would be fed for the journey.

<div align="center">Mission Central Lutheran Church</div>

It is back in the car once again, this time as we exit the freeway the landscape

changes. The land sparsely populated with trees suddenly changes and there are trees

everywhere. The trees are in groves. They line the side of the road, separate the shopping

areas from the streets, and even have been trimmed around the walkways creating an

archway. Trees, they are everywhere. The only breaks in the trees are for golf courses and

intersections. The presence of these trees, and the fact that none of the roads go straight

for any significant time, made it difficult for us to get oriented.

Once adjusted to this new surrounding, however, it became easy to discover a

pattern. This community was laid out with the shopping areas, also tucked behind trees,

strategically located within and accessible to various neighborhood housing developments. Churches were clustered together and located near schools, enabling them to share parking. This community was built in phases, one *neighborhood* at a time. The newer end of the community is currently undergoing rapid growth in all areas of development.

Driving up to the church one noticed that it was not fancy; a modest building with a two-story education wing on one side, the sanctuary on the other, and a fellowship area connecting the two. These common features, however, were not what captured our attention. Rather, it was the beautiful rose stained glass window. This, its signature, sets this building apart from other buildings nearby.

Doctrinal

Listen to the words from the people of Mission Central Lutheran Church: "Christ is the focus;" "Seek first the kingdom of God and all else will follow;" and "It's about transcendence, not attendance." All of these phrases describe this congregational system and give insights to what they believe. This congregation is a group of sinners who believe in someone greater than themselves. They confess that they fall short and desire to be part of a community that accepts them as they are, challenges them to grow in their journey with God and with one another, and reminds them what's central in their life. Communion each week shapes, forms, and defines this community of gathered believers. The proclaimed living Word of God sustains and centers them. The ministry of Mission Center is to plant seeds and to provide opportunities for these seeds to grow. They firmly believe that God will tend to the growing, for there is a high level of trust that God is at work within this community through its ministry.

Mythic

This congregation, nearly forty years old, has one continuous story. Three Senior Pastors are credited for being formative in shaping this story: an initial pastor who led at the original site and who shaped it around attending to the needs of the people; the pastor (a member for much of its history, but who only served on the staff for a short time) who served as one of the community developers for the area shaped it around evangelism and reaching out to those in the greater community; and the previous Senior Pastor who enhanced the internal environment to be one of empowerment and service.[26] Their current Senior Pastor has been there just a year and is graciously keeping each of these themes going. Yet while these three leaders were named as important, in reality they were just the ones recognized for lifting up and shepherding the spirit of the people that were already present. The people have been the ones who have caught hold of these ideas and made them part of this congregational system. Easy, welcoming, personable, accepting, and supportive were some of the words used to describe this congregation's atmosphere. Underneath these words, however, exists something deeper, richer, and more profound. They have a reason for coming together and they have a reason for going forth into the world.

Ethical

Humble service is a thread woven through this congregation. People within Mission Central have eyes to see the hurt in the world and quietly find ways to make the world a different place. They do not have grandiose visions, rather they look for

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[26] As the current Senior Pastor described it, one pastor reached horizontally and the other reached vertically. The current work is to connect the two.

intersections of people's needs and their own resources. If they don't readily have the resources available, they seek them out. Many within this congregation are seated in positions of power in the greater community and in their places of employment. Some see their *ministry* as holding onto their Christian values as they maneuver their way through the complexities of leading in the realities of business. Others make themselves available, in whatever way they can, to those in need through their community involvements. For some it is this faith community which has been the key for them making connections to those in need.[27] No matter how these connections are made, the impact is the same. People at Mission Central understand that living their faith happens outside of the church sanctuary and, at least in part, is about being present with and among those in need. This is a deeply held value that is more about action and less about talk. Action, for them, also includes giving of their financial resources. One example is in the tithing of their building campaign, something they are proud to say is just part of who they are and how they operate.

Social

Mission Central has a "social agenda," as one member said. Being in relationship with one another is important to them and they give it attention. On Sunday mornings it is present among the welcome team, the fellowship taking place in the coffee area, and is witnessed in the prayers for the people during worship. This social agenda is expressed in the ongoing small groups throughout the year, allowing people to meet with others for a short time in a social setting. Its bigger, and perhaps most fun expression, is in the number of social events Mission Central has throughout the year. These events have

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[27]One of their staff positions is dedicated to this role alone!

many purposes (including raising money and celebrating various times of the years), but the main purpose it simply to be together and to invite others from the community to join them. This element is as critical to their health and well-being as Bible Study, worship, and service.

This *social agenda* can also be used to explain the various networks alive within the congregation. Some of these networks are formal (council and staff) and others are informal (parents whose kids attend the preschool and are involved in the church's children's programming), but they are all channels of communication, invitation, support, and challenge. Both the informal and the formal are tended and nurtured. Just like the social events and small groups nurture the informal, periodically the previous Senior Pastor had Peter Steinke come and work with their formal leadership around his *Healthy Congregations* principles. The weekend we attended they launched a pilot program for helping people discover their gifts. This was another example. As this congregation has grown and added additional services, these networks have become very critical and have helped the members stay connected as one community.

Ritual

The central ritual within this congregation is worship. This weekly ritual cannot be overestimated, and for Mission Central having the sacrament of communion each week is critical. But there are other rituals as well, like how the staff functions within this congregation. The staff functions more as equippers and less as doers. This posture has set a rhythm within this congregation. The staff (and council) are the rudders, but the congregation rows the boat. The formal leadership holds the center, the congregation moves in and out doing ministry. Add to that fact that there are ongoing events

throughout the year in which the congregation as a whole participate. These events provide great relational energy and become ways of putting flesh onto the social values they hold so deeply.

Finally, the birthing of other mission congregations has also become a ritual. This congregation intentionally chose not to become a mega-church and as a result has birthed several other ELCA congregations. This has created a spirit of collaboration, as well as helping to seed the church with leadership who has a kingdom mind-set. While birthing new congregations is certainly a less frequent ritual than the rest, the launching of new ministries within the congregation is an expression of this same impulse. So worship is the hub ritual, formal leaders become the spoke rituals, social gatherings become the glue rituals, and birthing new ministries and congregations is the launching ritual.

Experiential

Although not explicitly articulated, there is a connection to the Spirit at Mission Central. Said differently, the Holy Spirit provides the energy. Prayer is one place this is witnessed, allowing people to connect to one another and to God at the same time. This is also seen in their growing desire to learn, not only for the children, but also within the adults. This learning is wide and varied, be it learning more about the Bible itself or other faiths, people are trying to make connections intellectually as they also make connections between faith and their lived experiences. While most of the members at this congregational system have some church background, it is not assumed that everyone can speak the language of the church, and certainly not the Lutheran language. Because of this, there is attention given to helping people both learn the language of faith and to work through what it means to be people with a living faith.

Material

Worship is very important. The sermon touches people's heads but is also relevant to their lived experience, and the music reaches to a deeper place within the heart. Each worship service seeks to touch people with different styles of music and with a different format. Each format operates within a slightly different feel. For example, the worship leaders wear robes at some services and not at others. This difference in leadership style directly translates to those in attendance. While people have a preferred worship service, this congregation is not three separate groups, they are one community.

Their rose window is another important piece to their material dimension and is their branded identity. The window can be seen from the outside, but there is also a painted version inside the fellowship area. The rose window is also used as a logo on their printed material. While these are the named aspects, the material dimension is not extremely important to these people. One reason might be that much of their ministry is not visible, taking place outside the church building itself or within the people. Instead, what is central to Mission Central is mission, God's mission among them and in which they participate.

New Wine Lutheran Church

The sun is shining today as the plane lands once again in a metropolitan area. The drive is uneventful as we pass mile after mile of urban sprawl. Cement, billboards, commercial areas, and a constant flow of cars fill the landscape. Some areas have been rejuvenated, others are worn out. Graffiti spices it up every now and then. Though never concerned about our safety, this area certainly is densely populated, ethnically mixed, and a composite of various economic classes.

Nestled up against a freeway ramp, behind an office building, and facing a smorgasbord of modest homes and townhomes, New Wine Lutheran Church sits. Pastored by a young first-call pastor, this congregational system is beginning to taste the fruits of new wine.[28] Driving up to the church, past the fast-food restaurants and grocery stores, we saw a hodge-podge of people, young and old, gathered in the parking lot alongside the building. The BBQ grill was fired up, the popcorn machine was ready to go, and the table was filled with a variety of chips, cookies, and other treats. It wasn't long before the projector was rolling and Movie Night was underway. The casual atmosphere was inviting and non-threatening. The warmth of the people made one forget about the chill that was present in the air of this fall evening.

In its recent history, this congregation experienced dramatic decline in membership, but one did not see despair in the people gathered for worship on Sunday morning. Small children ran free around the small campus, in and out of the sanctuary building and throughout the outdoor gathering area. There is new life within this congregation.

Doctrinal

The doctrine of New Wine is simple, share Jesus with those who do not yet know him. This incarnational doctrine is more about a lived faith than a concise professed creed. It is Lutheran, in that it is a grace-filled, come-as-you-are proclamation. It is simple so one does not lose track of the main thing. These past three years have been a time of getting back to the basics and redefining life together. The proclamation may be

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[28]The story of Jesus turning water into wine comes to mind, saving the best wine for last. See John 2 and the wedding at Cana.

simple, but the effects are not. The goal of New Wine Lutheran Church is to let the gospel message penetrate into the life of the people. That is the hope, the aim, the goal. New Wine has a renewed hope for its future.[29]

Mythic

The storyline of New Wine is filled with ups and downs, similar to the contextual story in which it is located. The small remnant of those that have stayed with the congregational system throughout those ups and downs have kept the storyline of being a welcoming place alive by carefully noticing and caring for people. It is in a context that is very mobile, unconnected, and for which a community of belonging is often foreign. But this community of faith has become the connective tissue for many, a network of supportive and caring relationships, a bridge that enables one to connect to others in meaningful ways. Movie Night is just one example of this connective tissue, connecting neighbors with each other, connecting the church to their immediate neighbors, and connecting people within their own faith community to each other. They are the church, as they profess in worship, for one another and the greater community.

Ethical

Why reach out to others? Mostly because this community loves Jesus and Jesus commanded it; it is as simple as that. Most people at New Wine are content to serve as an

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[29]Recently they established a new vision and five guiding values. These two aspects of their ministry are informed by the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. *Vision:* To be a community of disciples, reflecting a medley of generations and backgrounds, who are transformed by the Spirit, embody God's Hope, and passionately advance God's Kingdom in this community and the surrounding area, and to the world as we are called, working hand-in-hand with other expressions of the body of Christ until all experience the fullness of real life in Jesus Christ. *Guiding Values* are like oars of a boat. They guide and propel us through the waters of mission and ministry as we navigate the channels of our culture. Our guiding values are: Seek God First - Create Belonging - Dream Courageously - Build Bridges - Strive for Excellence

extension of their faith and as opportunities present themselves. Why? Because that's what people of faith do. Yet, some people have embedded within them the ability to see needs in the world and use their natural leadership ability to create ministries. These leaders, a high percentage for such a small faith community, are innovative and creative in connecting people and resources. As they initiate ministries they invite other New Wine mission partners (members) into the process. The accepting of these simple invitations has increased New Wine's capacity to reach beyond themselves and make a difference in the world. These initiatives have created a buzz and have been recognized by newcomers with the result that once again their numbers are increasing. Ironically, it is as they seek to see beyond their own needs, to the needs of the world, that they have begun once again to grow – not only in numbers, but in their faith and in confidence of their ability to participate in God's mission in the world. Out of their simple faith, New Wine has rediscovered their ability once again to dream God-sized dreams for the sake of the neighbor.

Social

Socially this congregation has ownership of its life together. Being mission partners, rather than members, is one reflection of that ownership. They truly are partners, they rely on their pastoral leadership, but leadership is shared. The people are real and honest and allow each other to be wounded, make mistakes, and celebrate the little things in life. There's an authenticity to the people of New Wine that runs countercultural to their context. It's open to diversity, even when it does not even fully

know what that means for their life together.[30] It leaves room for the Spirit to move among their loosely knit network and it appreciates the surprises that come along the way. Part of what has ignited the new life among them was their willingness to let the old formal ways of being together become transformed into new informal ways of being together. This has required the people to deal with change at an adaptive level and has challenged the leadership to tend to the speed and process of this transformation. But it has been tended and change has happened.

Ritual

Most of the rituals have been deconstructed in the past few years and are in the process of being reconstructed.[31] At New Wine worship is central and is a melding together of traditional and contemporary worship elements. Connected to these worship experiences are various other core activities that give snapshots of their life together: Baptisms at the Beach, a big outreach event (not typically seen as an outreach in most congregations); Festival of Hope, an outreach event to the neighborhood and the diverse ethnic communities that reside nearby; Alpha; and the Mission Jamaica service trip. Many of these are still emerging and only time will tell if they remain central or not, but certainly what it witnesses to is an openness to create new rituals. Most of the emerging rituals are outward facing and are about inviting and serving others.

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[30]One of the stories that best illustrates this is of a neighbor that approached the church as a location to host his martial arts school. It was a non-profit, non-Christian school. After several conversations with the instructor and discussions at church council, using their guiding values as a compass, they decided to build a bridge with the school and become a host. This partnership was risky in many ways, but has become a God moment in their recent history. The instructor now serves in a leadership role within the church.

[31]As membership had continued to decline in the ten years prior to this current pastor coming (1990 at 765 to 2001 at 150), many of the things this congregation has done programmatically in its past had already evaporated. The few remaining rituals were heavily evaluated. Yet, given the climate most felt it was time to do something else or die.

One of the old rituals that is being transformed is the preschool ministry. Up until recently the church and the preschool operated on parallel tracks. Thanks to attention from both the church leadership and the preschool staff, there are now bridges being built between the two as they together seek to serve families in their community. All of these rituals offer exciting new possibilities for the future. In a way, the rituals, in and of themselves, are an opportunity for the people of New Wine to empty themselves, allowing them to be filled with something new.

Experiential

Part of New Wine's new life has come from their becoming a praying church. They are living *into* being a people fueled by learning and growing in their faith and, *out of* their passion for reaching out to others. This cyclical pattern has become their source of energy and there is a sense that God is preparing this little community to participate in a mission bigger than they have imagined in a long while. Located several miles away from the largest Lutheran church in the state, New Wine has been well aware of what they are not. More recently, however, they have also become aware of what they are. As noted earlier, the Spirit moves freely through this community and it's exciting to see. The next phase of their life together is giving itself permission and finding a language to talk about their own faith journey, together and individually, through Alpha.

Material

The material dimension of New Wine can be summed up in this statement: come as you are, use what you have, and leave the rest to God. This dimension is best illustrated in two things: the property and the leadership. Their small modest property is tired, but functional. Yet, they manage to make it serve the ministry. For example, they

currently have only one service on Sunday mornings. With that, the building could sit empty for many hours, but it doesn't. They have opened it up for a Korean community. The Korean community worships late in the morning and then has a meal together in the gathering area well into the afternoon. It is also used in many ways throughout the week.[32]

The leadership is a misfit group in many ways. They are a visible sign of the diversity represented within the congregation. Both the staff and the lay leaders have varied churched and unchurched backgrounds. As one sits and talks with them, one can easily see that they are living examples of God at work transforming and shaping people. While many have or are getting theological training, they are by no means traditional seminary candidates. New Wine has moved forward by using a pulling model of leadership,[33] one of accompanying people on the journey of faith and life, but one that moves people forward as a community. No one has the answers, but the leaders of this community of faith are seeking God's direction and wisdom on their behalf. The worship at New Wine is an illustration of how they have lived out this model, moving from a traditional worship service to a blended one mixing old traditional values (like hymns) and new contemporary ones (like visual images and contemporary language). As this congregation seeks to remove obstacles that get in the way of people growing in their

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[32]The preschool makes use of it during weekdays. The martial arts school is there in the evenings. Movie Night is held on Saturday evening. They have used their space as an asset.

[33]The pastor shared a leadership metaphor – based on his experience running a marathon. The pastor and his father-in-law ran a marathon three years ago and their goals were to finish and to finish together. About half way through the race, the father-in-law hurt his knee and he didn't think he could make it. At that moment that pastor had a decision to make. He decided they were going to finish together, but the question remained, how were they going to do it? The pastor found that if he ran too far ahead of his father-in-law, he'd say, "I just can't run that fast." So, the pastor would run up and run back. But if the pastor ran too slowly he knew that they weren't going to make it either. He couldn't simply run his father-in-law's pace. So the pastor's new leadership law is to always run just far enough ahead of people so they can keep going, but not too far ahead that they give up.

faith, as, for example, the previous traditional worship had been, they are discovering new ways of being a community of faith together. They continually are asking, does this new wine need a new wineskin?

Cross in the Road Lutheran Church

In contrast to the cosmopolitan urban area of the last stop, flying into this final destination introduced us to green farmland and open space. Ironically, however, this expansive farmland is slowly being eaten up by the city. A change is taking place. Driving from the airport toward the church gives one a hint of the many worlds that intersect here. There is a large casino, the meeting of two major rivers, a huge industrial area with over a mile of train tracks, a billboard for the upcoming Nascar race, several tired, established neighborhoods, and some newer commercial, shopping areas.

Cross in the Road Lutheran Church was also once surrounded by fields, but now is located at the southern most edge of this sprawling city. The once small communities nearby that were isolated are now becoming engulfed by suburbia. The face of this area has changed dramatically in the twenty-four years this congregation has existed, and it now sits in one of the fastest-growing counties in the nation and the wealthiest county in the state. Across the street, to the south, is a ripe green field with a lone weathered barn, a clue to the greater story of this area and a sign of its past. Behind the congregation, to the north, is a myriad of older homes that sit on several acre lots, a few even have horses wondering the pastures, another clue to the people who call this area home. To the east, new construction has created new neighborhoods with homes closer together, more expensive, and more contemporary. This is the emerging part of the community and provides a glimpse into the future. To the west, a large piece of land sits undeveloped and

is a buffer between Cross in the Road and the next community. The main road on which this congregation sits is undergoing major construction. It is becoming a main thoroughfare connecting two main highways. This is a church at the crossroads, literally located at the edge of several different communities and eras.

Doctrinal

Lutheran Christians is how one woman described this congregation. Cross in the Road certainly operates within a Lutheran frame and has taken seriously the Lutheran traditions. This congregation has three theological underpinnings that shape its life together. The doctrine that is most prevalent stems out of the vocation of the baptized. "A place of preparation"[34] is one of the phrases used to describe Cross in the Road. There is a sense that everyone within this congregation has a call, some are called into paid ministry as a vocation, others are called to be at home with their children, and other are called to serve in business. Another theological underpinning comes from their understanding that the Holy Spirit is leading this ministry, not the people. The congregation continually seeks to be about discerning how the Spirit is moving among them. There is a vibrant pneumatological view of church. The third underpinning is a missiological one. For the people here, God is an active subject in the world. God is alive in their midst. They, as disciples, are trying to find ways in which they can participate in God's mission in the world. It is a humble but real aspect of who they are as a congregation.

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[34]Here is how they describe themselves: known for being "a place of preparation" for spiritual nurturing and growth for individuals, families, small groups, and the congregation's life as a whole. They also strive to be a "God Oasis" for all who seek the encouragement, comfort, and life-giving nourishment of a relationship with Jesus Christ. This is from the history section of their website.

Mythic

Sixteen out of Cross in the Road's twenty-four years have been led by the same pastors, a second-career clergy couple still in their first call. The tenure in their leadership has resulted in a unique partnership between the people and the pastors. The pastors certainly have shaped this story, but the people have accepted it and made it their own. The story is one of intersecting faith and the world. Service is the most tangible expression, but in general it is helping people think theologically about all of their life. Living in an area that is very affluent, this challenge could fall on deaf ears, yet this congregation has an openness and hunger that allows them to embrace it.

Ethical

Cross in the Road has a vibrant service ministry. This ministry has grown out of a commitment to engage the needs of the world in real and tangible ways. The service ministry, however, is not only about fixing a house or serving a meal, it is also about connecting relationally with the people themselves; it is a lived theology of the cross. Several stories emerged with this theme and many shared how their involvement, as a family, has shaped their view of the world. One of the powerful stories they shared was how they became an emergency relief site. One day a plane crashed in the field behind the church building and for the rest of the day, and into the evening, the staff and leaders made themselves and their facilities available for emergency relief staff, the family of the victims, and to the media that covered the story. While there are many results that have come out of that experience, one tangible one is that both of the pastors serve as chaplains for the community. Cross in the Road has become known in the greater community for their commitment in both taking the lead and partnering with others

around these types of concerns. The service element of discipleship is constantly being put in front of this faith community. The idea that *to whom much is given, much is expected* is taken seriously. This is both an ethical and theological issue.

Social

While the people in this congregation are connected, the social nature of their life together is rather low key. Community is formed around being involved in doing ministry together. The Senior High ministry is one example. Since their youth director left, the Senior High youth have found their place by being leaders in various ministries. They have found community as they serve alongside one another. As people, youth and adults alike, walk alongside each other they get to know others and connections are made (like when they built one part of the current facility themselves). It is critical that people in this faith community know they are needed to carry out the ministry. This focus has resulted in broad ownership across the membership. The structure is organic, a wide spread network of people actively involved in ministries which stem out of their passions. The leadership, staff and lay, are constantly tending to this process and helping people make connections. Pastoral care is a mix between a traditional model, led by the pastors, and the involvement of lay ministers. As they grow in size, small groups have also become one of the formal ways of connecting people. This ministry is on the rise.

Ritual

Cross in the Road's main rituals are the *Faith Stepping Stones* and weekly worship, both heavily influenced by Lutheran tradition, yet both uniquely their own. Their main liturgy, for example, is written by their two pastors and the Director of Music. The effort put toward worship each week is appreciated by their members, who are more

traditional than contemporary, but who have come to accept the various liturgical expressions. The *Faith Stepping Stones* program marks key points in one's faith journey individually and communally, taking seriously the promises made at baptism by parents, sponsors, and the congregation. This *program* makes those promises come to life in meaningful ways. One of the pastors helped develop this program which has resulted in a high level of commitment on the part of the leadership and the congregation.

In addition, council retreats have become a key touch point for the leadership of Cross in the Road. While monthly meetings focus on business, council retreats focus on the stories of God's people from the past as well as in the present. The retreat is a time for sharing personal stories, for being in God's word, and for coming together as a leadership team. This annual event has transformed the leadership and the congregation.

Experiential

This is a place to grow both in faith and in relationship with others. It is a place to lead and to become a leader. The High School ministry is a prime example, as noted earlier. Rather than focus on themselves, the High School ministry is primarily based on leading the confirmation ministry and engaging in service. Throughout the ministry there is an expectation that learning and growing is never done, but at some point leading naturally emerges. The intersection on which the church building sits is a physical sign of who they seek to be, a community that strives to meet people at the intersections of faith and life.

A growing number of people from within this congregational system have felt a stirring within them. The pastors, having experienced similar things which resulted in each leaving other professions and becoming ordained, are taking these stirrings

seriously. Over time what has emerged is an intentional discernment ministry, mostly through small group discussions. Several people have discerned their own callings as being called into full-time ministry within a church and have gone to seminary. Others have reoriented their lives in other ways, but no less meaningfully. Another way in which this dimension is expressed is in their becoming a teaching congregation, hosting pastoral interns. They have created space within their community for growing and learning, and in the process have received much more then they have given. These intersections have been, for the congregation, holy ground.

Located in a community that has many young families, the preschool ministry continues to grow and has become a main avenue for families into this congregation. Cross in the Road values families and seeks to equip them wherever they are on their journey of faith. The preschool is only one of the many entry points.

Material

Creative expression is allowed and encouraged at Cross in the Road. Art is seen in the sanctuary, in the narthex, in the halls, and by the entry ways. Music is central to their life together and draws a large percentage of their people into participation. The prayer garden, the accessible kitchen, and the rotation model of Sunday School also are opportunities for people to express, in concrete ways, what's happening in their lives. Making bread, walking the labyrinth, and lighting a candle in the narthex after worship were some of the tangible ways faith came to life the weekend we visited. Less visible, but equally as important, is service, witnessed by buying a Christmas present for someone in need, fixing a house, or preparing a hot meal. Faith has many and varied physical expressions at Cross in the Road.

Walk from the sanctuary toward the education wing too quickly and one might miss one of Cross in the Road's most unique partners. In a small room each Sunday morning a group of Laotians gather to worship God in their native tongue. Most who gather are older adults, but wandering the halls outside are many of their children. Officially Cross in the Road's only role with this worshipping community is offering them space. Unofficially, however, there is a movement stirring. There is a trust being built between the leadership of these communities and the Laotians are being welcomed into the larger faith community. Their children are coming to confirmation and are mixing with others within the larger congregational system. No one knows what the future holds, but this could be another intersection for Cross in the Road Lutheran Church.

Having described the congregational systems, as well as comparing their contexts and congregational make-up, it is now time to move from description to analysis, going more deeply into the research questions. What are the cultural dynamics within these congregational systems that empower missional leadership?

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

"Faithful, yet changing,"[1] is how Mark Hanson, Presiding Bishop of the ELCA, described the current state of this denomination. As Bishop Hanson began his term in 2001 he reflected, "What I am hearing in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is that this church wants a bishop who will articulate the mission, rooted in word and sacrament, to which God is calling us – and help us imagine what the church can look like for the sake of the mission."[2] His response was an eight-pronged vision centered on: witnessing, worshipping, engaging, equipping, inviting, connecting, changing, and praying.[3] Yet how is the church doing? What does this faithful, yet changing, ELCA look like? What does the church look like that lives for the sake of mission? Does the lived missional church in the ELCA reflect these eight aspects? These are some of the questions this research hopes to answer.

As noted in the methodology chapter, five ELCA congregations were studied seeking to discover, "What are the cultural dynamics within a congregational system that are vital to the empowering of missional leadership?", with a secondary inquiry being, "What commonalities, if any, exist between various ELCA congregational systems with

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[1]Mark S. Hanson, *Faithful, yet Changing: The Church in Challenging Times* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Books, 2002), 1.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid.

regard to these vital cultural dynamics for empowering missional leadership?" Based on the qualitative analysis of the data from this study, this chapter will highlight a first level analysis of key words and phrases, seek to articulate the unique cultural dynamics that make up the particular genius of each congregational system, and lift up eight themes which emerged after comparing these five congregational systems.

First Level Analysis

As a way of grounding this analysis, this section will begin by taking a deeper look at the primary source of data, the focus groups by outlining their make-up and through comparing key words and phrases.

Focus Groups

Since the focus groups served as the primary source for the data analysis, it is worth noting the make-up of these focus groups. In each congregational system participants were gathered around four particular foci: available pastoral and lay staff, council members, various ministry leaders, and people living their faith in the world.[4] In four of the five congregational systems, these participants were gathered in four separate focus groups. In one, Bread for the Journey, two of the focus groups, council and ministry leaders, were merged into one and a separate interview was done with one of the pastoral staff. Table 4.1 lays out the focus group participants by total number of people, the male/female ratio, the number of staff, the ethnic background, age, and number of years as a member of the congregational system.

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[4]The target size for each focus group was six to eight people, with all of the available staff invited to participate in the staff focus group.

Table 4.1 – Focus Group Participants

Casa para Todos	Bread for the Journey	Mission Central	New Wine	Cross in the Road
22 people	21 people	30 people	26 people	18 people
12 male/10 female	11 male/10 female	12 male/18 female	10 male/16 female	9 male/9 female
6 staff	8 staff	9 staff	8 staff	3 staff
20 White 2 Latino/Hispanic	21 White	29 White 1 Bi-racial	25 White 1 Asian	18 White
Age 15-20 = 0 Age 21-29 = 1 Age 30-39 = 3 Age 40-49 = 6 Age 50-59 = 9 Age 60-69 = 2 Age 70-79 = 1 Age 80+ = 0	Age 15-20 = 1 Age 21-29 = 0 Age 30-39 = 1 Age 40-49 = 6 Age 50-59 = 8 Age 60-69 = 4 Age 70-79 = 1 Age 80+ = 0	Age 15-20 = 0 Age 21-29 = 0 Age 30-39 = 2 Age 40-49 = 8 Age 50-59 = 13 Age 60-69 = 3 Age 70-79 = 4 Age 80+ = 0	Age 15-20 = 0 Age 21-29 = 3 Age 30-39 = 5 Age 40-49 = 3 Age 50-59 = 5 Age 60-69 = 6 Age 70-79 = 3 Age 80+ = 1	Age 15-20 = 1 Age 21-29 = 0 Age 30-39 = 3 Age 40-49 = 5 Age 50-59 = 5 Age 60-69 = 1 Age 70-79 = 3 Age 80+ = 0
Years in Cong (not all responded) 0-1 = 0 2-5 = 2 6-9 = 1 10-14 = 4 15-19 = 7 20-25 = 2 26+ = 0	Years in Cong (not all responded) 0-1 = 3 2-5 = 3 6-9 = 1 10-14 = 2 15-19 = 0 20-25 = 4 26+ = 2	Years in Cong (not all responded) 0-1 = 0 2-5 =3 6-9 = 9 10-14 = 7 15-19 = 1 20-25 = 2 26+ = 1	Years in Cong (not all responded) 0-1 = 0 2-5 = 11 6-9 = 0 10-14 = 1 15-19 = 1 20-25 = 2 26+ = 5	Years in Cong (not all responded) 0-1 = 0 2-5 = 7 6-9 = 3 10-14 = 3 15-19 = 3 20-25 = 1 26+ = 0

Overall each congregational system had a good representative group participate in the focus groups. The number of people participating in the focus groups ranged from 18-26, with a fairly even male and female ratio. Ethnically there was not much diversity in the focus groups, but, for the most part, they were representative of the congregational system's make-up. Bread for the Journey was one exception; this system was the most ethnically diverse in their trend report, yet all focus group participants were White. With regard to diversity in age, each congregational system had a wide range, with Bread for the Journey and Cross in the Road each having High School students participate and New Wine had someone in their eighties. The 50-59 age range was well represented in each congregational system. This reality tipped the scales toward an older median age of

participants. There was also diversity in the years in which participants had been involved in that congregational system. Bread for the Journey had three people that had been members one year or less, all systems had people in the two to five year category, and Bread for the Journey, Mission Central, and New Wine all had people that had been members twenty-six years or more.

Primary Word Analysis

As the basis from which key themes could be identified, a primary word analysis was conducted from the focus group transcripts. This primary word analysis was developed by identifying the most frequently used words, individually and clustered with similar words, and the words of top significance as identified in Crawdad. Table 4.2 lays out the high frequency words and clusters them into sections. The words with highest significance in Crawdad are found in Table 4.3.

Table 4.2 Key Words and Clusters

Key Words	Casa para Todos	Bread for the Journey	Mission Central	New Wine	Cross in the Road	Mean	Range
People Section							
people	145	143	156	150	135	145.8	135-156
community (in)	4	10	3	8	11		
Section Total	**149**	**153**	**159**	**158**	**146**	**153**	**146-159**
Descriptors:	welcome 10	welcome 10	Social 2	new people 7			
	open 14	open 10	fellowship11	open 12			
	connect 26	connect 13	fun 7	connect 11			
	home/house19 invite/inviting 4	family 8 invite/inviting 12	family 3	friend12 invite/inviting 13	family 11 invite/inviting 2		
	give 4	love 26 equip/empower 17	love 31 encourage 2		love 12 encourage 8		
		growing14 relationship 14 alive 9	support 12		growing 33 give 23		
Church Section							
church	108	143	134	146	132	132.6	108-146
congregation	42	36	122	33	52		
Section Total	**150**	**179**	**256**	**179**	**184**	**189.6**	**150-256**
God Section							
God	24	38	13	23	16	22.8	13-38
Jesus	4	15	3	6	1		
Christ	3	7	9	3	0		
Spirit	0	15	1	12	5		
Lord	0	3	1	2	0		
Total	**31**	**78**	**27**	**46**	**22**	**40.8**	**22-78**
Bible+	18	17	13	4	12		
faith	5	19	12	12	26		
pray	4	10	9	14	4		
Total	**27**	**46**	**34**	**30**	**42**		
Lutheran/ELCA	16	43	36	23	24		
grace	3	4	0	2	6		
Total	**19**	**47**	**36**	**25**	**30**		
worship	22	17	20	18	19		
service	21	16	24	7	23		
sermon+	5	19	11	15	17		
communion	2	11	10	1	9		
baptism/baptize	0	7	5	7	7		
Total	**50**	**70**	**70**	**48**	**75**		
Section Total	**127**	**241**	**167**	**149**	**169**	**170.6**	**127-241**

Key Words	Casa para Todos	Bread for the Journey	Mission Central	New Wine	Cross in the Road	Mean	Range
Ministries Section							
small group/groups	8	29	8	11	11		
ministry/ministries	22	43	28	22	19		
class	17	8	18	2	8		
Sunday School	8	8	31	1	15		
Total	*55*	*88*	*85*	*36*	*53*	63.4	36-88
Other:	network 3	Alpha 7	education 21	Alpha19 event 6 preschool 9	education 7 choir 23 music 12 program 17		
SectionTotal	*58*	*95*	*106*	*70*	*95*	*84.8*	*58-106*
Leadership Section							
pastor	*67*	*67*	*119*	*69*	*76*	79.6	67-119
lead	*75*	*80*	*35*	*40*	*46*		
staff	5	13	27	17	21		
council	16	13	19	17	55		
committee	13	7	22	2	20		
intern	0	8	0	3	13		
Total	*34*	*41*	*68*	*39*	*109*		
servant	5	0	1	0	0		
team	4	19	3	10	7		
lay	1	13	14	0	0		
volunteer	3	3	8	7	10		
Total	*13*	*35*	*26*	*17*	*17*		
Section Total	*189*	*223*	*248*	*165*	*248*	*214.6*	*165-248*
Context Section							
community (out)	19	23	23	17	15		
this area	4	3	8	4	3		
service	2	13	1	12	23		
mission/missional	10	15	27	18	4		
outreach	1	4	7	4	4		
neighbor/hood	4	12	4	17	1		
Total	*40*	*70*	*70*	*72*	*50*		
Other:	culture 5 diversity 5 Hispanic/Spanish 12 Recovery 5	reaching out 2 world 7	social projects 4		reaching out 1 world 4		
Section Total	*67*	*79*	*74*	*72*	*55*	*69.4*	*55-79*

Key Words	Casa para Todos	Bread for the Journey	Mission Central	New Wine	Cross in the Road	Mean	Range
Purpose Section							
change	16	18	10	29	19		
new	48	41	40	31	32		
Total	**64**	**59**	**50**	**60**	**51**	**56.8**	**50-64**
vision	13	6	4	8	8		
mission	10	1	3	5	3		
Total	**23**	**7**	**7**	**13**	**11**		
call	6	12	6	4	11		
passion	8	11	7	8	4		
gifts	9	12	7	18	1		
talent	8	3	5	3	1		
Total	**31**	**38**	**25**	**33**	**17**		
Other:	intentional 11		intentional 7 purpose 4 direction 5 goal 6 philosophy 5 guiding values 11 values 3				
Section Total	**118**	**115**	**82**	**134**	**92**	**108.2**	**82-134**

Table 4.3 Significant Words in Crawdad

Crawdad Words	Casa para Todos	Bread for the Journey	Mission Central	New Wine	Cross in the Road	Mean
nodes	870	987	1086	869	893	
density	0.006	0.005	0.005	0.005	0.006	
focus	0.238	0.238	0.197	0.261	0.224	
Comparing words	people .24045	people .23996	people .19921	people .26382	people .20641	.229970
	church .18252 congregation .03519	church .21267 congregation .02809	church .14685 congregation .0516 thiscongregation .0529	church .2595	church .22685 congregation .04399	.248032
	new .05778 mission .02034	new .0268	new .02756 mission .02106	new .0445	new .03322	.046252
	lutheran .02663 God .0262 worship .01973	lutheran .02827 God .03894 worship .02487	lutheran .02028 worship .01605	lutheran .0293 God .02883 worship .0292 prayer .01756	lutheran .03038 God .01821	.070890
	leadership .04653 leader .02396 pastorann .04328 pastor .03451 council .0213	leadership .03191 leader .02765 pastorann .04276 pastor .02824 team .01819	leadership .02619 pastor .06876 committee .0228 staff .01701	leadership .03016 pastorann .04535 pastor .02386 council .03012	leadership .01921 pastorann .03172 pastor .02147 council .0512	.141256

Crawdad Words	Casa para Todos	Bread for the Journey	Mission Central	New Wine	Cross in the Road	Mean
Comparing Words cont.	area .02042	area .01696	area .03075			.013626
		group .05055	group .05015	group .04758	group .07388	.090924
	ministry .0297	ministry .05111	ministry .03731	ministry .04367		
			class .01878	alpha .01672	program .01812	
Top words	people .24045	people .23996	people .19921	people .26382	church .22685	
	church .18252	church .21267	church .14685	church .2595	people .20641	
	thing .13292	time .071	year .11947	thing .08292	thing .10848	
	new .05778	thing .06967	thing .08137	time .04813	group .07388	
	time .05568	ministry .05111	pastor .06876	group .04758	time .07223	
	leadership .04653	group .05055	time .05596	pastorann .04535	council .0512	
	pastorann .04328	place .04384	thiscongregation .0529	new .0445	year .04758	
	school .0387	pastorann .04276	congregation .0516	ministry .04367	service .04662	
	good .03848	part .0411	group .05015	year .04184	congregation .04399	
	congregation .03519	way .03978	Sunday .04642	different .03758	kid .04217	
	pastor .03451	God .03894	community .03937	old .03245	different .03497	
	community .03415	year .03871	ministry .03731	good .03068	new .03322	
	Sunday .03115	school .0372	kid .03235	leadership .03016	good .03312	
	part .0298	different .03513	service .03158	council .03012	part .0331	
	ministry .0297	kid .03509	area .03075	lutheran .0293	pastorann .03172	
	kid .02954	leadership .03191	part .02858	worship .0292	lutheran .03038	
	different .02944	community .0301	life .02779	way .02919	way .02834	
	lutheran .02663	lutheran .02827	new .02756	life .02895	life .02754	
	God .0262	pastor .02824	leadership .02619	God .02883	big .02739	
	big .02574	congregation .02809	school .02383	place .02639	school .02686	
	leader .02396	leader .02765	committee .0228	community .02585	lot .02312	
	place .02319	new .0268	good .02257	big .02568	community .02289	
	council .0213	great .0262	mission .02106	pastor .02386	member .02224	
	year .02128	worship .02487	lutheran .02028	work .02064	pastor .02147	
	stuff .02071	good .02417	class .01878	word .02014	kind .02085	
	area .02042	big .02136	staff .01701	part .01973	leadership .01921	
	mission .02034	youth .02102	worship .01605	kid .01712	family .01906	
	building .02031	kind .019	job .01524	alpha .01672	God .01821	
	worship .01973	team .01819	great .01488	school .0164	program .01812	
	way .01868	area .01696	home .01482	same .01401	prayer .01756	
	same .01835	Sunday .01677	big .01477	passion .01387	choir .01705	
Unique Words		Only team	Only committee	Only Alpha	Only prayer	
			Only staff		Only program	
			Only class		Only choir	
					Only member	
Exceptional Words	No group		No God		No ministry	
		No council	No council			
			No PastorAnn		No worship	

First, it is important to note the consistency of the overall top words. In all of the five congregational systems, using both a simple word count and Crawdad, *people* and *church* rose up as the top words. People was the top word in all but Cross in the Road, and church was the second top word in all but Cross in the Road in which it was the first.[5] The number of times people was used was similar across all systems. (The range was 135-156, with the mean as 145.8.) The number of times church was used varied a bit more, but was still significant. (The range was 108-146, with the mean as 132.6.) Combining people with *community*, referring to the internal community, increased the mean and decreased the range.[6] (The range was 146-159, with the mean as 153.) Combining *congregation* with church, the range also increased, and so did the mean, with Mission Central standing out.[7] (The range was 150-256, with the mean as 189.6 for all congregational systems, and Mission Central has 256, with the next congregational system, Cross in the Road, at 184.) So, people/community and church/congregation were very important across all systems, with church/congregation being extremely important for Mission Central.

Second, both in Crawdad and by word count, *God* surfaced as a top word in four of the five congregational systems,[8] with Mission Central being the exception. (The

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[5]*People* was used 145-143-156-150-135 times respectively (Casa para Todos, Bread for the Journey, Mission Central, New Wine, and Cross in the Road) and had significance of .24045, .23996, .19921, .26382, and .20641 respectively in Crawdad. *Church* was used 108-143-134-146-132 times respectively and had significance of .18252, .21267, .14685, .2595, and .22685 respectively in Crawdad.

[6]*People* plus *community* was used 149-153-159-158-146 times respectively (Casa para Todos, Bread for the Journey, Mission Central, New Wine, and Cross in the Road).

[7]*Church* plus *congregation* was used 150-179-256-179-184 times respectively (Casa para Todos, Bread for the Journey, Mission Central, New Wine, and Cross in the Road).

[8]*God* was used 24-38-13-23-16 times respectively (Casa para Todos, Bread for the Journey, Mission Central, New Wine, and Cross in the Road) and had significance of .0262, .03894, 0, .02883, and .01821 respectively in Crawdad.

range was 13-38, with the mean as 22.8.) Add in other words for God (Jesus, Christ, Spirit, and Lord) and the range and mean increase (The range becomes 22-78, with the mean as 40.8), with Bread for the Journey clearly being the front runner (with 78).[9] Expand this section to include *worship*, and its related elements, *Bible, faith, pray, grace*, and *Lutheran* and one finds greater frequency, with Bread for the Journey again clearly at the top.[10] (The range was 127-241, with the mean as 170.6.) By comparing the means of each of these sections, the section on God is higher than the people section and lower than the church section.

Third, *leadership* appeared in various ways and was voiced as important throughout. By word count, the combination of leadership words occurred more often than people, church, or the section of God words.[11] (The range was 165-248, with the mean as 214.6.) While there was quite a variance among all of the systems, all were higher in the leadership section than they were in the people section. It was not surprising that *pastor* was a top word in all five congregational systems, with Mission Central significantly ahead of the others.[12] What was surprising was that Mission Central was not the highest in using the current pastor by name; Cross in the Road was in word count and

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[9]The total God words used were 31-78-27-46-22 times respectively (Casa para Todos, Bread for the Journey, Mission Central, New Wine, and Cross in the Road).

[10]The total God section was 127-241-167-149-169 times respectively (Casa para Todos, Bread for the Journey, Mission Central, New Wine, and Cross in the Road).

[11]The total leadership section was 189-223-248-165-248 times respectively (Casa para Todos, Bread for the Journey, Mission Central, New Wine, and Cross in the Road) compared to *people* (145-143-156-150-135), *church* (108-143-134-146-132), or the "*God*" section (127-241-167-149-169).

[12]*Pastor* was used 67-67-119-69-76 times respectively (Casa para Todos, Bread for the Journey, Mission Central, New Wine, and Cross in the Road) and had significance of .03451, .02824, .06876, .02386, and .02147 respectively in Crawdad.

Casa para Todos and Bread for the Journey were highest in Crawdad.[13] *Staff, council,*

committee, and *intern* were also key words in this section.[14] Overall, Cross in the Road

and Mission Central had leadership as high in frequency.

Fourth, *context,* was important though not as significant as the already named

sections. *Community, mission,* and *service*[15] were some of the key words present in each

congregational system, but each of the words also had dual meaning so their particular

focus had to be discerned. Include words like *outreach, neighbor,* and *this area* (a code

word given for each time participants named their community) to this section, along with

the list of their particular initiatives and language, and this section grows in frequency.[16]

In general, all of these congregational systems spoke about the realities of their context

and no one particular system stood out. (The range was 55-79, with the mean as 69.4.)

Compared with the other sections, context related words are low in frequency.

Fifth, *ministry* was present in all congregational systems, with various ministries

named. In Crawdad, ministry appeared as the top word in all but Cross in the Road.[17] By

word count, ministry was present in all systems, with Bread for the Journey standing

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[13]*PastorAnn,* the code word in all systems for when participants referred to the current pastor by name, was used 40-30-35-40-47 times respectively (Casa para Todos, Bread for the Journey, Mission Central, New Wine, and Cross in the Road) and had significance of .04328, .04276, 0, .04535, and .03172 respectively in Crawdad.

[14]The total of staff, council, committee, and intern was 34-41-68-39-109 times respectively (Casa para Todos, Bread for the Journey, Mission Central, New Wine, and Cross in the Road).

[15]Because of the dual meaning of these words, it was difficult to discern their meaning in Crawdad. For example, community surfaced in Cross in the Road and, based on a study of the words, it was deemed more internal then external. The same could be said about service in Mission Central. After a study of the text, it seemed to fit more in worship then in outreach. But because of this, the Crawdad numbers are not listed in this category for these words.

[16]The total context section was 67-79-74-72-55 times respectively (Casa para Todos, Bread for the Journey, Mission Central, New Wine, and Cross in the Road).

[17]In Crawdad *ministry* had significance of .0297, .05111, .03731, .04367, and 0 respectively (Casa para Todos, Bread for the Journey, Mission Central, New Wine, and Cross in the Road).

out.[18] (The range was 19-43, with the mean as 26.8.) Other ministries frequently named in each congregational system were *small group/groups*, *class*, and *Sunday School*. The total of all of these ministries, plus the particular ones spoken of in each system, gives one a fuller picture of this section.[19] (The range was 58-106, with the mean as 84.8.) When compared with other section, this section is second in frequency to the context section.

Finally, each congregational system had language which referred to their *mission/purpose*. This section is representative of a cluster of ideas that were repeated throughout the focus groups of each congregational systems with similar, yet slightly different language, and therefore made this the hardest to describe of all the sections. *Mission*, having to do with purpose, and *vision*, were present in all systems, but ironically were not the key words of this section;[20] *change* and *new* were.[21] All five congregational systems spoke about things and people that were new, as well as the change/s they were experiencing. (The range was 50-64, with the mean as 56.8.)[22] Add in words like *intentional* and *values* alongside *call*, *passion*, *gifts*, and *talents* and this section becomes

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[18]*Ministry/ministries* was used 22-43-28-22-19 times respectively (Casa para Todos, Bread for the Journey, Mission Central, New Wine, and Cross in the Road).

[19]The total ministry section was 58-95-106-70-95 times respectively (Casa para Todos, Bread for the Journey, Mission Central, New Wine, and Cross in the Road).

[20]*Mission* was used 10-1-3-5-3 times respectively (Casa para Todos, Bread for the Journey, Mission Central, New Wine, and Cross in the Road) and *vision* was used 13-6-4-8-8 times respectively.

[21]*Change* was used 16-18-10-29-19 times respectively (Casa para Todos, Bread for the Journey, Mission Central, New Wine, and Cross in the Road) and *new* was used 48-41-40-31-21 times respectively. In Crawdad *new* had significance of .05778, .0268, .02756, .0445, and .03322 respectively (Casa para Todos, Bread for the Journey, Mission Central, New Wine, and Cross in the Road).

[22]This range includes *change* and *new* together. See footnote 21.

a dynamic and unique category.[23] (The range was 82-134, with the mean as 108.2.) All

five congregational systems had a purposefulness about their individual and communal

life.

From this primary word analysis, various sections rose up as important (see Table

4.4). Through word count clustering, leadership surfaced with the highest mean (214.6),

followed by church (189.6), God (170.6), people (153.0), mission/purpose (108.2),

ministry (84.8), and context (69.4). Comparing similar clustering of the top words in

Crawdad, church surfaced with the highest influence (.248032), followed by people

(.229970), leadership (.141256), ministry (.090924), God (.070890), mission (.046252),

and context (.013626). It is worth noting that the clusters in word count did not include

exactly the same words as the clusters in Crawdad, so the two cannot be directly

compared to each other.

Table 4.4 Comparing Key Words and Significant Crawdad Words

Key Words		Crawdad	
1. Leadership	214.6	1. Church	.248032
2. Church	189.6	2. People	.229970
3. God	170.6	3. Leader	.141256
4. People	153.0	4. Ministry	.090924
5. Mission	108.2	5. God	.070890
6. Ministry	84.8	6. Mission	.046252
7. Context	69.4	7. Context	.013626

Each of these analysis methods had limitations. In Crawdad the influence was

determined only for nouns based on their significance within a sentence. In this analysis

words with double meanings, like community, could not be separated into various

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[23]The total mission/purpose section was 118-115-82-134-92 times respectively (Casa para Todos, Bread for the Journey, Mission Central, New Wine, and Cross in the Road).

categories. In other words, the meaning behind the word itself could not be extracted. Through the word count analysis, there was the ability to extract the meaning of words that had dual meaning or identify different words used in similar ways. This ability allowed for comparing systems in spite of the variations of language from within each individual system. Here the limitation was human error or judgment. So, while the two analytical lenses are not identical by any means, they do provide two summaries of the same data that operates as conversation partners. With that said, *church* was high and *context* was low in both views, with the other sections dispersed in various orders. All sections, however, were present as significant using both lenses.

Certainly there is more that could be said about both the broad strokes of each section and the particular words or phrases identified within. This section, however, with the profile of the focus groups and these six main sections, is intended to be just an initial analysis of the findings. Word count clustering and significance alone cannot identify the cultural dynamics of these congregational systems and get at their individual genius. There are too many unique characteristics and nuances within each of these faith communities to be mined to let this be the end of the analysis. This, rather, is intended to be the tip of the iceberg, providing the groundwork for a deeper analysis. In an effort to cultivate the themes and deeper insights, one needs to move to this second analysis which will look at clusters of these keys words and highlighting their meanings both within each congregational system individually as well as collectively.

Individual Congregational Systems

There are both commonalities and unique qualities in each of these congregational

systems. Many key words were the same throughout, yet each congregational system has

created its own way of life together, giving various words their own particular meaning.

In an effort to lift up the genius of each of these congregational systems, this analytical

section will lay out the key cultural dynamics that emerged from clustering and

connecting the top words and phrases within each system individually.

Casa para Todos

Casa para Todos has at its core *a gracious and active view of God that drives the*

people of God in this faith community into the world. Said differently, members think that

God's up to something in the lives of the people at Casa para Todos, in their

congregational system, and in the world around them.[24] An active, gracious God is the

center of this community's life together, with worship and accessing God's living Word

as their main touch points.[25] This community of faith "joins with God in creating Christ-

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[24]*God* was used 24 times through the interviews. (Jesus was used 4 times and Christ 3 times.) Phrases which included God were: create a relationship with God; open to God's call; it is amazing how God does stuff; I needed God in my life; God put this place (congregation) here for a reason; I hope they see God through me; join with God in creating a Christ-centered community; create a relationship with God, other people and the world around us; God's love; and it's not what we do but what God does through us. *Grace* specifically was named 3 times, but other phrases also referred to a gracious spirit. Phrases which included grace were: creating a Christ-centered community where grace happens; whether it is hospitality or grace, it's being displayed out there; and the preaching is good, good focus on grace. Other phrases included: I just feel comfortable; neither of the pastors are perfect, but you feel we can relate to them; and I don't know if I could do this, but as I did it I learned. *Call* was used 6 times referring to God calling people into ministry. And 60 times various references were made to connecting to the community in some way. The word *mission* itself was used 20 times, with 10 being focus on mission as outreach. Phrases included: we are a mission church; missional strategies; missional congregation; and mission-minded.

[25]The frequent use of the word *worship* (used 22 times) and *service* (referring to worship 21 times) are one way of demonstrating the centrality of worship in this congregational system. The *Bible* (or equivalents) was used 18 times and the *sermon* was referred to 5 times.

centered community where grace happens and people are equipped and sent to serve"[26] as

their mission statement says.

With an active view of God at the core, *the horizon for this congregational system*

is the changing world around them, and a changing world it is. Located in the largest

county in this study by population, it is more ethnically diverse than the average United

States county, with a high percentage of people whose primary language is not English,

and a higher than United States average poverty level partnered with a lower than United

States average median income.[27] "The activities are very outward focused," as one

member stated. This congregational system is aware that the context in which they live is

not static, but alive, dynamic, and changing.[28] Reaching out to others is always on their

radar and as the world shifts, so must they.[29] Two of their new ministries, the Hispanic

ministry which includes a Spanish worship service and the Recovery ministry, are

tangible expressions of their current tending to this dimension. One focus group

participant said it well, "You hear it regularly in the sermons. We hear that we need to

make our plans for the people not here yet. You cannot not hear that after awhile. It's in

the rhythm of the congregation. It's the very language and how it's structured."

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[26]The mission statement of Casa para Todos was named several times in various focus groups.

[27]The demographics for Casa para Todos are reported in Chapter 3 and were obtained from www.census.gov and based on 2005 census data.

[28]*Change* was used 16 times. *New* was used 48 times.

[29]*Community* surfaced as the 12th most significant word in Crawdad (.03415 in significance) and was used 19 times in referring to the context. Phrases used included: haven't done big events in the community; name in the community; bring the community in; relationship with the community; we allow community organizations to; open to the community; contact with the community; in touch with the needs of the community; and listening to the pulse of the community. Other words that identify connecting with the greater community included: this area (4 times), culture (referring to various ethnic cultures was used 5 times), Hispanic/Spanish (12 times), diversity (5 times), language (6 times), and needs (8 times).

The heart of this congregational system is the people.[30] They know they are the people of God located in a particular place called both to care for each other and live for the sake of the world. Their ministry is missional in that is has a really big door and fosters relationships within that are always open with an eye toward the world and those not among them.[31] The ministry is done communally and is centered on their core as God's people. People at Casa para Todos believe "we are all called"[32] to be God's faithful followers and allow each other to be paradoxically both saint and sinner. Their home, a key metaphor for this faith community,[33] is a network of connected people tending to their own discipleship journey who invite others to join along.

Within Casa para Todos *leadership is shared and dynamic.* The missional view of leadership is ignited by the pastors, but the people of this congregational system take ownership and are empowered to engage in ministry, at times leading and at other times following.[34] While this congregational system is not the smallest, it does have the

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[30]*People* was the number one word that surfaced with Crawdad (145 times and .24045 significance) and was used primarily (89 times) to refer to the people inside the congregational system. Phrases used included: savvy people; people are eager and excited; spectrum of different people; people befriending you; grow to love these people; people are welcoming; and so many people with leadership capacity.

[31]Various words used to describe this dimension were *connect* (15 times), *welcome* (10 times), *open* (14 times), *small groups* (8 times), and *ministry* (22 times). Phrases used included: we are the church (not the building); called to serve people who walk in the door; church is the people; one church with various ministries; not a personality driven church; not called to be comfortable; doesn't look inward; and bridge builder to a broken world.

[32]As one focus group participant said. *Call* was used 6 times referring to people's own callings. *Gifts* (9 times), *talent* (8 times), and *passion* (8 times) are also indicators of this spirit within the congregational system.

[33]*Home* was used 13 times and *house* 6 times; 12 times it was used to directly describe the church community.

[34]*Pastor* was used 67 times, with 40 times referring directly by name to one of the two current pastors. The idea of *servant leadership* was used by the lay leaders to describe leadership in their congregational system 5 times. The word *lead* was used 75 times, referring to *leader* 63 times and *leadership* 32 of those times. *Council* was used 16 times, but not as a prime instigator of ministry. While

smallest number of paid staff, and until just over a year ago were led by one pastor.[35]

This faith community, in order to be involved in the depth and breadth of ministries they have, has needed to do it in partnership between staff and members. One member said it this way, "So many people here are in a leadership capacity, but don't hold any official position." Being a leader here is not as much of a privilege as it is a responsibility and obedience to carrying out God's call for this community.

This congregational system is *shaped by a Lutheran identity*; a dynamic understanding of what it means to be Lutheran.[36] Clearly located in the religious minority, Casa para Todos lives in the shadows of Evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics (with each having at least three times as many members as the Mainline Protestants). Yet this reality has allowed Casa para Todos to take a deeper look at their own Lutheran identity. Under the direction and guidance of their pastoral leadership, this congregational system continually seeks to deconstruct the aspects of Lutheranism that can become trappings or create *insider* exclusivity, while also holding firmly to the core theological aspects that are unique to the Lutheran faith. While the people of Casa para Todos cannot rattle off their core Lutheran DNA, they have key elements embedded within them as a people. This Lutheran community is a saint and sinner people with a gracious view of God that lives for the sake of the world.

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not referred to by the term, lay leadership seemed to emerge most often as a key form of leadership as people faithfully respond to the ministry they feel the church is called into. The people of Casa para Todos just step in to make ministry happen, trusting God will equip them along the way. Several examples of this were talked about with regard to confirmation ministry, adult education, and leading various Bible studies.

[35]This information was obtained during the on-site visit at Casa para Todos.

[36]*Lutheran* was used 16 times, 14 of which refer to Lutheran identity. Phrases used included: have been Lutheran all my life; looking for a Lutheran home; a Lutheran alternative in the Bible-belt; (with regard to worship) you can tell they are all Lutheran; and not too many Lutheran churches have a lot of minorities. However, Word and sacrament was also important, grace was a key identifier, and living in the tension of saint and sinner also highlight Lutheran beliefs.

Casa para Todos is not a proud people, but a purposeful community with a particular calling. "We are not called to be comfortable...I think it's...good to remember where the focus is...it's not on what we do...but what God does through us. If we lose that, we are not the church,"[37] said one of their members. This growing community of faith is not only growing in membership, but in diversity and, most importantly, in its life together as a community of people on a mission from God. In summary, *Casa para Todos is a community of God's people with and for each other, centered by a gracious God at work in their lives, calling them in mission in the world. In worship and through leading together, they engage in ministry with eyes toward the future and the changing world.*

Bread for the Journey

Bread for the Journey is *a community of disciples with an active faith in a living Trinitarian God who are participating in God's mission in a changing world.* While language about God as Trinity was never used, God was spoken about as God, Jesus, and Spirit,[38] whose nature is both communal and sending. The God alive within Bread for the Journey is a missional God and this faith community's view of change is tied directly to

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[37]As said by a focus group participant at Casa para Todos.

[38]In Crawdad (.03894 influence) and in simple word count (38 times), *God* came up the highest at Bread for the Journey of all the five congregational systems. *Jesus* was used 15 times. *Christ* was used 7 times. *Spirit* was used 15 times. *Lord* was used 3 times. In addition, this congregational system used "God" words more than the other systems, with a total of 78 times. Also, *Christian* was used 10 times. *Faith* was used 19 times. *Alive* was used 9 times. And *relationship,* referring to one with God, was used 9 times. Phrases used included: God is here; God is taking us; God is always there as a resource; God working among us; God wants to do something with this group; I feel like God led me here; this is God's facility; Jesus loves you through this place; taking the message of Jesus to the world; Spirit-filled place; Spirit built this place; open to the moving of the Spirit; faith walk; exploring faith; your faith is your own; growing in faith; Holy Spirit is alive; and relationship with God, relationship within community, and then reaching out.

this view of God.[39] "We are a mission church...We are always being challenged to face

outward,"[40] one participant stated. Located within a large, highly educated, and affluent

county, Bread for the Journey has some contextual challenges. Rather than retreat from

them, this faith community has sought to engage them because their view of God

compels them to. The deep missional heart within these people of God comes forth in

their life of faith, expressed through their particular passions, gifts, and calls.[41] Their faith

is actively lived in the world. One member professed it this way, "It is the Holy Spirit

who is alive and in the people of this church and because we love the Lord we allow

diversity. And it is so much more exciting and interesting."

This community of faith is a *storied people sharing power and leadership*.[42]

There is a storyline that lives within the people of this congregational system that has

been passed along and incorporated into the DNA of its people. This congregational

system has the largest staff and has experienced many changes in key leadership, namely

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[39]*Change* was also a key word, used 18 times. Phrases used included: intentional change; dealing with change; our middle name is change; not afraid of change; need to change; change in council; and seeing the Senior Pastor as a change agent. Change is often tied to the movement or leading of the Spirit or based on a vision for the future of this ministry. *Mission* was used 15 times referring to being missional. *Open* was used 10 times. *Community*, referring to the context, was used 23 times. *Neighbor* was used 12 times, 6 times referring to inviting them. *Serve*, or serving or service, was used 13 times. *Outreach* was used 4 times.

[40]As one of the focus group participants said at Bread for the Journey.

[41]*Passion* was used 11 times. *Gifts* was used 12 times. *Call* was used 12 times. *Talent* was used 3 times. Phrases used included: the passion and the vision; we can focus on what we have a passion for; his passion for his faith; one of my passions; intentional and passionate; work with spiritual gifts and passions; find your gifts and get plugged in; applying those gifts into ministry; so many gifts; we are called to serve; called to be leaders; our call is to go out; and serving wherever you are called.

[42]*Lead* was used 80 times, with various lay leadership positions named. *Leadership* was used 34 of those times, with *lay leadership* used 8 times. *Team* was used 19 times, and was the only congregational system in which it showed up in Crawdad's top words. *Equip* was used 11 times. *Empower* was used 6 times. *Mentor* was used 2 times. Phrases used included: Co-lead; God's leading; called to be leaders; raising leaders; new leaders; equip leaders; strong leader; strong lay leadership; high value on lay leadership; lay leadership is very important; lay leadership led worship and sermons; clear purpose within the team; leadership training; Spirit-led leadership; empowering place; equippers; and to be equipped.

in the position of Senior Pastor. These realities have forced the people at Bread for the Journey to think deeply about their identity and how they will move this congregational system forward.

The result has been a consistent message that intentionally guides their present life together, but is rooted in the past and has an eye to the future. It is a story that is not only present within the congregation but in the greater community as well. This is noted in many ways, but mostly by how often they referred to their own ministry and life together which often blurs the lines between them and their context.[43] "This church has been a place that has asserted itself into the community," one mission partner reflected.

Bread for the Journey's shared story is bonded to a posture of shared, strong leadership. The pastors and staff have key roles,[44] but lay leadership is very strong.[45] This dance of sharing leadership has created an empowering environment that is purposeful and adaptive. Their confidence, rooted in their faith in God, allows them to share power and leadership, spreading it across the congregational system. One focus group

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[43]*People* was used 143 times and 101 times referring internally to the community. *Church* was used 37 times to refer to their life together. *Congregation* was used 36 times. *Community* was used 10 times referring to their internal community. Phrases used included: people on fire for God, people with vision, people with ownership, God works through people; people love Jesus; people welcomed; people understand that the Spirit is doing the work here; I've seen it clearly in the people; it's cool to look back and see how God has worked through people; getting involved in this congregation has been wonderful; it is the Holy Spirit who is alive and well in the people of this church; and I see this church as family.

[44]*Pastor* was used 67 times, with one of the pastor's named 30 times. *Staff*, as a term, was used 13 times, plus times when particular staff roles or people were named. *Council* was used 13 times. Phrases used included: Pastor Ann was a strong leader; the pastor always says it's not me; the pastor is clear that is it not about each one of us; our pastor is a change agent; the pastor says we are not perfect; the pastors don't just give us the answer, but say here is something to think about; we do not wait for the pastor or the staff to be the only resource; God was working through me and the team; if the pastors were gone, the church has enough leadership to carry on; and when things start to go off to one side or the other, the pastors, not just the pastors, but certainly the pastors, get people focused back on our relationship with Jesus.

[45]See footnote 41.

participant said it well, "God is taking us where we need to be no matter who is in leadership."

Hosting interns and partnering with a Lutheran seminary, this congregational system has also expanded the reach of their shared leadership. Bread for the Journey sees itself as a teaching/learning faith community with the ELCA. This posture comes not out of a sense of pride, but with a view toward participating in God's mission for the whole church.

The people of Bread for the Journey are *engaged Christian disciples*, and specifically *Lutheran engaged Christian disciples*. First and foremost, they are Christian; Christians hungry to come and learn and grow in their life of faith together.[46]

> What has been a blessing is that I have been allowed to become an adult in my faith...I wouldn't have the same relationship now if I did not come to this faith community. Once I allowed myself to start growing, then I was able to embrace the people here who welcomed us from the first day and who have allowed us to be who we are.[47]

Bread for the Journey's location may offer some clarity in understanding their ministry. The county in which this faith community lives has over half of the people within it as *unclaimed* religious affiliation. Of those claiming religious affiliation, there are five times as many Roman Catholics as Mainline Protestants and almost two times as many Evangelical Protestants as Mainline Protestants. Mainline Protestants are the fifth,

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[46]*Small group* was used 29 times, with 22 focused on participating and 7 on leading. Group was the 5th top word in Crawdad (.05055 significance). *Alpha* was used 7 times. *Class* was used 8 times. *Sunday School* was used 8 times. *Growing* was used 14 times. *Pray* is used 10 times. Phrases used include: we are growing (referring to faith); growing in relationship with the Lord; importance of prayer; prayer for me is essential; pastor's classes; lots of adult Sunday School classes; our small group; with small groups we are still connected; in small groups, application is essential; people in small groups are open; new small group; small groups are the way to know people; one aspect of small groups is they participate in an area of ministry together; all of the current small groups are doing the same thing; encouraged to join small groups; and Alpha has been helpful.

[47]Spoken by one of the focus group participants at Bread for the Journey.

or smallest, category and make up less than one-fifth of the population. An alive, vibrant Lutheran Christian faith in this context is noticeable.

Worship is a central hub of their life, with the sermon and communion as two defining pieces.[48] The people come to worship expecting the Word of God to come alive in the sermon and to be engaged each week in the communal act of celebrating the Eucharist together. In a context with so many Roman Catholics, celebrating the Eucharist weekly has been both a welcoming reality and a redefining element of worship.

Prayer is tied into their worship life together, not rote prayers, but prayer as an expression of their communal journey. Connected directly to their disciple journey is a vibrant Lutheran identity.[49] This identity is related to defining what it means to have a Lutheran expression of being a Christian, not wrapped up in Lutheran traditions, rituals, and polity. Similar to Casa para Todos, being in the minority has forced the people of this faith community to define and articulate their Lutheran identity as people with and without previous Lutheran ties join.

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[48]*Worship* was used 17 times. *Service*, referring to worship, was used 16 times. *Church*, referring to worship, was used 4 times. *Communion* was used 11 times. *Baptism/baptize* was used 7 times. The *sermon, message,* or *preach* was used 19 times. *Sunday morning*, referring to worship, was used 7 times. Phrases used included: preaching right to me; message that challenges; message is so clear; commune every Sunday; enrich people we come in contact with be it Sunday morning or in groups; together on Sunday morning; not some warm fuzzy message – it was a real demand for something; I cried through the whole service; no one has sermons like him (referring to pastor); there is lots of biblical scholarship (referring to the sermon); the sacrament is alive here; inclusive nature of communion; the sermon is the center point; and on Sunday morning we are all hearing the same thing.

[49]*Lutheran* was used 43 times with 11 times referring to Lutheran background, 13 times connected with Lutheran Church, 4 times referring to Lutheran Christians, and 2 times referring to Lutheran theology. *ELCA* was used 2 times. *Grace* was used 4 times. *Sacrament* was used 2 times. *Baptism/baptize* was used 7 times. *Communion* was used 11 times. Phrases used included: this is my first experience with a Lutheran church; know Lutheran has a good theology; Lutheran is an expression; going to a Lutheran church; someone suggested trying a Lutheran church; experience grace; the sacrament is a means of grace, not an ends of grace; the sacrament is alive here; I loving having communion in every service; you can see that in Jesus' baptism; we got a survey from the ELCA; open communion; it is beyond permission giving, it is a theological issue; this is how we experience grace; I love the Lutheran theology; and the core is that we are Christian, not Lutheran. Lutheran is an expression of that.

One participant articulated it this way, "It is not about our politics or social issues or comfort zone, it is all about a community of faith who is growing in faith and taking the message of Jesus to the world."[50] As a community of faith seeking to engage its diverse context from a position of power and resources, Bread for the Journey has accepted its call to be a church for the world. It has done this by being a living, dynamic community of God's people that has a story to tell. In summary, *Bread for the Journey is a community of Christian disciples, following an active, living Trinitarian God, narrating their life together, sharing power and leadership, and participating in God's mission in a changing world.*

Mission Central

Mission Central is a *community of God's people together on a journey with a living God.* For this congregational system, God comes alive in community.[51] Mission Central talked less directly about God by name and talked more about God's love being alive within the people. A previous pastor said this, "We have lay people that love each other, love the Lord, and who love to give of themselves rather then grab for themselves. That's been the spirit." For this community of faith the living God is incarnate.

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[50] As one of the focus group participants said at Bread for the Journey.

[51] *God* was used 13 times. In Crawdad, Mission Central was the only congregational system in which God did not show up as one of the top words. *Jesus* was used 3 times. *Christ* was used 9 times. *Lord* was used 1 time. *Spirit* was used 1 time. *Faith* was used 12 times. *People* was used 156 times, with 103 referring to the people within this congregational system. Phrases used included: caring people; people prayed for me; it wasn't about the pastor, but the people; feel in love with the people; if you let God in, you're going to get more out of life; love God and each other; God's answer to me was; God this is yours; God spoke; for God; live your faith; faith journey; Christian faith; how your faith takes root; using gifts to serve God; mind like Jesus Christ; love the Lord; and still growing in my faith.

Worship is central for this faith community.[52] The proclaimed Word is important and remembered. A member of Mission Central professed, "You come every Sunday here and are fed. It is solid. You can go out in your screwed up world, 'cuz Sunday's coming." For the people at Mission Central, the opportunity to confess and commune is vital and they rely on its regularity. The various styles of worship welcome a diverse group of people into this defining element of their community.[53] Worship provides the opportunity for this whole body to express who they are as a people on a journey together.

Mission Central is *a community of humble saints and sinners, deeply and variously connected with God and each other.*[54] "The expectation is just that you come. We want you here, everything else is a bonus. We want you here and worshipping," as one focus group participant explained. Three things are important about this faith

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[52]*Worship* was used 20 times. *Service*, referring to worship, was used 24 times. *Communion* was used 10 times. *Sermon, message,* and *preach* was used 11 times. *Baptism/baptize* was used 5 times. Phrases used included: incredible sermon; the sermon got me; one of the top five sermons; I remember the sermon; the power of communion; from the beginning we could not have worship without confession and communion; excellent worship; fell in love with the service; worship is central; the actually breaking of the bread was very important to me. I knew it was real. It drew me in; People remember Sunday. Tears came to my eyes three times this past weekend during the hymn, the pastor's sermon, and when the Director of Music sang; and the sermon is on the internet. I go back and listen.

[53]The times worship services are held became a way of talking about these three different styles of worship. For example, of the 24 times service was used to talk about worship, 8 of those times referred to a particular worship service. The 11:00 service is the traditional. The 8:30 service is a blended service. The 9:50 service is the contemporary. Phrases used included: we went to the 8:30 service and fell in love; at the 9:50 service; a large number of 8:30 people who hang around to catch the 9:50 people; we're 9:50 people, that's our style; that's a lot of work for the pastors to do three services; we won't be there at the 11:00; and some people still want the traditional Lutheran, whereas I get stifled.

[54]One previous pastor at Mission Central said, "The fact that we come at this thing as a bunch of sinners, very imperfect, and have confession at every service. There doesn't seem to be a presumptuousness around here. Everyone seems to know who they are. They love God and each other. I think we have to give some credit to our theology."

community. The first is how they interact with one another.[55] Love is a critical descriptor of the people here. But it is not just any kind of love, it is a love that allows people to be who they are, broken pieces and all.[56] The love they have for one another stems out of the knowledge that they are also loved by God. This communal bond is embedded in the overarching story of who they are and want to be. One focus group participant said, "There's continuity from twenty-five years ago...It's a strength of this church. It's continuous, not starting over all the time." The telling and retelling of their own accepting and belonging story continually draws in new people, both enhancing and enlivening their life together.

The second thing that's important to the community of Mission Central is that they know what they are about, both individually and communally: they are to be people growing in faith and engaged in ministry.[57] This quiet service is a gift to those receiving

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[55]One focus group participant at Mission Central said, "I think part of the healthiness is that we enjoy socializing together."

[56]*Love* was used 31 times. As mentioned earlier, *people* was also used extensively to talk about the internal community. *Support* was used 12 times. *Fellowship* was used 11 times, plus 11 times specific fellowship events were named. *Fun* was used 7 times. *Social* was used 2 times referring to gathering together. Phrases used included: people love staff; people love each other; people love the church; people love God; support each other's ministries; a lot of support; the support network; strength and support; sent me to love the people; we have two pastors we love; she loved the feel of the congregation; I love our church; everyone loves what they do; love to give of themselves; social agenda; people aren't proud; it's the most humble group of people; there's an emotionality in this congregation and it is not cheesy; very humble, no fanfare and I think what helps is the focus on worship; and we have lay people that love each other and love the Lord.

[57]*Ministry* was used 28 times. *Education* was used 21 times. *Class* was used 18 times. *Sunday School* was used 31 times, with half referring to adult Sunday School. *Confirmation* was used 5 times. *Bible* was used 13 times. *Small Groups* was used 8 times. Phrases used included: model of doing ministry; private ministry; so much ministry is happening among the members; what ministry people do during the week; you don't have to be up front to do ministry, it's a gift to do it quietly; joined a small group; this congregation's small groups; four of the reference to Bible Study were with regard to youth; I've been a patient in the hospital for the last two years and people prayed for me. People that didn't even know me would come up and ask how I was doing; and everyone is doing quite amazing work.

and those engaged in it. For the people of Mission Central it is as they learn, lead, and serve that they grow deeper in their own faith journey.

Finally this community is led communally. The pastors are very important here, but ironically, it is not a pastor-led ministry. One member lifted this up by saying, "I think we are congregation-led, not pastorally-led." As a congregation with the shortest Senior Pastor tenure (one year), this element partially explains why they have experienced such a smooth transition. This congregational system also has a large staff which surrounds the pastoral leadership, many serving part-time. The staff's main role is to invite, equip, and release people to serve, allowing lay leadership to step in and engage ministry, primarily on the front lines.[58] Their mission statement articulates this aspect well, for Mission Central is called to "share the love of Christ as a community with the community."[59]

While the people within Mission Central are vital to their life together, they also are *living their faith everyday and seeking to find intersections in the world to help others and to share their resources*. Mission Central is located within a context that is primarily White, well above the United States average of Whites, has a low level of poverty, and an average high school drop out rate. But there are needs in their area, both in their immediate proximity and in the greater metropolitan region that the people of Mission

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[58]*Pastor* was used 119 times, the most of any of the five congregational systems. In Crawdad, it was the number 5 top word (.06876 significance). Previous pastors were referred to 36 times and the current pastors were referred to by name 35 times. This was the only congregational system in which the Pastor by name did not appear in the top words in Crawdad. *Council* was used 19 times. *Staff* was used 27 times, and this does not include the times various positions were named. *Lay* was used 14 times, with 7 referring to lay leadership. Phrases used included: there is confident leadership, they don't feel threatened; one of the staff invited us; our staff work hard; every staff was so pleased to be where they were, doing what they were doing; we have two pastors that we love; council functions mostly as rubber stamps; coordinating with the staff person; bring it to church council; I don't think we would do anything without the blessing of the council and staff; no pastor teaches adult education; and it goes back to lay leadership.

[59]The mission statement of Mission Central was shared in the focus group.

Central seek to engage. As a previous pastor who just recently served in an interim capacity said, "I was overwhelmed again at how much ministry is happening among the members of this congregation, most of which nobody knows about." There is a deep missional expression of this faith community.[60] This is a community that is outward facing, turned toward the world. They enjoy being together, but they know that God's people look for ways to be God's presence in the world. This missional, external focus changes the world, but also makes its way back into the congregational system, changing the people.

Mission Central is *tied to the Lutheran Church*, sometimes leading, sometimes following. Located in a county that has half of its population with unclaimed religious affiliation, there are four times as many Evangelical Protestants as Mainline Protestants, and two times as many Roman Catholics. Yet Mission Central has established itself within its context, both as a church and as an ELCA church. Historically, many in this congregational system have Lutheran roots and Mission Central continues to draw in other Lutherans. Hence, this community of faith has a Lutheran identity and seeks to maintain it. Mission Central sees itself embedded within the overall ELCA, particularly expressed through their connection with their particular synod, but also in the planting of other ELCA congregations in their area. In addition this congregational system seeks to

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[60]*Community* was used 23 times referring to the context. In Crawdad, it was the number 11 top word (.03937 significance). *This area* was used 8 times. *Mission* was used 27 times referring to missional activities, with 12 focused on being a mission congregation. *Outreach* was used 7 times. *Social,* referring to outreach, was used 4 times. In addition, giving money away was referred to in some way 19 times. Phrases used included: missional sense; mission outreach; missioned two congregations; mission start; outreach ministry of this congregation; outreach to the poor; non-structured outreach; we do more outreach than any other church in the area; money just shows us; give away money; raised money for…; tithed the building campaign; the Senior High went to a family's house to help them move. She started to cry. They helped the whole day; we go through Lutheran Helping Hands. It has been such a gift to us. These people have cancer; the funds just flow; it's the most active congregation we've been in; and there's opportunity for involvement.

participate in the missional arm of the Lutheran Church through their tie to mission work around the world.[61]

One member summed up the spirit of Mission Central is this way:

The Lutheran theology keeps our focus on the center which is Christ and seeking first the kingdom and all else will follow....That's what drew us to this congregation, the focus on the center. And there's one thing in our life that's rock solid and that's this congregation. It's the most humble group of people.

Mission Central, a large congregational system by ELCA standards, located in an area in which Lutherans are the minority, has established itself as a vibrant ELCA mission post. In summary, Mission Central is a *Lutheran community of God's humble people, connected to each other on a journey with a living, God seeking to live their faith in the world.*

New Wine

There is rhythm to New Wine's life together. They are *a welcoming community that believes in an active, relational God, who, on their shared journey of discipleship, come together for spiritual growth, worship, and prayer, and then are sent into the world.*[62] People enter at various points in this rhythm. As a staff member at New Wine

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[61]*Lutheran* was used 36 times. *ELCA* was used 9 times. *Synod* was used 14 times. *Global Mission* was used 6 times. *Theology* was used 4 times. Phrases used included: missionary trip; mission fund; mission congregation; Lutheran all my life; grandfather was a Lutheran pastor; confirmed Lutheran; I love the ELCA; women of the ELCA; want traditional Lutheran; most Lutheran services; I'm a new Lutheran; we, as Lutherans; Lutheran theology; embodied theology; I think we have to give some credit to our theology; and birth other ELCA congregations.

[62]*God* was used 23 times, 13 of which referred to an active God. *Jesus* was used 6 times. *Christ* was used 3 times. *Spirit* was used 12 times. *Lord* was used 2 times. *Pray* was used 14 times. *Worship* was used 18 times. *Service,* referring to worship, was used 7 times. *Faith* was used 12 times. *Sermon, preach,* and *message* were used 15 times. Phrases used included: God had a plan; God's over it; God has been forming me; God is inviting me to; God has gifted me; God is good; tell my God story; Spirit with us, leads us; Spirit moves; through the Spirit; Spirit worked; filled with the Spirit; Spirit is doing; believe in Jesus; Christ is the center; seek God first; God's kingdom; faith journey; all about faith; ready to explore Christianity in a safe environment; coming to faith; experience worship; participate in worship; worshipping; and she would pray with people.

said, "To create belonging is what we are about, so there is some intentionality about that. That's one of the things we try to teach and model, to make outsiders insiders. We invite them into our community." Located in a very large, diverse metropolitan area in which they are in the religious minority, the people of New Wine recognize the importance of being open and welcoming and the need to articulate who they are as a people. As they have focused on this, new people have come.

Some people come to New Wine seeking a community with which to partner in their faith journey. Other people were welcomed first, drawn into the life of this community second, and then came to believe. Some people experienced God through one of New Wine's mission partners as they engaged the world. One staff member put it this way, "We don't tell them there is any other way to be a Christian except to reach out to your neighbor and be present in the community."[63] This is the basic way New Wine goes about its life. In the end, it does not matter how or where one encounters this congregational system, for this approach is not a formula of discipleship, but rather an authentic, organic community seeking to discover an embodied missional life together.

The people of New Wine are *authentic, forgiven people, openly accepting of each other and others.*[64] "For people that have been here awhile or people that are new, to have this be a place of belonging"[65] is one of their goals. The people within this congregational

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[63] As one of the New Wine staff said.

[64] Mission partners of People of New Wine range from life-long Lutherans to people new to the Christian faith. During the visit to New Wine we met three people that were very new to the Christian faith, two had practiced Buddhism and one was a Mormon.

[65] As one of the focus group participants of New Wine said.

system are the church and they are friendly, gifted, open, inviting,[66] and have their

neighbor in view.[67] The ministries are missionally driven with a blend between an

internal focus on spiritual growth, with ministries like Alpha, and an external focus on

inviting, with various events and outreach opportunities.[68] This posture has emerged only

recently with the coming of the new pastor and the fostering of a renewed missional

identity. As one participant stated, "The church is only the church when it exists for the

sake of others. If we are not existing for the sake of others, then we are not really being

the church."

Within New Wine, *the leadership, a reflection of the diverse make-up of people*

within this faith community, is focused on discerning God's leading as it seeks to stay

open to the world around them.[69] Interestingly enough, New Wine is the smallest

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[66]*People* was the number one word used 150 times, 95 of which referred to the internal community. *Open* was used 12 times. *Friend/friendly* was used 12 times. *Invite/inviting* was used 13 times. *Gifts* was used 18 times. *Passions* was used 8 times. *Call* was used 4 times. *Talent* was used 3 times. *Connect* was used 11 times. Phrases used included: the people kept us here; people are warm; bringing people in; people are friendly; new people; invite people; use my gifts; God-given gifts; gifts and passion; passion of mine; gift of belonging; we invite them; someone invited me; we have things to invite people to; arms wide open; very open; open-minded; openness; and open to others.

[67]*Community* was used 26 times, 17 of which referring to the context. *Serve/serving/service* was used 12 times. *Neighbor/neighborhood* was used 17 times. In addition, 14 specific outreach events were named. *Mission* was used referring to being missional 17 times, 7 times referring to their mission partners. Phrases used included: a program that allowed our community to come in and get help; these guys have done a great job reaching out to the community; when I am interacting with my neighbor; to reach out to your neighbor; be a presence in the community; we invite them into our community; some start serving before they believe in Jesus; we don't have the diversity we'd like from the community; everyone is invited; this congregation is called to the neighborhood and it does things all year long; mission team; mission arm of church; missional church; and give us cards to distribute to our neighborhood.

[68]*Alpha* was used 19 times. *Ministry* was used 22 times. Phrases used included: Alpha has done something with the DNA of the church; Holy Spirit is using Alpha; people involved in ministry; that's why I am in ministry; calling in ministry; ministry here; the heart of this ministry; empower people to do ministry; and your ministry.

[69]*Lead* was used 40 times, *leader* made up 32 of the 40, and *leadership* made up 25 of the 40. *Team* was used 10 times, often referring to team leadership. *Pastor* was used 69 times, with 40 times referring to the current pastor by name, and 20 times referring to the role of pastor. *Staff* was used 17 times. *Council* was also used 17 times. In Crawdad, the current Pastor by name (.04525 significance), leadership (.03016 significance), council (.03012 significance), and pastor (.02386 significance) all were in the top

congregational system, but does not have the smallest staff. While all but two of their

staff are new since the arrival of the new pastor, bringing people with diverse

backgrounds to the staff has forced the paid leadership to widen its view of the church.

Council and staff are the main leadership hubs with the role of guiding this

congregational system, but because they are small almost everyone is actively involved in

leading in some way. As one person said, "This is our church and we have tasks to do."

The people within New Wine are able to lead because they know their guiding values and

are together shaping the vision for the future.[70]

Yet change has needed to happen. As the pastor said, we are "unwavering about

change, but also unwavering at honoring the people who are here." Change, within New

Wine, is a direct result of keeping their neighbor on their radar and of welcoming the

stranger. The reality of change has challenged this faith community to partner, adapt, and

revision itself in order to reach those around them. One focus group participant stated it

this way, "we are building bridges with all different organizations within our community,

like our neighborhood, and with other churches." This little faith community knows it

can't go it alone, so they have opened their imagination to new approaches to ministry

and mission.

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words. Phrases used included: empowering leaders; asked me to lead some music; we, as a staff, started thinking; one of the focuses is on team leadership; mission team; from a leadership perspective; one good thing Pastor X does is he always turns everything back to the main thing; it is about the heart of these people, the leadership of the pastor and the staff and it is reflected in the people who come here; the leadership of the church is excellent; and prayer team.

[70]*Guiding values* was used 11 times. *Vision* was used 8 times. *Intentional* was used 7 times. *Purpose* was used 4 times. *Goal* was used 6 times. Phrases used included: one of the five principles this church has is building bridges with the community; we worked hard at establishing a true vision and mission; we established five guiding values; the guiding values are active and alive; they really are guiding values; we use the guiding values as the agenda for council; we all had input into shaping this vision; we had vision forums; one of our guiding values is striving for excellence; people coming into a common goal; it's obvious the passion that the church as to its mission; trying to be intentional about bringing people in; and the vision is absolute clear, to go out and touch people that don't know Jesus.

Lutheran historically, New Wine is seeking to reinvent itself, *keeping a Lutheran core, but seeking to stay connected to their changing world, they are willing to adapt and be flexible.*[71] With one hundred times as many people with *unclaimed* as their religious affiliation as Mainline Protestant, many of the neighbors of New Wine have no Christian language or background from which to begin a conversation. Not only has New Wine learned to live in the religious minority, but they have had to rediscover their particular Lutheran identity living only a few miles away from the largest ELCA church in their state. The New Wine flavor of Lutheranism is not rigid, but seeks to embody Lutheran theology as it draws in people from various faith traditions, including non-Christian.

As the oldest congregational system studied, that had its first decade as its most vibrant, New Wine has had to come to terms with their new reality. They had to change or die. This congregational system could not survive in this context as a traditional, program-driven Lutheran church. In the midst of all this, the pastor named the reality:

> Tension is all about being Lutheran. There are people that it is important to have that Lutheran identity, but what does it really mean to be Lutheran? There's more to being Lutheran than robes and hymnals. We have tried to get back to Luther's heart, as we perceive it, for the church.

New Wine is a congregational system undergoing transformation. "It is a process for people to come to faith, it's a relational process, and we try to build relationships wherever they are," said one focus group participant. "We try to remove speed bumps

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[71]*Lutheran* was used 21 times, referring to Lutheran church was 7 times, growing up Lutheran 5 times, and Lutheran identity 6 times. *ELCA* was used 2 times. *Change* was used 29 times, 12 times referring to feelings about change. Phrases used included: what does it mean to be Lutheran; Lutheran theology; tension is all about being Lutheran; the Lutherans; change worship; culture changed; a lot of changes; things changed; change is hard, change or die; process of change; this might be counter-ELCA, but we are really big into access into the means of grace; people come to faith through coming to the table; our table is a really big part of our worship experience; and change the name (this church changed their name a few years back).

when people come to faith. We try to make the main thing the main thing."[72] The main

thing for this faith community is to be faithful followers of Jesus living in and for the

world. In summary, *New Wine is God's people living as a discipling community,*

discerning God's leading as it is open to and sent into the world.

Cross in the Road

Cross in the Road is *a community of the baptized that is Spirit-led and mission-*

driven. God is at work in the people within this community of baptized believers.[73] "We

provide a place for people to explore their faith without too many restrictions,"[74] one

member reported. The people here believe the Spirit is leading them internally as a

community as well as into the world.[75] As one council member said, "The Spirit really

leads us. As the council, we'd like to have it out front leading us, but we do a lot of things

on faith, because we truly believe that it will be there if we need it."[76] Faith is what

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[72]As one of the focus groups participants at New Wine said.

[73]*God* was used 16 times, 13 referring to an active God. *Jesus* was used 1 time. *Spirit* was used 5 times and *spiritual* 4 times. *Faith* was used 26 times, 16 referring to an active faith, 4 times as a descriptor of the people, and 6 times naming three of their programs. While *baptism/baptize* was only used 7 times, this is a congregational system that knows a faith rooted in baptism and seeks to actively nurture it individually and as a community. Phrases used included: nurture faith; faith development; explore their faith; discovering who we are in our faith; move out in faith; faithful followers; Jesus would have you live; relationship with God; activity of God in their life; with God's help; God calling us; God loves everyone; promise to the child and to God; it's not mine, it's God's; stirring from God; there is such a powerful faith here; follow the Spirit; Spirit leads us; spiritual leaders; building spiritually; and spiritual history.

[74]As one of the focus group participants at Cross in the Road said.

[75]*Community* referring to context was used 15 times. *Service* and *serve* was used 23 times. *Need* referring to the need or needs of the external community was used 13 times. *World* was used 4 times. *Outreach* was used 4 times. Phrases used include: at our base, we do church in the world; we need to help others; we could serve those people; outreach of this church; Grace Groups…to study, learn, share, and serve; God's calling us to take whatever talent we have and serve; that's one of our ministries that reaches out to other people; we are very much an outreach; our preschool is an outstanding outreach; maybe a satellite church to serve the Mexican American community; people that serve Salvation Army lunches; and when you serve, it humbles you.

[76]As one of the focus group participants at Cross in the Road said.

guides the people here, both individuals and as a congregational system, as they see themselves as "a place that prepares people for life."[77] The leadership understands the complexity and harsh realities life affords.

Operating within a Lutheran framework Cross in the Road has developed a theology of discipleship, service, and worship.[78] At the center of this congregational system lies worship, which draws the community together, sets the tone for their shared life, and offers various opportunities for leading. The music, and specifically their choir, enhances and enlivens the liturgy and the proclaimed Word.[79] The weekly sermons shape and challenge this congregational system's dynamic view theology of discipleship and challenge them to engage the world around them.[80]

The liturgy, while shaped around elements of a traditional Lutheran worship service, is fresh and vibrant, having allowed the gifts, talents, and passions of the people

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[77]A phrase used several times in various focus groups and which serves almost as a mission or purpose statement for Cross in the Road.

[78]*Lutheran* was used 19 times, referring to Lutheran identity 8 times. *ELCA* was used 5 times. Phrases used included: wonderful reputation among people who are not Lutheran; other ELCA churches; continue to be Lutheran; there are a few large Lutheran churches; was born and raised Lutheran; the Lutheran church; confirmed Lutheran; connected with the Lutheran church; they give like Lutherans; we worship in a Lutheran tradition; I wasn't ELCA; life-long Lutherans; and Lutheran Book of Worship.

[79]*Worship* was used 19 times. *Service* referring to worship was used 23 times. *Church* referring to worship was used 5 times. *Sunday morning* referring to worship was used 2 times. This congregational system, however, was the only one of the five in which worship did not come up in Crawdad in the top words. The *choir*, however, did (as the 31st word with a significance of .01705). Choir was used 23 times. *Music* was used 12 times, 10 referring to music in worship. Phrases used included: worship experience; worshipping; worship in a Lutheran tradition; in worship; worship style; our pastors are very well-grounded in preaching from Scripture; we gave them a place to worship; they want you in worship; the music is upbeat without being praise; music plays a pretty big role here; set new music to create a new liturgy; we have a beautiful choir; I'd love to have the choir sing every Sunday; our music is enjoyable; and inviting people to join the choir.

[80]*Sermon* was used 5 times. *Preach* was used 10 times. *Message* was used 2 times. Phrases used included: in classes and sermons we try to give people tools; their messages usually do that; they make you look at yourself; our pastors give good sermons; they bring it into their sermons; it's in the preaching; the message is fresh.

within this faith community to be incarnated in unique ways. Within this liturgy are markings of their communal faith journey, i.e. the seven blessings that are part of the Faith Stepping Stones ministry. One focus group participant said this about Faith Stepping Stones, "It reminds parents continually that they have made a promise to their child and to God. That's a really important aspect of the congregation." In other words, the liturgy is the work of the people in this faith community.

Cross in the Road is located in a county where there is a greater percentage of people claiming affiliation to the Christian faith. This context, with Mainline Protestants falling between Roman Catholics and Evangelical Protestants, has allowed them to maintain more of a traditional Lutheran identity, even though some of that traditionalism is currently being questioned. Yet even within this traditional Lutheran frame there is considerable attention given to keeping it alive and vibrant.

Missional discipleship emerges out of continued learning, service, and being alongside one another. Ministries are the main mechanism for nurturing faith and flow into and out of their worship life.[81] Many of these ministries are common to other congregations, yet Cross in the Road has created them with their own unique DNA of faith development, learning, and outreach. Located in the smallest county in this study, Cross in the Road has the members with the highest educational attainment, very affluent, and primarily consists of Whites. Yet the people of this faith community have been

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[81]*Ministry/ministries* was used 19 times. *Program* was used 17 times. In addition, particular ministries were named: *confirmation* was used 19 times, *Sunday School* was used 15 times, *groups* was used 11 times, *class* was used 8 times, *education* was used 7 times, and *youth* was used 8 times. Phrases used included: in classes; the pastor's class; this is a ministry; small group ministry is called Grace Groups; in the education program there is a lot of leadership there; I've been a small group leader; preschool ministry; youth ministry; confirmation guide; service ministry; there's service in confirmation; we write our own Sunday School curriculum; we've had to change our Sunday School; now there is an adult class during confirmation time; team ministry; (worship) is the priority over Sunday School; youth program; and junior guide program.

challenged on a regular basis to not let this reality blind them of the real needs present around them and in the world in general.

As the people of this faith community participate in and lead various ministries, relationships are created.[82] In other words, the people of this congregational system do not gather simply to be together, their gathering is purposeful; to actively live out their calling as God's people. This common purpose challenges traditional age-segregated groupings and other typical boundaries and pulls together unique sub-groups of people.

Leadership is centered on the pastors and council as together they set the direction for Cross in the Road, but it is a shared leadership as people become involved, are empowered, and take ownership. This congregational system has transformed a pastor-council-committee leadership structure into a shared leadership partnership that seeks both to model and ignite spiritual growth as well as tend to the business, ministry, and vision of Cross in the Road.[83] With the longest pastoral tenure and the least number of pastoral transitions, the relational base on which these two co-pastors lead has created

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[82]*People* was used 135 times, referring 84 times to the internal community. *Community* was used 26 times, 11 referring to the internal community and 15 referring to the context.

[83]*Lead* was used 46 times, referring to *leader* 38 times, and *leadership* was used 24 times. *Pastor* was used 76 times, with 47 referring to the current pastors by name. In Crawdad the current pastor by name was the number 15 top word (.03172 significance). *Council* was used 55 times. In Crawdad council was the number 6 top word (.0512 significance). *Staff* was used 21 times. *Committee* was used 20 times. *Team* was used 7 times. *Intern* was used 13 times. Phrases used included: (referring to council) we focus on our faith development also; as a council we can only model that to the congregation if we've done it ourselves; one thing that struck me (as a new council member) was the faith of the members; we (council) spend lots of time in prayer and reflection; this congregation has a lot of leadership; the council retreat…it's about building spirituality, community, and family…and visionary; (council retreat) it's strictly reading the Bible and getting into deep discussions and discovering who we are in our faith; (talking about setting the vision) there's an intentional focus on Scripture; any change that happens in the church has to start and grow from the council; it is not a top-down driven organization. It's a bottom-up; it's like we move out in faith and it happens; we really do work out of faith; we are capable and we will step up; the pastors do a lot to keep us enthused, but there are powerful leaders here; we raise up leaders. We raise faithful leadership and faithful followers; and the council sets the direction for the church.

a high level of trust and afforded them the opportunity to challenge each other and take risks. One of the current financial risks included becoming a site for seminary interns.

The main driver of this faith community is the Holy Spirit. The formal leaders believe this, allowing them to live in the tension between planning and being open to God's leading. As one member said, "I think one of the interesting paradoxes that we're still trying to figure out is, 'How can we continue to be Lutheran, on the one side, and popular and appealing and grow, on the other side?' We tend to fall to, 'Let's just follow the Spirit.'"[84]

"This church is the first church I've been to that's given me a way to live my faith,"[85] one member confessed. Cross in the Road is a mature congregational system, confident in its ministry and mission, yet allows itself to not become too comfortable or complacent. Grounded in Lutheran theology and tradition, the community of faith is equipping God's people to be mission-minded followers of Jesus. In summary, *Cross in the Road is a Lutheran missional community of the baptized led by the Spirit into the world seeking to faithfully worship, learn, and serve together.*

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[84]Spoken by one of the focus group participants at Cross in the Road.

[85]Spoken by one of the focus group participants at Cross in the Road.

Table 4.5 Cultural Dynamics of Each Congregational System

Casa para Todos	A gracious and active view of God that drives the people of God in this faith community into the world.
	The horizon is the changing world.
	The heart of this community of faith is the people.
	Leadership is shared and dynamic.
	Shaped by a Lutheran identity.
	A community of God's people with and for each other, centered by a gracious God at work in their lives, calling them in mission in the world. In worship and through leading together, they engage in ministry with eyes toward the future and the changing world.
Bread for the Journey	A community of disciples with an active faith in a living Trinitarian God who is participating in God's mission in a changing world.
	Storied people sharing power and leadership.
	Engaged Lutheran Christian disciples.
	A community of Christian disciples, following an active, living Trinitarian God, narrating their life together, sharing power and leadership, and participating in God's mission in a changing world.
Mission Central	A community of God's people together in a journey with a living God.
	A community of humble saints and sinners deeply and variously connected with God and each other.
	People living their faith everyday and seeking to find intersections in the world to help others and share their resources.
	A community of faith tied to the Lutheran Church.
	A Lutheran community of God's humble people connected to each other on a journey with a living God seeking to live their faith in the world.
New Wine	A welcoming community that believes in an active, relational God, who together on a shared journey of discipleship, come together for spiritual growth, worship, and prayer, and then sent into the world.
	Authentic, forgiven people, openly accepting of each other and others.
	Leadership, a reflection of the diverse make-up of people within this faith community, is focused on discerning God's leading as it seeks to stay open to the world around them.
	Keeping a Lutheran core, but seeking to stay connected to their changing world, they are willing to adapt and be flexible.
	God's people living as a discipling community, discerning God's leading as they are open to and sent into the world.
Cross in the Road	A community of the baptized that is Spirit-led and mission-driven.
	Operating within a Lutheran framework, this faith community has developed a theology of discipleship, service, and worship.
	Missional discipleship emerges out of continued learning, service, and being alongside one another.
	Leadership is centered on the pastors and council as together they set the direction for this community, but it is a shared leadership as people become involved, are empowered, and take ownership.
	A Lutheran missional community of the baptized led by the Spirit into the world seeking to faithfully worship, learn, and serve together.

Comparing Congregational Systems

This deeper analysis of these congregational systems individually makes it clear that each of them is unique, where they take into account the particulars of their context and the congregational system's history, as well as an overarching Lutheran identity. Yet there are also several commonalities that surfaced. While the previous section sought to lift up the unique cultural dynamics of each system and their relationship to their context, this final section will lift up the common cultural dynamics that have been identified upon comparing these five systems. These themes are related to: view of God, view of the world, discipleship, the congregational system, leadership, ministry, Lutheran identity, and change.

Theme One: An Active and Present God

The core of these five congregational systems is similar; *all have a view of God that is active and alive in the world and working within them as a community of faith and as individuals.* For some systems this was credited to the Spirit, for others it was articulated as a vibrant faith journey, but for all five God was identified as being at work leading, guiding, challenging, and empowering. Worship, not surprisingly, was the main communal encounter with this active and present God, providing the compass that keeps each of these faith communities focused. Worship was the main hub of each of these congregational systems.

Many things were important in worship, but two things are non-negotiable – the proclaimed Word and being a community which celebrates the sacraments together. Each system's worship experience looked different and had a different personality, but if there was only one key cultural dynamic to be identified throughout all systems, worship

would be it. In worship, God is expected to show up and be present. The people have come to expect that, and just as God is the center of worship, worship in turn centers them as a community, for mission and ministry, and personally, for daily living. God and worship define the core of these missional congregational systems.

<div align="center">Theme Two: The World as the Horizon</div>

With God and worship as the center, what defines the edges? The answer is the changing world. *Each of these congregational systems has an outward focus, an eye to the future, and exists for the sake of the world.* Each of these faith communities has incorporated into its self-understanding an identity shaped around reaching out to people outside the church. Said differently, they exist to love their neighbor and welcome others. Perhaps this understanding has come from the reality that all of these congregational systems are living in parts of the United States in which Mainline Christians are in the minority and so they have accepted the fact that ELCA Lutherans no longer live in a Christian context. Or perhaps this perspective has emerged out of their understanding that God's creative and redemptive mission is not just present in the church, but God's mission is in and for the world in partnership with the church. No matter how they have arrived here, the truth is is that all systems grasp this reality and as a result are blurring the lines between church and the world. People in these congregational systems see real needs in the world and they, as individuals and communities, seek to engage the world in God's name and participate in God's creative and redemptive mission.

It is important to note two critical reflections on how these systems see their relationship to the world. First, being a church with the world as the horizon is one of the critical elements of what it means to be a missional church, yet the language of missional

church was not prevalent among the people in these faith communities. Some of the leadership used missional language as they articulated what they were about, but most of the people within these systems used other language, like neighbor, inviting others, serving the needs of people, or living for the sake of the world. This is worth noting because the people within these systems are not consistent or clear about this aspect of their life together. This leads this researcher to believe that they are in the early stges of their missional understanding.

Second, the majority of the language used to articulate this aspect was about *doing*, rather than *being* missional. It seemed, from this researcher's perspective, that the doing of acts of mission were the first part of the transformation of a congregation toward being missional. People were able to get their head around helping others, serving tangible needs, and inviting their neighbor. However, a shift in attitude, that the church exists not to add more members to its roster but to share the good news of Jesus Christ with others through one's words, actions, and attitude, is a deeper shift. For some of these systems that deeper shift has taken place across the majority of the faith community, for others it still rests primarily within the leadership. For these reasons, it can be concluded that these congregational systems are at various points in making the transformation toward being a missional church.

Theme Three: Discipleship as a Way of Life

With God and worship as the center and the world as the horizon, discipleship was their way of life together. *The people within each of these congregational systems are passionate about their faith and are on a journey, individually and communally.* The discipleship way of life within these five systems have some common characteristics.

First, there was a humble spirit present in the people, an understanding that they were both saint and sinner. People were aware of their brokenness, but were also aware of the gracious gift they have received from God. Second, there was a curiosity within these people. While they had confidence that God was among them and active in their lives, they were also open to the mystery of God and interested in learning and growing in their faith. Third, there was diversity among the people in each of these faith communities that provided an enriching and dynamic atmosphere, forcing them to continually redefine themselves as a community of faith. People within these systems came from various faith backgrounds, from lifelong Lutherans to new Lutherans, from no faith background to being raised in a Christian home. Some people knew the language of the Christian faith, while others were just learning it. Regardless of where one was on their journey, this eclectic group of people all found common ground in striving toward having a lived faith that connected with and mattered in the world. Framed theologically, there was a lived practice of the priesthood of all believers, of being called and sent, and of being God's presence in the world through one's various vocations.

Theme Four: The Congregational System as a Network of People

These congregational systems were messy and it was hard to figure out how this discipleship as a way of life became embedded into the people themselves. Ironically, the answer was obvious, and was found in the number one word, both in word count and Crawdad; it was the people. *Each of these congregational systems is a community of people who operate as a network or human system of relationships;* the fourth cultural

dynamic. People, to use networking language, were the nodes.[86] Clues about this network

came from the variety of relational words used throughout all of the systems; words like

empowering, growing, welcoming, inviting, connecting, network, support, love, and

encouraging. The focus group participants often referred to their shared life together. This

aspect, so natural to the people themselves, was not often talked about directly, but as an

afterthought. Yet these relationships have a rhyme and reason to them. Just like one

knows various ways to get to and from work given the various times of the day and

traffic patterns, so to the people of these congregational systems have a multiplicity of

ways of relating to one another that is fluid, yet intentionally passes on the DNA of the

congregational system, and allows them to effectively carry out their mission and

ministry. Clearly certain people serve as primary hubs, but relationality is the foundation

undergirding each system.

Theme Five: The Dance of Leadership

The fifth cultural dynamic is about leadership. All leadership roles are not the

same in these congregational systems, but *all of the people within these faith communities*

have a part in the leadership dance. It was clear across the board that pastors have a

critical role in creating the tone within each system, are expected to lead, and are looked

to to proclaim God's Word. Yet, all of these faith communities also have strong lay

leadership, both in official capacities, like staff, council, and committees, and among the

people in general. There is a leadership *dance* occurring within these systems, between

clergy and lay leadership and between leaders with official and unofficial roles. Woven

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[86]Node is a networking term referring to one element or unit within a network. Networks and
nodes will be defined in more detail in the next chapter.

within this leadership dance is the paradox that people, who are both saints and sinners, boldly assert themselves as God's people leading within their faith communities and the world, yet doing so from a posture that allows imperfection and practices forgiveness. In the end, leadership sets the communal tone, articulates the mission and vision, and creates an atmosphere which encourages and ultimately sets people free to lead and serve.

One important finding was that there was no uniform organizational structure across these five systems. While there could be many different reasons for this, including their various sizes, in the end it was clear that the organizational structure was less important than the core understanding of this leadership dance. A second, but related finding was that very few of the focus group participants could clearly articulate the leadership process within their system. Over the course of the focus group time the leadership process questions were answered, but not when asked directly. Yet in all of the systems, people were confident in the leadership of their congregational system and knew how to make their way through it. Even in systems where the leadership process was changing, or had changed, there was little doubt in the leadership.

In the end, leadership was more about planting the DNA within the people and creating an environment in which that DNA could be lived out. While the pastor, staff, and lay leadership all had roles, ultimately what emerged was created by and credited to God.

Theme Six: The Tension of Ministry and Mission

Within the network of people, ministry and mission, the sixth cultural dynamic, provided the connective tissue. *Ministry and mission live in tension and move people back and forth between their internal, communal life together and their daily encounters*

with the world and their neighbor. In some systems the combination was missional ministry, primarily internal ministries with an external focus, and in other systems the focus was ministry partnered with mission, and sometimes it was mission that turns into ministry, like Alpha. Whatever the make-up, these two centers created formal opportunities for the people within these congregational systems to gather and together engage in their discipleship way of life. With worship as the primary hub, mission and ministry were the secondary hubs, providing people places to grow in their faith, to exercise leadership, and to connect with the world in intentional ways. It was clear, however, that the mission activities and ministry were not the ends in and of themselves. Interestingly enough, it doesn't matter what the ministry or the missional activity was, all served these three purposes. (One prime example was the choir at Cross in the Road which served as an outreach ministry even while its primary role was to lead worship.)

Theme Seven: A Vibrant Lutheran Identity

Lutheran identity was the seventh cultural dynamic, yet it is *a Lutheran identity in which Christian and Lutheran inform each other within the context of the world.* Some participants stated this notion explicitly, while others simply lived it. The primary focus of all of these faith communities was to help the people in their midst grow in their discipleship journey. While all systems had various Lutheran elements in their DNA, these Lutheran elements were more about core Lutheran theological commitments than about loyalty to the ELCA or Lutheran traditions. Even for the faith communities that had many people who came with a Lutheran background, their Lutheran background was not what was propelling them into the future. Each system, in its own way, had and continues to challenge and push against some of the traditional understandings of what it is to be

Lutheran as each strives to live out its call to be missional in this time in history and within its particular location.

As has already been noted, Word and sacrament are important Lutheran components, as was the idea of grace. Each of these five faith communities are consciously keeping these elements core and dynamic among their people. Preaching was vibrant, relevant, memorable, challenging, and accompanied by reading and studying Scripture. The sacrament of communion was defined as each strove to become a confessing community seeking to share their life together. Being the baptized people of God shaped these communities on their faith journey, but in a less prominent way than the sacrament of communion.

Theme Eight: The Changing and Adapting Posture

Finally, while it may have already been implied, it also needs to be stated explicitly, *these five congregational systems are fluid, living systems in a changing world with an eye toward the future, and have an adaptive posture as they continually seek to discover what it means to be the church.* Many participants noted that change was part of their DNA, be it their middle name or that their leader was known as a change agent. All five systems lived with an attitude that change happens and, over time, have come to expect and recognize it. Perhaps this was partly because all five systems have experienced some type of real significant change in their recent history (be it a new building, new staff, or a new leadership structure), but change was real in the lives of these people and within these systems. As a result, people have gained a confidence in God and their church, knowing neither can be restrained to any one particular form or way of being. God has proven to be bigger than any one of their particular issues, and

living through change has given them permission to think in new and creative ways,

which in turn allows them to be more open and adaptive. This, in the end, points right

back to a God who is active and alive in the world, in these congregational systems, and

in the people themselves.

Table 4.6 Cultural Dynamics Summary

An Active View of God	A view of God that is active and alive in the world and working within them as a community of faith and as individuals.
The World as the Horizon	A community of faith that has an outward focus, an eye to the future, and exists for the sake of the world.
Discipleship as a Way of Life	People within community that are passionate about their faith and are on a journey, individually and communally.
Congregational Systems as a Network of People	Communities made up of people who operate as a network or human system of relationships.
The Dance of Leadership	All people within these faith communities have a part in the leadership dance.
Tension of Ministry and Mission	Ministry and mission live in tension and move people back and forth between their internal, communal life together and their daily encounters with the world and their neighbor.
A Vibrant Lutheran Identity	A Lutheran identity in which Christian and Lutheran inform each other within the context of the world.
Changing and Adapting Posture	Faith communities that are fluid systems, living in a changing world, with an eye toward the future, and have an adaptive posture as they continually seek to discover what it means to be the church.

Summary

Ultimately, key words, phrases, and narratives cannot fully capture the spirit of

these faith communities, but it they do provide a glimpse into missional ELCA

congregational systems. As a missiologist who has grown up in a Lutheran tradition and

cares deeply about the future of the Lutheran church, these findings are good news. There

is always a risk in studying one's own denomination, especially if one is an optimist. For

one can stretch the findings to support one's own desires or the findings can be so dismal that one becomes disappointed and loses hope. This study has attempted to find a middle ground, perhaps named realistic optimism. On the one hand there is hope. ELCA congregational systems can, and are, being missional within a Lutheran frame. Certainly God is at work in the world and within these five congregational systems located in various parts of the United States. Each of the communities of faith studies has chosen to participate in God's mission in the world, taking seriously its particular location, and seeing itself on a journey toward becoming a missional ELCA congregation.

On the other hand, there is no clear way or structure that has emerged out of these findings. Rather, the cultural dynamics identified were organic and grew out of the particular contextual realities of each system and were shaped by their unique leadership and history. This reality opens up new sets of questions, leaving much yet to be discovered about both missional ELCA congregational systems and specifically missional leadership.

In the end, I am not sure if these congregational systems have taken Bishop Hanson's eight-pronged vision to heart or if Bishop Hanson's vision simply emerged from witnessing congregations like these striving to become missional communities, but it does seem that Bishop Hanson's vision and these congregational systems have a similar spirit. Bishop Hanson addressed the missional church generically from 30,000 feet; these five congregational systems incarnate the missional church on the ground. What this analysis has sought to offer is a view of the missional church from somewhere in the middle, rooted in particular, concrete congregational systems, but also from seeking to discover common cultural dynamics of what it means to be an ELCA missional

congregational system. What can the church, particularly the ELCA, learn from these findings? Are there resources available to unpack these findings theologically and theoretically? Can an innovative missional Lutheran theology grow of this research? This is the next move in this cartographical work.

CHAPTER 5

A LUTHERAN HERMENEUTIC FOR LEADING IN MISSION

Introduction

The research of this dissertation set out to answer two questions: *What are the cultural dynamics within a congregational system that are vital to the empowering of missional leadership?* and *What commonalities, if any, exist between various ELCA congregational systems with regard to these vital cultural dynamics for empowering missional leadership?* The previous chapter presented research findings that answered affirmatively both questions; yes, there are particular cultural dynamics that are vital to the empowering of missional leadership and, yes, in comparing five ELCA congregational systems, eight common cultural dynamics were found (see Tables 4.5 and 4.6). So what now? What can be said based on these findings? What do these cultural dynamics have to say about missional leadership?

As noted in the introductory chapter, the grounded theory approach "is a qualitative research **method** that uses a **systematic** set of **procedures** to **develop** an inductively derived grounded **theory** about a **phenomenon.**"[1] Having focused so far on the first part, the systematic research method, it is now time to focus on the second part of a grounded theory approach, developing an inductively derived grounded theory and, this researcher will put this theory into conversation with theology. Taking seriously the three

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[1]Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (Newbury, CA: Sage Publications, 1990), 25.

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critical shifts presented in the introductory chapter,[2] the core beliefs of the researcher,[3] and the research findings of missional ELCA congregational systems, a further question emerges, *Can a missional Lutheran theology of leadership be proposed?* Using Craig Van Gelder's hermeneutical approach for leading in mission,[4] through a Lutheran lens, and drawing upon the eight cultural dynamics identified in this study, this chapter will set out to answer that question.

Part One: Communicatively Discerned

It is clear that there is a process of communicative discernment taking place within each of these congregational systems. People in these congregational systems are important, both in general and in particular roles. These people exist within a web of relationships, namely, within the church and the world. Within and throughout these webs, discernment is taking place, allowing each congregational system to live out its unique calling within its particular context and within the ELCA. How can this communicative discernment be explained?

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[2]There is a need for the church in the United States to rediscover its missional nature; congregations will be the primary agencies in the missional church movement; and congregations will be led by leaders who understand the missionary nature of the church and have an eye toward the changing world around them.

[3]Three core beliefs were stated in the introductory chapter. The first is that a missional movement is needed within the church that is flexible, faithful, and takes seriously the dynamic relationship between God, church, and the particularities of being located geographically and within history. The second is that the lived experience of congregational systems already attending to these intersections needs the opportunity to speak into the missional church conversation. The third is that the heart of missional leadership is the blurring of lines between the church and the world.

[4]Craig Van Gelder's hermeneutic for leading in mission is shaped around: communally discerned, biblically and theologically framed, theoretically informed, and strategic action. Craig Van Gelder, "The Hermeneutics of Leading in Mission," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 3, no. 1/2 (Spring/Fall 2004). Upon conversation with the author, communally discerned has been adapted to communicatively discerned, using Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action. See Jürgen Haberman, *Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).

Part one of this chapter will set forth two big ideas that address communicative discernment within missional congregations. The two ideas are focus on creating a hybrid identity and being complex, open systems and emerge from cultural anthropology and open systems theory.

Cultural Anthropology

Anthropologists study culture or a group of people. Their primary concern has tended to be primitive or nonliterate cultures,[5] yet recently cultural anthropology has shifted toward studying the Western world. Cultural anthropology, like ethnography, observes people in their natural environment,[6] is flexible in its research methodology,[7] and attempts to capture everyday experiences of a lived group of people.[8] This study of cultural dynamics is a study of culture and several aspects of Kathryn Tanner's cultural anthropology will be helpful here: hybrid identity and theology as a way of life.

Hybrid Identity

Kathryn Tanner is a theologian who has taken seriously cultural anthropology and the postmodern world. Her work *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*[9] offers key insights into the communicative discernment process. Challenging the modern

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[5]Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 3d ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002).

[6]Thomas A. Schwandt, *Qualitative Inquiry: A Dictionary of Terms* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997), 101.

[7]John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 2d ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), 14.

[8]Ibid., 200.

[9]Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

constructs of anthropology,[10] Tanner offers a reconstructed understanding of culture from within a postmodern understanding which removes modern constraints from the center. Modern anthropology has consensus-building as a core feature of group living. Tanner accepts the idea of consensus-building but does not believe it is core. Instead, she suggests that conflict as much as shared beliefs and sentiments become central.[11] Attachments to or investments in common stakes, not necessarily common understanding, are what bond culture. This bond serves as the common reference point for the culture; how it lives and what sense it makes of its social action is defined by this core common bond. Ultimately, investments, not agreements, are the glue.[12] Religious commitments often function as such investments.

Just as Tanner has redefined the core, she has also redefined the edges. Culture does not need to be marked by self-contained boundaries, a commitment held by modern anthropologists. With a postmodern understanding cultural elements may cross boundaries without jeopardizing the distinctiveness of different cultures. In fact, much of what makes culture what it is involves redefining elements that have been transported across boundaries from other cultures. In other words, what makes cultural identities differ is the *way* in which the common elements are used, *how* they are handled and transformed, and *what* meaning is attached to them. In reality, all cultural identity is a

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[10]Reasons include their inattentiveness to historical process, viewing cultures as internally consistent wholes, claiming consensus, seeing culture as a principle of social order, for the primacy of cultural stability, and seeing cultures as sharply bounded, self-contained units. Ibid., 40-56.

[11]Ibid., 57.

[12]Ibid.

hybrid, a relational affair that lives as much between as within cultures.[13] So culture, rather than having self-contained boundaries, has boundaries that are porous.

Certainly this is true of the congregational systems studied. One example of this is having the world as the horizon, which requires constant dialogue to be taking place between these congregational systems and the world. This reality, Tanner argues, recognizes the fact that culture is self-critical. This critical nature has two dimensions: being critical of itself outwardly against others and being critical of itself inwardly with the ability to create and recreate its own identity.[14] Within a postmodern understanding a cultural system's hybrid identity is created by its ability to be critical of itself and its surrounding environments. This ability, ironically, does not threaten the culture's identity, but actually strengthens it.

The people within the missional congregational systems studied have an innate ability to do this work. While certainly not of one mind, the people within these communities have common stakes and core investments which hold them together at the same time they are allowing their boundaries to become less defined. This loosening of boundaries comes from their deep commitment to be in relationship with the world. This deep commitment actually forces the people within the faith community, and in particular its leaders, to continually be critical of both the external and internal cultures. Part of this critical view of itself is rooted in a Lutheran identity, as well as a particular view of God, creation, humanity, and sin. These faith communities have a particular eschatological view, holding fast to being God's children marked by the cross of Christ forever.

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[13]Ibid., 57-58.

[14]Ibid., 58.

As the Mainline Church recognizes its *decentered* location, as each of the congregational systems studied has, such communicative discernment becomes increasingly critical. Yet many congregational leaders are under-equipped in this area. It is necessary in this time in history to acknowledge explicitly this ongoing process of cultural formation and reformation. A modern anthropological view of culture will no longer hold. In its place will be cultures held together by common stakes, not common understanding, and congregational systems which seek to wrestle with what it means to be a Christian community in this time and place. Interestingly enough, tending to the process is as important as landing on the identity itself. So, *communicative discernment is about creating a hybrid identity as a congregational system lives within and engages its particular context.*

Theology as Way of Life

Theology, for Tanner, is a cultural activity that is part of this communicative discernment.[15] As communities of faith throughout the world engage their contexts they are about the work of asking God questions, meaning questions, and questions about understanding their way of life together. How is the truth of the gospel to be lived in this time and place?

Anthropology insists that the world be addressed as cultures (plural), not culture (singular), for there is no culture in general, only culture in particular.[16] (Culture here is

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[15]"The most basic contribution that an anthropological understanding of culture – postmodern or not – makes to theology is to suggest that theology be viewed as part of culture, as a form of cultural activity...Theology is something that human beings produce." Ibid., 63.

[16]Anthropology is interested in cultures (plural) because their primary interest is in the differences and distinctions that exist between cultures. Ibid., 66.

defined as "the whole social practice of meaningful action."[17]) The same can be said of

theology. An anthropological approach to theology will not see universals as much as

particulars.

> Thinking about theology as a part of culture would mean thinking about theology
> as a part of some specific, communally shaped way of life, with all the full-bodied
> and concrete comprehensiveness that the expression "way of life" conveys from
> an anthropological point of view.[18]

These particulars, however, will emerge out of testing and seeking understanding of

previous universal claims, for certainly there are some things about God which are true

and can be said across time. But the emphasis here is that if theology is to have a place

within a culture it needs to be lived, to be worked out in the lives of people in particular

ways in each era of history.

> Putting theology into the cultural context of a Christian way of life challenges this
> [universal, abstract] view; it makes theology much more an integral part of daily
> life.[19]

This aspect makes it no longer possible to separate Sunday from Monday or one's church

life from one's home or work life. When this integration takes place the Christian way of

life becomes deeply embedded within the culture itself.

If culture refers *to the whole social practice of meaningful action*, then Christian

theology has to do with the meaning dimension of *Christian practices*[20] with the

theological task of culture being to give meaning to all socially significant Christian

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[17]"and more specifically to the meaning dimension of such action – the beliefs, values, and orienting symbols that suffuse a whole way of life." Ibid., 70.

[18]Ibid., 67.

[19]Ibid., 69.

[20]"Christian social practice essentially involves making theological affirmations about God and Jesus and about human life in their light." Ibid., 70.

action. This understanding pushes and pulls theology in two different directions. In one sense theology defines a culture of people and their way of life; in another sense people challenge theological claims as they press against them in an effort of creating meaning in their particular location. Congregational systems live in the midst of this tension, constantly wrestling with creating and recreating their hybrid identity.

The cultural dynamics of an active view of God is the heart of this meaning-making of Christian practices. A belief that God is indeed active in the people within a particular faith community shapes their way of life together, yet at the same time, this active God is also active in the world, often in peculiar ways. Being a community of people that is for the world challenges the community to open themselves up and re-imagine their life together.

Theology always arises out of the lived experiences of people seeking to truly understand God within a particular period of history. According to Tanner, keeping the work of theology alive requires tending to the process of answering, "What is a Christian to say and do in these circumstances?"[21] or How are we to live social practices that constitute a way of life together? This work requires all Christians to become everyday theologians, working out these questions within the particularities of their own lived experience, and for some to address theology academically, putting lived experiences up against and in conversation with Scripture and the church across time.

There are both differences and similarities between these two theological inquiries. The everyday theologian seeks to construct a Christian way of life that is meaningful and engages their Christian understanding as it intersects with their daily life.

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[21] Ibid., 90.

This reality was expressed by focus group participants in all of the five congregational systems studied. The academic theologian engages the lived theology of everyday theologians, challenging and refining it against tradition and Scripture, cleaning it up, systematizing it, and making it more articulate and less time bound, and in so doing makes it more general and abstract. In many ways the pastoral leadership within each congregational system served this role. "As a postmodern understanding of culture makes especially clear, however, the cultural dimension of a whole way of life never offers of itself the sort of clarity and consistency that academic theology pursues."[22] Simply put, there is messiness in the everyday that is not always apparent in the work of academic theology. Hence both views are essential and need to continually be put into conversation. And both views were present in this research.

Framed missiologically, there is a call for deeper reflection on God's activity in the world and for creating theological constructs that shape and inform God's people, just as there is a demand for a lived theology among God's people in community as they self-reflect about the social practices that constitute their way of life.[23] These two, the academic and the everyday work of theology, need to regularly be in dialogue. Theological construction and reflection is part of the work of the whole body of Christ and, as this researcher discovered, the tension represented by these two becomes a key part of the hermeneutical circle, creating important roles for both clergy and laity. *This constructive understanding of theology, which acknowledges the messiness of theological*

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[22]Ibid., 74.

[23]Ibid., 76.

reflection in the postmodern world, opens up the work of constructing local theologies which constitute a way of life together.

Open Systems

As already noted in the introductory chapter, there are closed and open systems, with open systems relying on their environment for survival. Within the overall category of open systems, various levels of complexity exist. New sciences have emerged that have allowed open systems theorists to describe these more complex systems.[24] Congregations are systems that are both open and highly complex because they seek to be counter-cultural, they rely on the environment for their survival, exist only by the volunteer exchange of resources, and are not uniform, meaning that one congregational system does not necessarily operate like another. Three key concepts of complex, open systems will be addressed in this section: the multiplicity of systems, their self-regulatory nature, and the idea of networks.

Multiple Systems

First, congregations are *a constellation of systems which exist within a multitude of other systems.* Some of those systems encourage and support the ongoing life of the congregational system, while others test and strain their life together. One of the results of this complexity is that when studying congregational systems it is not always clear what factors can be attributed to which systems. It is also important to note that any one individual also lives within multiple systems, piecing together aspects of these various

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[24]Alberto-Laszlo Barabasi, *Linked: The New Science of Networks* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing, 2002), James Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science* (New York: Penguin, 1987), Dee Houck, *Birth of the Chaordic Age* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 1999), Mark Ward, *Beyond Chaos: The Underlying Theory Behind Life, the Universe, and Everything*, U.S. Edition, 2002 ed. (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2001).

systems as they seek to create meaning for their own way of life. Complexity moves in many directions.

Let illustration 5.1 serve as an example of this idea as it applies to congregational systems. The box represents the context, be it city or region in which the congregational system is located. The bold dotted oval represents the congregational system being studied. The large dotted oval within the bold oval represents the worshipping community. The other circles illustrate various groups (be they internal ministries, like Sunday School, or external organizations, like Girl Scouts) and their relationship with the congregational system as a whole. The Xs are the people gathered for a focus group from within the congregational system. The location of the Xs represents each person's location within the system. All the Xs are connected to and impacting the congregational system, but all are also implanted within one or more other systems.

Illustration 5.1 Congregations as Multiple Systems
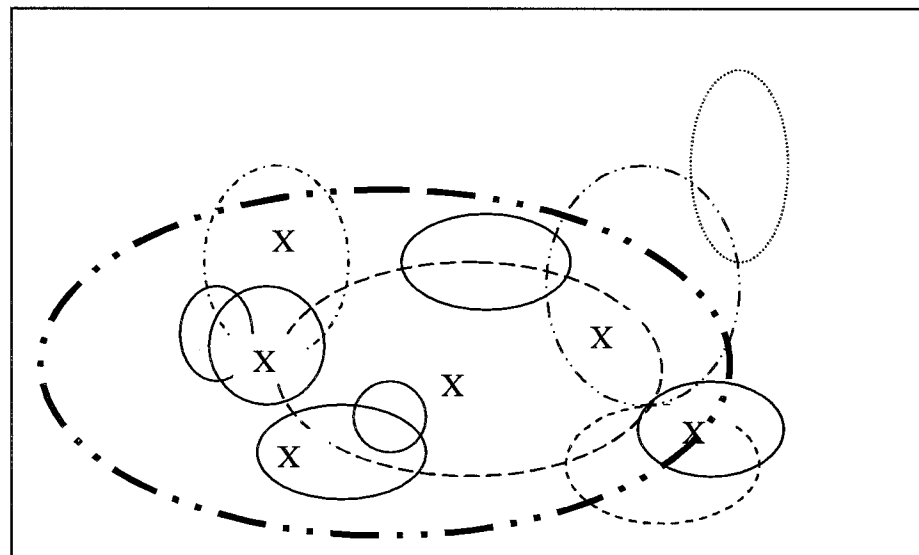
Obviously this illustration overly simplifies real life; an illustration of real life would be far more complex. Imagine for a moment, however, *if* this kind of mapping

were to be done for each focus group studied. It would illustrate the complexities in which congregational systems are working, as well as reveal some key influences and influencers of the congregational system. The communicative discernment taking place within each congregational system is dealing with all of these complexities and realities.

While several examples can be cited to make this illustration even more concrete, let one be highlighted here. In a focus group at Casa para Todos, two women, one new to that faith community and another with a longer tenure, talked about their involvement in that congregational system. For both women Casa para Todos had helped them live their faith more fully in the world. However, in addition to being active at Casa para Todos, both of these women were in work environments that also supported and enhanced the ideas expressed at Casa para Todos. One woman worked in an ELCA synod office and another in a branch of Lutheran Social Services. The question rises, What system is most impacting their missional leadership? Is it their faith community or their work place? Add to that the fact that both are involved in various other community networks and it is hard to extract what elements came directly from the congregational system.

Self-organizing systems

A second learning from complex, open systems that is evident within these congregational systems is that they are *self-organizing systems*. Missional congregational systems have learned how to self-regulate and are continually changing and adapting to the circumstances around them. Margaret Wheatley says:

> In organizations, we typically struggle against the environment, seeing it as the source of disruption and change. We tend to insulate ourselves from it as long as possible in an effort to preserve the precious stability we have acquired. Even though we know we need to be responsive to forces and demands beyond the boundaries of our organization, we still focus our efforts on maintaining the strongest defensive structure possible. We experience an inherent tension between

stability and openness, a constant tug-a-war. But as I read about self-organizing systems, these dualities aren't present. Here are systems that stay strong by staying open.[25]

Self-organizing systems stay strong by being open! Just like Tanner's view of culture, self-organizing systems have porous boundaries. Openness is one of their assets. Interestingly being open, welcoming, and inviting were all attributes used to describe these congregational systems. This attributes suggest a posture of self-organizing, bringing things into the systems from outside and accepting or rejecting them based on a clear understanding of themselves. Systems self-organize through "process structures, reorganizing into different forms in order to maintain their identity."[26] So what is needed within these organizations is a clear self-identity. This self-identity, along with its process structures, allow for the system to "self-reference."[27] Within the systems studies, this self-referencing nature came not only from their Lutheran Christian identity, but also from their focus on purpose, guiding principles, and the vision that shaped their life together. This self-referencing capacity matures over time and systems become adept at this way of being. Ironically, as a self-organizing system "partners *with* its environment, the system develops increasing autonomy *from* the environment."[28] Hence, self-identity and self-regulation increase as the system opens itself to its environment.

The congregational systems studied, consciously or unconsciously, were about this self-regulating work not only internally, but also as they engaged their environment.

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[25]Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, 2d ed. (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1999), 82.

[26]Ibid.

[27]Ibid., 84-85.

[28]Ibid., 84.

This clearly was seen in the cultural dynamic of having the world as the horizon, but was also present in subtle ways, like changing approaches to ministry, worship, or organizational structure. From a missional perspective, the work of self-regulating is as important as what might be traditionally viewed as church work, like preaching, worship, and Sunday School.

Networking Theory

Finally, within complex, open systems relationships are everything, yet not all relationships are weighed equally. As has been noted, people networks were recognized as a cultural dynamic; how might network theory inform this reality?

Network theory addresses relationships by looking at nodes, links, and hubs. Networks are made of nodes, the individual units that make-up a network, and links, which serve as mechanisms for transmitting information.[29] Hubs are weighted nodes, nodes with a high number of links, making them key communication centers, and the "generic building blocks of our complex, interconnected world."[30] Hubs "create short paths between any two nodes in the system."[31] Within the systems studies, nodes were the various people within a congregational system, links were the mission and ministry, and hubs were the places where people connect and information is diffused.[32] Robustness is the term used to describe a network that has many hubs, making it strong and vital. The more robust a network, the less vulnerable it is to failure and the more vibrant it becomes.

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[29]Barabasi, *Linked: The New Science of Networks*, 11.

[30]Ibid., 63. To learn more about hubs see Barabasi, *Linked: The New Science of Networks*, 55-64.

[31]Barabasi, *Linked: The New Science of Networks*, 64.

[32]More will be said on this later in this chapter.

To determine how robust a system is boils down to the number and types of hubs within a system.[33]

Within the five systems studied, people were the main nodes, with some key people also serving as hubs, i.e. the pastoral leadership. Yet hubs were also the places which served as key opportunities for transmitting messages that shape the meaning of the faith and perpetuating their life together. For example, worship was a key hub in all systems, but each congregational system also had multiple and varying other hubs. For Cross in the Road the choir was a key hub, as well as their Faith Stepping Stones ministry; for Bread for the Journey it was small groups and youth ministry. All of the systems studied had hubs that were dynamic and vibrant which helped create their robustness.

Self-organizing, self-referencing systems must have a robust network in place. Within networks *what* is being communicated is clearly important, but *how* it is being communicated is equally, if not more, important.

Communicative discernment is a two-fold conversation taking place within the congregational system itself and as it engages the world around it. Tanner's postmodern understanding of cultural anthropology highlights the process of creating a culture or system's hybrid identity and reminds us of the work of theology within its way of life. Complex, open system theories highlight the reality that congregational systems are really a multiplicity of systems interfacing with other systems, lift up the self-regulating nature of such systems, and address the value of creating robust networks. The work

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[33]Barabasi, *Linked: The New Science of Networks*, 109-22.

these theories have identified is the work of a congregational system as it

communicatively discerns its way of life together.

Part Two: Biblically and Theologically Framed

Part two of this chapter will focus on Van Gelder's second part of a hermeneutic

of leading in mission, biblically and theologically framed. It will take seriously

Newbigin's missional challenge for the North American Church to develop a domestic

missiology[34] and Hunsberger's three-way dialogue between the gospel, culture, and

church.[35] This part will be divided into four sections: view of church, view of God, view

of ministry, and view of leadership.

View of the Church

Church is a loaded word and, as discovered in this study, one which holds various

meanings. For some people church is a building located on a particular street where

worship services are held. For others church refers to the denomination with which a

congregation affiliates. In general, church can refer to the universal body of Christ across

time and space. The church can also be God's people dispersed in the world. Each of

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[34]Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 165-72.

[35]George R. Hunsberger, and Craig Van Gelder, ed., *The Church between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 8-9. It is worth noting that while the elements (gospel, church, and culture) of Hunsberger's dialogue are the same as addressed in this biblically and theologically framed hermeneutic of leading in mission, the way they are used and defined are different. For example, in this dissertation culture is not used to describe what is outside the church in a general way. Rather, culture here is actually cultures, seen in the plural, particular way. Context, however, is used in this work in a similar way as culture is used for Hunsberger, referring to that which is outside of the church or the environment in which the church resides. In addition, while the *Missional Church* discussion grounds its view of the missional church in God, seeing that as its starting point, this hermeneutic for leading in mission does not deny that position but also raises the communicatively discerned nature of a missional theology. This move is meant to hold the two in tension, which this researcher believes Van Gelder's four part hermeneutic does.

these references to church brings with it a particular set of assumptions. The Mainline

Western Church in the United States is at a point in history when it can no longer assume

that a shared understanding of church exists. This reality provides both a challenge and

an opportunity.

A new understanding of church is being suggested for the church in the 21st

century.[36] The *marks of the true church*, often summarized as the gospel rightly preached

and the proper administration of the sacraments, that once provided a missional impulse

for churches during the Reformation need to be revisited.[37] These marks have shifted

there focus and are most often used to define the church in ecclesial terms and, when

used alone, rob it of its true nature. Taking the lead from the missional church movement,

it is time to rediscover the church's nature.[38]

Theocentric

The Mainline Church has been an *ecclesiocentric* church, a church centered on

structure. This ecclesiocentric focus is now being challenged by the idea of a *theocentric*

church, a church centered on God. God's mission, in an ecclesiocentric focused church,

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[36]Richard Bliese and Craig Van Gelder, eds., *Evangelizing the Church: A Lutheran Contribution* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 18th ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000).

[37]The missional impulse of the Reformation was to refocus the church on its essence, attempting to strip it of its political and ecclesiological trappings of its time. During the time of the Reformation this was a radical move, one that could today be framed as missional. See Augsburg Confession, article VII. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), 43.

[38]Van Gelder takes up this subject in-depth. His construction of a missional ecclesiology defines what the church is (its nature), what the church does (its ministry), and then moves to how the church is to be structured (its organization). Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit*, 27-44.

became synonymous with the church's mission, collapsing the two into one. The result being that the church was placed in the center, with God working only through the church, not outside it. In a theocentric focused church the church exists to participate in God's mission, the *missio Dei*, with God working through the church, yet keeping a distinction between the two.[39] The view of church as theocentric translates into God being active in and through the church, but above all for the world. Within this view of church, how one views God is central.[40]

Using the language developed by the *Missional Church*, the church's calling and vocation is to represent the reign of God, the kingdom of God, in the world.[41] This representation is both passive and active.[42] The church represents the reign of God in its passive aspect in the world as a "sign and foretaste"[43] of God's kingdom. In its active form the church acts as "agents and instruments"[44] of the kingdom of God in the world. Hence what emerges, in its simplest form, is church as a community of God's people who strive to bear witness to God's kingdom on earth as they remain open to and keep the world on the horizon. The congregational systems in this study clearly had a theocentric

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[39] Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 80-81. Matthew 16 is an illustration of this. Here the *ekklesia* and the *basileia* are separate, but closely related concepts. Ibid., 97-98.

[40] This missional view of God will be addressed in more detail later in this chapter.

[41] Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America.*

[42] *Missional Church* highlights that as the church represents the reign of God it does so in two ways, passive and active. "The passive meaning indicates that one stands for another" and "the active meaning of *represent* indicates the way a person may be given authority to act on another's behalf." Ibid., 101.

[43] In this way, the church lives into a new future, God's future, here on earth, and points to God. Ibid., 100-01.

[44] In this way, the church, under God's authority, engages the world by proclaiming the gospel, striving for justice, and being God's co-workers in the world. Ibid.

view of church and were attempting to live as signs and foretastes, agents and instruments of God's reign. In fact, the ecclesial elements of church, with the exception of the role of clergy, were secondary to their primary focus which was on God and their identity as a faith community.

For the Sake of the World

The term *missio Dei* is a mysterious one. Since its dissemination throughout the church following the Willingen International Missionary Council (IMC) gathering in 1952, this term has found widespread usage within missiology circles.[45] It originally was stated as "[e]ven the Church is only an instrument in the hands of God. The church herself is only the outcome of the activity of God who sends and saves."[46] In work group meetings following the IMC gathering, however, this term developed several key aspects to it: "its source is the triune [*sic*] God himself,"[47] "(t)he sending of the Son for the reconciliation of the universe through the power of the Spirit is the basis and goal of mission,"[48] and "(f)rom the 'Missio Dei' [*sic*] alone comes the 'Missio ecclesiae' [*sic*]."[49] Out of this concept comes the idea that God is both the sender and the one sent, witnessed

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[45]Georg F. Vicedom's work was behind it. Georg F. Vicedom, *The Mission of God; an Introduction to a Theology of Mission*, trans. Gilbert A. Thiele and Dennis Hilgendorf (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1965). Missiological works using the *missio Dei* include the GOCN works already noted as well as: Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*.

[46]H. H. Rosin and Interuniversitair Instituut voor Missiologie en Oecumenica (Netherlands), *'Missio Dei': An Examination of the Origin, Contents, and Function of the Term in Protestant Missiological Discussion* (Leiden,: Interuniversity Institute for Missiological and Ecumenical Research Department of Missiology, 1972), 6.

[47]Ibid., 7.

[48]Ibid.

[49]Ibid.

in the person of Jesus Christ. The *missio Dei* is about God's work of salvation, with the

kingdom of God being the goal.[50]

As its history illustrates, the *missio Dei* is a dynamic term within missiology,

being central but still retaining vagueness. It is central in that it grounds the mission of

the church in God and calls the church continually to be seeking ways of living into and

out of God's dynamic mission; it is vague in that the term *missio Dei* does not have a

concise definition and hence is open to ongoing articulation, as well as exploitation and

misuse.[51] Over fifty years after its inception, *missio Dei* continues to challenge the church

on both of these accounts.

With regard to defining the nature of the church, seeing God's mission as bigger

than the church resulted in the world becoming the focal point. As the topics of

subsequent missional conferences illustrated,[52] the orientation became God and church

for the sake of the world. The world, then, began to set the agenda as to how the church

would participate in God's mission.[53] As highlighted in John 3:16-17 (NRSV):

> For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who
> believes in him may not perish but have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the
> Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be
> saved through him.

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[50]Ibid., 16.

[51]Ibid., 12.

[52]Several CWME conferences provide an example: 1963 in Mexico City with the theme "God's Mission and Our Task"; 1980 in Melbourne with the theme "Your Kingdom Come"; and 1989 in San Antonio with the theme "Your Will be Done."

[53]See the Final Report of the Western European Working Group and North American Working Group of the Department in Evangelism as examples. *The Church for Others: Two Reports on the Missionary Structure of the Congregation* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1967).

This new reality was not unanimously accepted across the global church. Yet, while not everyone in the church agreed with *how* the church was to engage the world around God's mission, this shift in emphasis marked a turn in the global missional conversation. If *missio ecclesiae* is to follow *missio Dei* and God's mission focuses on the world, then the world has to be the horizon for the church.

Clearly this element was vital in congregational systems that empowered missional leadership. Ironically just as the *missio Dei* is clear, yet vague, so is the *for the sake of the world* aspect of these systems studied. It is clear in that these faith communities see themselves as participants in the world and God's mission in it. Yet it varies as to how this commitment is actually translated – it can be accompanying, bringing people into faith communities, and/or a personal faith conversion experience. The commitment to the world, yet variety in approaches, keeps a tension that continually opens up new opportunities for dialogue about the radical nature of the Christian way of life.

<div align="center">View of God</div>

For centuries theologians have been about the work of putting together words which best describe God and humans' interactions with God. Currently there is a renewed focus on a Trinitarian view of God. This lively debate has drawn in scholars from Eastern and Western churches, as well as various parts of the world, making it a diverse and global conversation. In relation to this, missiology has also had a renewed focus on Trinitarian theology.

Recent scholarship has lifted up two views of the Triune God: the *perichoretic* and *sending*. The sending view, traditionally connected with the Western line of

Trinitarian thought, has God the Father sending God the Son, and they send God the Spirit (i.e., John 20:21 NRSV: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you"). This view highlights the particularities of God; God creates, redeems, and sanctifies. Within this view the Triune God sends the church into the world to participate in God's mission.

The periochoretic view, traditionally connected with the Eastern line of Trinitarian thought, has the Father, Son, and Spirit all indwelling in the Godhead (i.e., John 14:11 NRSV: "I am in the Father and the Father is in me"). All of God indwells in the Father, Son, and Spirit, with each completing who God is. Each is in relation to the other two, being equal but not the same. God, in God's self, is a God in relationship. The Triune God moves together, creating a three-way circulation of love based on equality. This view highlights the kenotic nature of God; the emptying of the persons, one to another, and in turn to humanity and all of creation. Here God is witnessed as limiting God's self for the sake of being in relationship with the world.

Humankind, created in the image of God, is created with both communal and sending natures. Christian community seeks to live with this periochoretic, relational identity *and* this sending, for the sake of the world reality. Both the perichoretic and sending natures suggest movement, one internal and one external. Like breathing, there is a taking in and inhabiting, and there is a releasing and setting forth. Humankind, with similar natures as God, was created for such mutuality and interdependence, as well as for being open to the other, extending one's self and going forth into the world. While God alone is the only one that can fully exhibit these two natures, Christian community seeks to participate in and strives to be such people of faith.

These two movements were present in all of the congregational systems studied. The people of these faith communities were continually shaping their life together by emptying themselves, one to another, *and* by going out as sent people into the world to participate in God's mission. This understanding of themselves was based on their view of God.

Arguing for a dynamic view of God, Jürgen Moltmann presents an open Trinity which takes seriously both these internal and external movements. Believing that a Trinitarian perspective of God can serve the church today, he places his open Trinity within history, and in particular within the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.[54] This social doctrine crafts a Trinitarian hermeneutic that "leads us to think in terms of relationships and communities."[55] Two aspects of Moltmann's open Trinity will be lifted up in this section: its perichoretic nature and his doctrine of freedom.

Perichoretic Nature

Jürgen Moltmann develops his idea of the open Trinity in *The Trinity and the Kingdom.*[56] Drawing from the biblical narrative as the historical account of God in the world, he argues for a living God that suffers and therefore is also capable of loving.[57] The New Testament narrative talks about God, Father, Son, and Spirit, as *"relationships*

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[54]Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 74.

[55]Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 19.

[56]Ibid.

[57]"The living God is the loving God. The loving God shows that he is a living God through his suffering." Ibid., 38.

of fellowship...open to the world."[58] This Trinitarian image emerges out of history and puts the three distinct actors in relationship to one another, with the historic Jesus being the starting point from which God's being is revealed. In the New Testament, the historical and eschatological testimony does not show one form of the Trinity, instead "[w]e find a trinitarian [*sic*] co-working of Father, Son, and Spirit, but with changing patterns."[59] Unity is established using the idea of perichoresis, with perichoresis being "used to capture the mutual dwelling of the equal divine persons: Father, Son, and Spirit."[60] Each person, emptying and opening itself in particular ways, is God acting in the world. Hence, God is God only in relationship to God's self and the world. While the movement here is primarily internal, it also has an external aspect, for it is only as God opens God's self to those outside that the internal movement is complete, as is revealed in the person of Jesus.

This perichoretic nature, with both internal and external movements, becomes a defining element of churches with a theocentric view, as was evident in the congregational systems studied. This lively and vibrant, emptying and opening view of God was present within these systems and was central to their self-regulating, hybrid

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[58]Ibid., 64.

[59]Ibid., 95. Moltmann highlights three patterns centered on sending, lordship, and eschatology. "In sending, in the surrender and in the resurrection, the Father is the actor, the Son the receiver, and the Spirit the means through which the Father acts on his Son and the Son receives the Father. In the lordship of the Son and the diffusion of the creative Spirit, the Son together with the Father are the actors. The Spirit takes his sending from the Son, just as he takes his issue from the Father. In eschatology, finally, the Son is the actor: he transfers the kingdom to the Father; he subjects himself to the Father. But in eschatology the Holy Spirit is the actor equally: he glorifies the Father through the praise of all created beings who have been liberated by Christ's role. The Father is the One who received. He receives his kingdom from the Son; he receives his glory from the Spirit." Ibid., 94.

[60]Jürgen Moltmann, "Perichoresis: An Old Magic Word for a New Trinitarian Theology," in *Trinity, Community, and Power: Mapping Trajectories in Wesleyan Theology*, ed. Douglas M. Meeks (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2000), 114.

identity. Mutuality and interdependence was witnessed in their view of others within their faith community and their openness was evident in their self-critical nature as they continually had their eye to the other. Said differently, communicative discernment could not take place without such a communal *and* sending view of God.

To push this further, love is the name of this mutual indwelling of God, and those who love focus not on themselves but on others.[61] Hence, "[l]ove seeks a counterpart who freely responds and independently gives love for love."[62] It is love that makes people, not just God, persons in relationship; humanity is who it is only in relationship to the other.[63] This reality highlights the dynamic nature of what it means to be human, a person. Unity, then, should "be understood as a social, inviting, integrating, unifying, and thus, world-open community."[64] God, humanity, and the church are all social entities, created to be in relationship. Moltmann extends this by saying, "The perichoretic unity of the divine persons is so wide open that the whole world can find room and rest and eternal life within it."[65] Here Moltmann takes the Trinity and breaks it open to humanity and the world. "The divine Trinity is 'open' not because it is imperfect, but by virtue of the graciously overflowing love, open for all the beloved creatures."[66]

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[61]Ibid., 122.

[62]Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, 30.

[63]For more on this idea see John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*. Contemporary Greek Theologians, No. 4 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985).

[64]Moltmann, "Perichoresis: An Old Magic Word for a New Trinitarian Theology," 117.

[65]Ibid.

[66]Ibid., 118.

Moltmann's idea of an open Trinity brings together the complex, open systems theory and its porous boundaries, with an alive and active view of God that is both communal and sending. These two elements become melded together, just as was witnessed in the systems studied with love being the source of this active and dynamic God that gathers, calls, and sends.

Doctrine of Freedom

Freedom, for Moltmann, comes out of the language of community and fellowship, just as his image of God does. "Love humiliates itself for the sake of the freedom of its counterpart."[67] God's freedom is not dominion over creation, but the freedom to self-limit and be in community with it. This is God's posture toward humanity. Freedom is, for Moltmann, the external movement of the Trinity. It is the aspect of God's self that cannot exist apart from the world, and just as love is the source of the indwelling community, so too is love the source of this freedom.[68] Christian freedom is the extension of this freedom to humanity.

Time and space are critical for Moltmann. The two are complementary, but not the same. "We can experience different times in the same place, but not different places at the same time."[69] Yet, God dwells in both time and space; that is the radical nature of God. God has always been in space, in creation and amidst the people. But God also dwells in time which requires physicality; "God's fullness 'dwells' in Christ bodily (Col

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[67]Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, 30.

[68]Ibid., 216.

[69]Moltmann, "Perichoresis: An Old Magic Word for a New Trinitarian Theology," 112.

2:9), and the Holy Spirit 'dwells' in our bodies and our community as her temple (1 Cor 6:19)." [70]

Humanity lives within time and space, although for Christians the concepts of time and space is redefined. Humans exist as bodies, creatures, which live in real time and within community, yet the Christian way of life offers humanity a new perspective. This new perspective allows Christians freedom and just as God's love drove these congregational systems, this Christian freedom was the fuel that kept them going.

Moltmann lays out three different views of freedom: freedom over property, freedom as community, and freedom as passion for the future. [71] This first view of freedom is only seen over and against another in a power position. This view is limited and must be rejected if one is to obtain the other two views. The second view is in opposition to the individualistic perspective of freedom. "In mutual participation in life, individual people become free beyond the limits of their individuality, and discover the common room for living which their freedom offers...[w]e call it love and solidarity." [72] While this view of freedom is important, it needs to be directed at something; that something is a passion for the future. Therefore, the third view of freedom is passion headed toward a future of hope and new possibility. "We may sum it up by saying that the first means having, the second being, and the third becoming." [73] The new future is a world which transforms freedom as lordship into a future lived beyond time and space

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[70] Ibid.

[71] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, 217.

[72] Ibid., 216.

[73] Ibid., 217.

with God. Moltmann's views of human freedom translate into his view of the kingdom of the Triune God and create his eschatology.

Freedom, driven by a passion for the future in a broken world, is key in a missional faith community, as demonstrated in this study. Acknowledging the brokenness in the world, these missional communities sought to participate in God's creative and redemptive mission, believing it mattered. These missional communities were a sign and foretaste, as well as an instrument and agent of God's reign in the world.

God's mission, according to Moltmann, is to bring all of creation and humanity into unity with God's self, completing the perichoretic move. God has already accomplished this in Christ's death and resurrection. Hence, the future is already ours and determines the present. The future breaks into the now as something already accomplished. This is Moltmann's eschatological view, this is his source of hope. God has already gone ahead and now simply extends God's promises to God's people on earth. Eschatology, then, is the promise of God's bringing about this new future, bringing all of creation into unity with God, "being included in the eternal life of the triune [sic] God and participating in it."[74] The church, then, is an eschatological community as it lives into and out of this freedom as a sign and foretaste, but also as an agent and instrument.

Our translating the perichoretic nature of God to God's relationship with creation results in an understanding of God as one who opens up God's self, so that creation and humanity may dwell within. This opening allows for self-differentiation, for uniqueness and purpose, but also for connectedness and a deep holding. Freedom is the gift which

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[74]Moltmann, "Perichoresis: An Old Magic Word for a New Trinitarian Theology," 117.

springs forth out of this relationship of love. Moltmann's open view of the Trinity, hence, has both internal and external movements, the communal and sending aspects of the Trinity. Like a self-organizing system, Moltmann's view of God has a clear identity with porous boundaries and is open to its environment. A theocentric view of church, rooted in such an image of God, challenges the ecclesiocentric view of church that is prevalent today and offers a dynamic way of being the church.

<div align="center">View of Ministry</div>

This missional view of God and church must translate into a missional view of ministry. What are the people of God to be about? What are they to do and how are they to do it? What is the work of the baptized? In an effort to articulate a missional view of ministry, two broad themes will be developed: the creative and redemptive aspect of God's mission and the community of the baptized.

Creation, Redemption, and the Gospel

First, God created the world and God continues to create in the world. Luther reminds us of this in his explanation of the first article. "I believe God had created me and all that exists. He has given me and still preserves my body and soul with all their powers."[75] God "provides me with food and clothing, home and family, daily work, and all I need from day to day."[76] This is not a one time event from the past, but God continues, and will continue, to actively create and sustain life. "If God withdrew his care

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[75]Martin Luther, *The Small Catechism in Contemporary English with Lutheran Book of Worship Texts. A Handbook of Basic Christian Instruction for the Family and the Congregation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1979), 11.

[76]Ibid.

from us, even for a brief moment, everything now living would pass away."[77] So God is

the creator of the universe and God enlisted humanity to join in this ongoing creative

process.[78] More directly stated, humanity partners with God as co-creators in the world.

This active, creating God was recognized in the congregational systems studied.

Believing that God has been and continues to be about the work of creating and

sustaining life on earth, members of these faith communities moved through the world

with confidence and awe.

Second, sin exists in the world. The Fall not only has taken place, but there

continues to be a power encounter between evil, the devil, and God. Just as God did not

create only in the past but continually creates, this power encounter is not only part of

Christian history, it is a very real part of life today. The world is the place in which this

power encounter takes place. Hence, sin exists in the world and we, as humans, are in

bondage to sin as people who walk on earth. Humanity lives in "a situation in which there

are two kingdoms (earth and heaven, in Luther's terminology), two contending powers

(God and the devil), two antagonistic components within the Christian person (the old

self and the new self), and in which Christians are involved in constant struggle."[79]

Humanity, and the world, both need redemption.

This reality was also prevalent in this study. Not only is the world broken, but we,

God's people, are paradoxically saint and sinner. One of the gifts of a vibrant Lutheran

theology is the ability to live in the midst of this mysterious tension.

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[77]Gustaf Wingren, "Concept of Vocation: Its Basis and Its Problem," *Lutheran World* 15, no. 2 (1968): 88.

[78]For an example, see Gen 1-2.

[79]Marc Kolden, "Luther on Vocation," *Word & World* 3, no. 4 (1983): 383.

Third, this is not the end. God so loved the world that God sent God's son, Jesus, to save it.

> The death of Jesus on the cross is the centre [*sic*] of all Christian theology... All Christian statements about God, about creation, about sin and death have their focal point in the Crucified Christ. All Christian statements about history, about the church, about faith and sanctification, about the future and about hope stem from the crucified Christ.[80]

This focal point of the Christian faith is the good news and what Christians witness to. It is "*the resurrection of the crucified Christ*, which qualifies his death as something that has happened for us, and *the cross of the risen Christ*, which reveals and makes accessible to those who are dying his resurrection from the dead."[81] This is the gospel message. Through being joined to Christ's death and resurrection, Christians are reconciled to God and become new creations, given new life and the opportunity to participate in the unfolding of God's continued creative and redemptive mission.

Douglas John Hall, however, reminds us that the gospel must be discovered. "Each day, each historical epoch, each generation, the faithful are required to enter with sufficient depth into the trials and temptations of the present and impending future to be in a position to hear 'gospel.' Gospel is discovered, not possessed."[82] Hence, "only if we hear it ourselves, always anew, will we be enabled to proclaim it meaningfully to others."[83] This discovery of the gospel is the ongoing work of these congregational systems. As the gospel is proclaimed in their midst, members of the faith community

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[80]Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1974), 204.

[81]Ibid.

[82]Douglas John Hall, "What Is Theology?," *CrossCurrents* (2003): 181.

[83]Ibid., 182.

discover it again and anew in their time and place, and, in turn, they can proclaim it in the world as good news.

The Baptized Community

Christians, Christ's followers, are baptized into Christ's death and resurrection. In baptism Christians become new creations, dying to their earthly life and rising to a heavenly one.[84] This one-time event, however, is the call to a lifetime journey. How does this happen? Three aspects of baptism will be highlighted here: God as the primary agent, the role of the Christian community, and the Christian way of life.

God as primary agent

God is the primary actor in baptism. God is the one who acts, who *extends an invitation* to all, and who gives new life. God is the one who marks the baptized and *freely gives*. God is the one that conquered death and *bestows grace*. In baptism God, understood in terms of the Trinity, extends and invites humanity into God's self.

> Baptism as reception into the Body of Christ is a divine act independent of man's action, one which, in and with his being set within the Body of Christ, confers on the baptised [*sic*] person the grace that he "be clothed with Christ" (Gal 3.27; Rom. 6. 3ff) just at this particular place within the Body of Christ. In this Body the resurrection power of the *Holy Spirit* operates.[85]

In baptism, God clothes one in Christ, forgives sins, promises life eternal, gives the Spirit to each baptized person, and releases the Spirit into the world. God does all of this, the one baptized simply receives. This is a fact; baptism is God's free gift to

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[84]"In baptism the recipient is buried with Christ; he must die with him that he may rise and live with him (Rom. 6)." Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (Evansville, IN: Ballast Press, 1999), 28.

[85]Oscar Cullman, *Baptism in the New Testament*, trans. J. K. S. Reid (London: SCM Press LTD, 1950), 39.

humanity. In its most inclusive ways, baptism is the opening up of God's self to the

world, so that people will come together and be united. In this God is not selective or

does not make strict requirements. Oscar Cullman puts it this way:

> At Golgotha, the prevenient grace of God in Christ is appropriated to *all* men, and entry into Christ's kingdom is opened to them. In Baptism, entry is opened up to ...the "inner circle" of this Kingdom, that is, to the earthly Body of Christ, the Church. Golgotha and Baptism are related to one another as are the wider all-inclusive Kingdom of Christ and the Church.[86]

Hence, baptism centers God's people, receiving and shaping them within Christian

community. The covenantal relationship, established in baptism, is first and foremost

God welcoming a person, a new member, into the community of faith in which God is

present.

Christian community

God, however, is not the only actor in baptism; the faith community also has an

important role. In infant baptism someone else professes faith on behalf of the one

baptized at the baptismal event. Although this is a practice that has not gone

unchallenged, it is both theologically sound and symbolic of a Lutheran understanding of

baptism.

> Luther loved baptizing infants, because they could not answer for themselves. Their faith was confessed on the lips of others; the burden of their Christian nurture was placed on the shoulders of others...The responsibility of the community was to believe on the infant's behalf and to nurture and support the child in faith.[87]

But be it an infant or an adult, baptism is not about the proclaimed faith or

knowledge of the one baptized; it is a gift from God to the baptized *received by the*

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[86]Ibid., 34.

[87]Martha Ellen Stortz, "'The Curtain Only Rises': Assisted Death and the Practice of Baptism," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 26, no. 1 (1999): 15.

Christian community for the purpose of the creation of faith in the one newly baptized. The gathered community of faith, on behalf of the newly baptized, confesses its faith in God and commits to supporting the baptized in the Christian way of life. Baptism, therefore, is not an ending but a beginning, a beginning which sets faith in motion. In baptism, the community assembled gives witness to its belief in the Triune God, alive and active in the world. Those assembled are part of the ongoing story of God and are a representative group of the people of God across time and space.

Entering into the Body of Christ is to enter into relationship; it is to open one's self to God and to a Christian way of life. "Baptism clearly articulates that we are not our own: not rights, but relationships mark the Christian life. We are members one of another, bound together by reciprocal responsibilities."[88] These relationships are not simply with the immediate family that brought the baptized to the font or the gathered community of witnesses present, but include a complex network of Christians from the past, present, and future. Hence, "Baptism sets one into a web of relationships that will sustain and nurture, admonish and challenge, support us in living and accompany us through death."[89] These words remind us of the depth and breadth of the communal journey of the baptized.

The call to a Christian way of life

In baptism Christians receive freedom. The baptized person is freed from sin and death, Christ's saving act has now been gifted, one's end is secure. The future eschaton is now a begun reality and the future has broken into the present time. Time and space have

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[88]Ibid., 14.

[89]Ibid., 15.

been reoriented. The freedom God proclaims is now available to God's people. "This is

the Christian liberty, our faith, which...makes the law and works unnecessary for any

man's righteousness and salvation."[90] As part of this new way, the baptized becomes part

of a new community. The general call of the baptized is to a particular way of life, a life

of faith. Luther reminds us:

> The Word of God cannot be received and cherished by any works whatever but only by faith. Therefore it is clear that, as the soul needs only the Word of God for its life and righteousness, so it is justified by faith alone and not any works.[91]

In baptism the baptized receive a call to a new way of life. This new Christian

way of life is lived in community and committed to serve the world; it is dynamic and

open. This is the mission and ministry in which the church is called to participate. This

community of the baptized has two movements, in accord with its understanding of God;

internally the community is both forming and reforming each other and its way of life

together (a sign and foretaste) and externally the community is witnessing to and

engaging the world, participating in God's mission (an agent and instrument).

The *other*, both within Christian community and in the world, is always

influencing this Christian way of life. This is the beauty of a community centered on a

dynamic, living God; this is also the challenge of such a community that exists both in

time, but also in space. Luther reminds Christians that they are here on earth after

baptism for a reason:

> We have no other reason for living on earth than to be of help to others. If this were not the case, it would be best for God to kill us and let us die as soon as we

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[90]Martin Luther, *Three Treatises*, 2d, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 284.

[91]Ibid., 280.

are baptized and have begun to believe. But He permits us to live here in order that we may bring others to faith, just as He brought us.[92]

The Christian is freed from works of salvation so they can serve the neighbor and participate in God's mission in the world.

While baptismal language was not explicitly articulated in the congregational systems studied, this Christian way of life as a web of relationships which transcend time and call people to a peculiar way of life is indeed our Lutheran understanding of baptism. As called, gathered, and sent people of God, God's baptized people seek to discover together the Christian way of life. God's people are called to Christian community *united and empowered to participate in the creative and redemptive mission of God in the world.* This is the work of God's people here on earth; this is the call of the church (see Illustration 5.2 for an image).

Illustration 5.2 Missional View of Ministry

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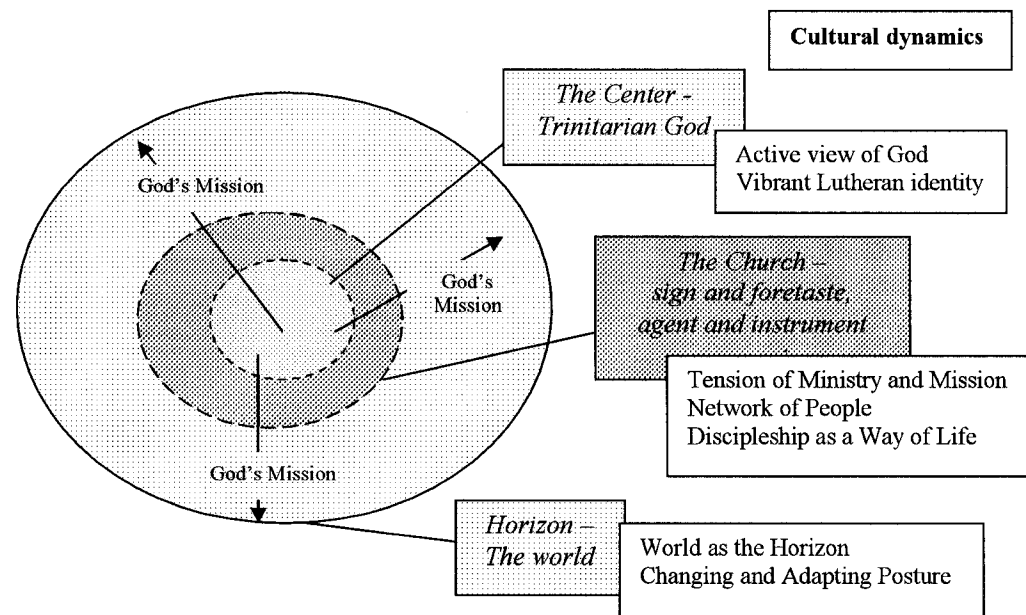
[92]Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), CD Rom, 1 Pet 1:10.

View of Leadership

Building upon a theocentric view of church, an open Trinitarian view of God, and ministry viewed as a community of the baptized participating in God's mission in the world, what is a missional view of leadership? Using a Lutheran view of two kingdoms and vocation, this section will complete this missional theology of leadership.

Two Kingdoms

As has been already stated, there are two contending powers at work in the world, the power of God and the devil. God's kingdom is in heaven, but in God's reign on earth these two powers struggle. Within the kingdom here on earth is the law and the gospel. The focus of the law (first use) is toward life on earth; the focus of the gospel is God rewriting humanity's future and directing humankind toward heaven. "The gospel is thus an eschatological message, in the sense that it promises something that belongs to the future, life after death."[93]

Christ's death and resurrection, into which all Christians are baptized, opens up a new way. "[T]he gospel brings a new relationship with Christ, a new presence of the Spirit, and a new freedom from the self which faith involves."[94] Suddenly time and space are not the only ways humanity is defined. Christians now have a new freedom that releases them from their bondage to sin and death. The gospel, then, proclaims a new view of time and space and announces life eternally with God. This new freedom,

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[93]Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 20.

[94]Kolden, "Luther on Vocation," 385.

founded in love, opens humanity up to be in a new relationship with God, now justified by faith. "[F]aith is entrance into heaven."[95]

The law (first use), however, still has a place, to serve the earthly kingdom, the neighbor. God's people are freed from sin and death with their salvation secure with God, so that they may be free to love and serve on earth, to participate in God's creative and redemptive mission in the world. The law, however, also has another use (second), to put to death within the Christian their sinful ways. Luther painfully reminds Christians that there are also "two antagonistic components within man, the old man and the new."[96] The reality remains, Christians throughout their journey of faith are paradoxically saint and sinner. Paul states it this way, "For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." (Rom 7:14-15 NRSV) The law (first use) continually challenges the Christian to a Christian way of life and at the same time the law (second use) always reveals the Christian's failure to live faithfully and lovingly for the good of the neighbor.

God's baptized people, however, live by a different concept of time and space. They live in the now and not yet, in the eschatological reality that they have eternal life with God, while also living in the midst of a broken, sinful world. The congregational systems studied acknowledged this paradoxical reality. This reality, however, rather than paralyzing them, set them free. In this new order, God's faithfulness creates faith in the Christian, for God does not need works from us, but the neighbor does, the world does,

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[95]Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 20.

[96]Ibid., 250.

and the communities of faith studied understood that. "God receives that which is his, faith. The neighbor receives that which is his, works."[97] Or as Luther said it, "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."[98]

Agency

Christians, communicatively and individually, have agency. In baptism, the baptized receives the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit allows God to continually be present in both time and space. In space because God, through the Spirit, is not limited by physicality; God, the Holy Spirit, is present throughout the world. Acts 1:8 reminds us that the Spirit came so that Christians may now be God's witnesses to the gospel. Yet, the Spirit is also present in time, in the life of Christians living in real time. This is the work God the Spirit – to unite, to empower, and to sanctify.

Christians, individually and communicatively, have agency through the Spirit, not only in general but also in particular ways. As Christians, not only are we joined in love, but we are transformed into "agents of Christ's love"[99] by the Holy Spirit. This agency is to serve the neighbor, to participate in God's mission *in the world*. "Christians are indeed called and made the habitation of God, and in them God speaks, and rules, and works."[100] Yet, "[t]he agent of moral being and doing is not the person; the moral agent is the indwelling Christ received only after being and doing, grounded in our own agency, has

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[97]Ibid., 14.

[98]Luther, *Three Treatises*, 277. See also 1 Cor 9:19 and Rom 13:8.

[99]Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, *Healing a Broken World: Globalization and God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 87.

[100]Ibid., 75. Quoting Luther, "Third Sermon on Pentecost," in Lenker, 3:321.

ceased and we have become totally dependent upon God."[101] This agency is, as Luther highlights, always within community.[102]

Hence, the Christian way of life is a community of persons empowered by the Spirit; it has love as its centerpiece and the world as its horizon. It is filled with energy, creativity, passion, determination, and much more. "The presence of God taking bodily form in 'our' many forms suggests a web of connectedness pregnant with implications for moral identity and agency."[103] Luther highlighted this power in the priesthood of all believers. The freedom Christians receive by being baptized into Christ and his body, the church, frees them to boldly pray, teach, and serve their neighbor in the world on Christ's behalf.[104] First Peter 2:9 (NRSV) says it this way: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." All who believe have access to this power; no longer do God's people need to rely on mediators, they are empowered and sent forth. "[A]ll activity in relationship to neighbor is normed and empowered by one theological principle – true Christians actively embody Christ for neighbor by serving the neighbor's well-being in all that they do."[105]

Agency clearly was present in the systems studied. It was ignited in worship, empowered through ministry, and lived daily in the world. Agency, connected with

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[101]Ibid., 112.

[102]Ibid.

[103]Ibid., 113.

[104]Luther, *Three Treatises*, 289-93.

[105]Moe-Lobeda, *Healing a Broken World: Globalization and God*, 91.

Christian freedom, is a powerful source of energy found as much in the space within these missional faith communities, as in concrete ways.

Vocation/Stations

The popular notion of vocation often refers simply to one's occupation, limited further to one's individual choice about one's occupation. Vocation, however, comes from the Latin word *vocatio* which in English is translated calling.[106] We, as baptized Christians, have both a general calling, to be faithful and to serve our neighbor, and particular callings. A theology of vocation can help the baptized people of God understand their particular callings on earth. Luther saw the particular stations in which one lives as part of one's vocation or calling. A vocation or station is the place or places the Christian is to serve the neighbor and to participate in God's creative and redemptive mission in the world in concrete and tangible ways.

People within this time in history, as well as Luther's time, occupy more than one station. "[T]he Christian need not invent his 'vocation'; he need only become aware of it."[107] Home, work, faith community, and civic community are all places where Christians are to be God's presence in the world and to give witness to the gospel. These are all worldly stations; the places where God has placed God's people in the world to serve the neighbor.

Stations are also the places where one's faith is tested, nurtured, and matures. These are the places where the gospel is discovered. "God's Spirit will see to putting to

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[106]Marc Kolden, "Earthly Vocation as a Corollary of Justification by Faith," in *By Faith Alone: Essays on Justification in Honor of Gerhard O. Forde*, ed. Marc Kolden and Joseph A. Burgess (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 267.

[107]Wingren, "Concept of Vocation: Its Basis and Its Problem," 87.

death our sinful self in the course of our new self's devotion to the duties of our callings."[108] This is the second use of the law. As people seeking to live a Christian way of life, this personal aspect of vocation is extremely valuable.

Vocation, however, like the Christian way of life, is not an individualistic endeavor. Vocations are always within community where solidarity in community makes them an agent within God's world, empowered by the Spirit. Through vocations the baptized are dispensed within the world; through various stations God's people participate in God's creative and redemptive mission in the world. Stations are how God's people are constantly being opened up to the world just as God continues to be open to the world. While all of humanity serve in stations and can be active in God's work in the world, without faith people are unaware of it.[109] Christians, through faith, are given eyes to see their vocations as their way of expressing God's love in their relationships to others. "The gospel invites us to see vocation as a concrete way of expressing our faith...a channel for it."[110] Hence, vocations belong to the Christian's life between baptism and resurrection.[111]

Vocation, then, becomes the missional impulse of the community, called, gathered, and sent for the sake of the world. Vocation gives the baptized their own opportunity to put faith, the world, and daily living into conversation. Unlike the contemporary secular view of vocation, a Christian's vocational calling is always

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[108]Kolden, "Luther on Vocation," 385.

[109]"Everything that beings me into relation with other people, everything that makes my actions events in other people's lives is contained in 'vocation.'" Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 7.

[110]Kolden, "Luther on Vocation," 389.

[111]Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 250.

connected to God's mission and lived in community, or more precisely communities. Each station in which God's people are embedded is within a community; be it work, family, faith community, or civic community.

It is worth pointing out that the relationships that constitute the Christian way of life not only are with those within Christian communities, but also include relationships in other communities in which God's people are stationed in the world. Christians are always located within the world and the baptized are God's presence, God's agents of love, in the world. Western Christians have tended to overlook this aspect of faith, just as vocation has been collapsed into an individual's choice or prerogative. In varying degrees the people within the systems studied have discovered not only a communal identity as baptized believers or the agency they have received in baptism through the Holy Spirit, but they have also claimed their particular vocations as stations in which they can and are participating in God's creative and redemptive mission in the world.

If Lutheran Christians are to take Luther's theology of vocation seriously, then it is time for us all to revision our lives as moving in and between various webs of relationships, with these relationships being the places to which we are called to participate in God's creative and redemptive mission in the world. It is time that the people of God rediscover the power of God moving both within them and in the world. It is time that we, baptized Christians with our future secured, see our "earthly vocation as a corollary of justification by faith,"[112] with faith supplying the criteria for carrying out one's vocations, including challenging prevailing norms.

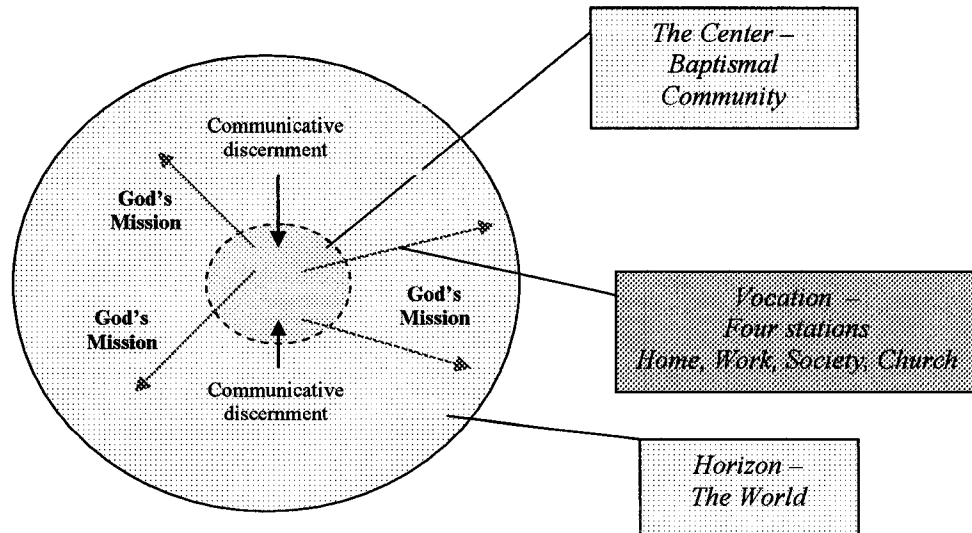[112]Kolden, "Earthly Vocation as a Corollary of Justification by Faith."

This radical notion of the people of God loose in the world may challenge the ecclesiocentric church, for God's people, untrained and ordinary, may not always act or speak in orthodox ways. Yet, this radical notion of the people of God loose in the world may indeed be in sync with a theocentric view of church, be closer to what Luther imaged when he called for the priesthood of all believers, and be what the ELCA missional congregational systems are embodying. Vocations *are* what connect God's people with the *missio Dei*; they are part of the creative and redemptive work of God in the world.

In this global world one's stations are no longer defined by traditional boundaries. While this new reality has ups and downs, an up side is that the scope of a Christian's influence has dramatically changed; an ecclesiocentric church has limited capacity for igniting and engaging this new reality. Yet a theocentric missional church, with an open Trinity as its center and the world as its horizon, can exercise its agency, rooted in Christian freedom, and truly be people *united and empowered to participate in God's creative and redemptive mission in the world.*

This missional view of leadership, rooted in Lutheran theology, may challenge current Lutheran polity, ecclesiology, and practices if it takes seriously the church's call to be agents and instruments, as well as a sign and foretaste. But perhaps the ELCA as a whole can also be open to this challenge and reframe itself around an open Trinitarian view of God. Perhaps it is time for church leadership to refocus as well and be about igniting the passion of the baptized, releasing the Spirit that is already at work within the Body of Christ (see illustration 5.3).

Illustration 5.3 Theological and Biblical View of Missional Leadership

Communicative
discernment

God's
Mission

God's
Mission

God's
Mission

Communicative
discernment

*The Center –
Baptismal
Community*

*Vocation –
Four stations
Home, Work, Society, Church*

*Horizon –
The World*

Part Three: Theoretically Informed

The Mainline Church in North America, as it has sought to be effective in its

ministry, has drawn upon organizational and leadership theories. These theories have

been both helpful and a hindrance. Recognizing that organizational and leadership

theories are not *what* drive the church, they can, however, be fruitful conversation

partners in organizing and leading communities of people as they live into and out of the

church's nature. Hence, leading in mission in this time in history will require not only

redefining the church as missional, but also revisiting organizational and leadership

theories, mining their learnings in light of the church's missional identity. Part three of

Van Gelder's hermeneutic of leading is mission is being theoretically informed. This

chapter will take some of the cultural dynamics that emerged out of the research of this

dissertation and put them into conversation with learnings from current organizational

and leadership theories. These learnings will be clustered around four ideas: change,

networking, leadership, and gifts-based communities. These, however, are not strict categories, but themes woven throughout.

Change and Adaptivity

Margaret Wheatley, a major contributor in organizational systems theory with over twenty years' experience working with organization, challenges leaders to adopt a new worldview,[113] for the "old ways of relating to each other don't support us any longer."[114] To get to this new worldview[115] requires looking at connections, seeing energy in relationships, acknowledging the power in what is unseen, and leaving the Newtonian worldview[116] that believes in predictability and strives for objectivity. This is a paradigm shift[117] in which the old rules no longer apply and in which new rules emerge.

Wheatley's discoveries come from her learnings from three new sciences: self-organizing systems, quantum physics, and chaos theory. Self-organizing systems, which have already been highlighted, demonstrate their viability and resilience in their capacity to adapt and create structures that fit the moment, with stability coming from a clear sense of who they are.[118] Quantum physics understands that relationships are "the key

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[113]Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, xi.

[114]Ibid.

[115]A view that sees the world as a whole.

[116]The Newtonian worldview sees the world as a machine with separate parts.

[117]Paradigm shift is a concept developed my Thomas Kuhn. Paradigms are scientific theories or ways of looking at the world and they serve as the unifier of science and scientific work. A paradigm shift refers to the moments in history when such shared assumptions undergo a radical revolution. For more on Kuhn's view of scientific revolution, see Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

[118]Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, 83.

determiner of everything"[119] and chaos theory reminds us that chaos is a given and freedom needs to be fostered.[120] What results is that this new world is one of networks in which relationships are primary, where context matters, and the whole of life is honored.[121]

In this new worldview chaos and change are givens. As leaders, [o]ur dance partner insists that we put ourselves in motion, that we learn to live with instability, chaos, change, and surprise."[122] Like the open Trinitarian view of God, there is continual movement and opening one's self to the world. Leading within such systems requires new leadership skills around adaptability and the ability to deal with change.[123] Leaders within such systems become people who look at the whole rather than the parts, tend to the development and retention of the core identity, facilitate the open flow of information, and foster relationships inside and outside the organization.

Wheatley's findings describe the underlying workings of the congregational systems studied in this research. As the church seeks to create missional communities, Wheatley's findings highlight the work that needs to be done and gives leaders guidance as to where they might focus their time and energy. With relationships as primary, context crucial, and a focus on the whole of life, these theories directly connect with discoveries that emerged in this study. Organizations that operate within this worldview focus on participatory management, tend to relationships, work within networks, share

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[119]Ibid., 11.

[120]Ibid., 13.

[121]Ibid., 158.

[122]Ibid., 154.

[123]Ibid., 157-70.

information, and create meaning.[124] All of the systems studied fit these criteria. Richard

Ascough, working with Wheatley's self-organizing systems, Dee Houck's chaos

theory,[125] and New Testament leadership as witnessed through Paul, states it this way:

> it seems that we are now at a point where we can see that the ever-present but
> unfilled parousia of Jesus calls the Church as an organization to be fluid,
> constantly redefining itself according to its current contexts. Chaotic? No! Rather,
> it should be chaordic, that is, self-organizing, seeking out its own optimal solution
> to its current environment.[126]

The voices of the people in five missional congregational systems would agree.

Networking

Networks, a foundational reality in Wheatley's work as well as in the research of

this dissertation, are being studied in various disciplines, with their learnings

substantiating each other. Two people who have done extensive work with networking

theory will be drawn upon here, Alberto-Laszlo Barabasi and Malcolm Gladwell.

"Networking thinking is poised to invade all domains of human activity and most

fields of human inquiry,"[127] Alberto-Laszlo Barabasi says. "Networks are by their very

nature the fabric of most complex systems."[128] Networks, made up of nodes, hubs, and

links, are the topology of the internet, social relationships, epidemics, and much more.

Networks were also the primary topology in the congregational systems studied.

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[124]Ibid., 157-68.

[125]Houck, *Birth of the Chaordic Age.*

[126]Richard S. Ascough, "Chaos Theory and Paul's Organizational Leadership," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 1, no. 2 (2002): 39.

[127]Barabasi, *Linked: The New Science of Networks,* 222.

[128]Ibid.

Many things can be learned from networks. The role of hubs, scale-free networks, and the idea of robustness are three learnings that will be highlighted. Picking up on what has already been stated, networks are made up of nodes, links, and hubs. Within a social network, nodes represent the individual persons, links are the things that connect these persons or nodes, and hubs are key people or nodes that are densely populated and diversely connected creating short cuts to other parts of the network. It is important to keep in mind that like systems, networks are complex and working at various scales. For example, it is possible to zoom in on a social network and recognize that a node, or person, is also a network, or zoom out and see that the congregational system is also a node within the network called the synod or town. Identifying the nodes, hubs, and links within a network illuminates key information about a network.

"Hubs appear in most large complex networks...they are ubiquitous, a generic building block of our complex, interconnected world."[129] Hubs follow strict patterns[130] and are not all equal. Scale-free networks "have several large hubs that will fundamentally define the network's topology."[131] The greater the number of large hubs, the more effective and robust a network becomes. Large hubs are created because other nodes are attached to them. Two factors impact nodes' attraction: nodes that were created early[132] and nodes with higher fitness.[133]

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[129]Ibid., 63.

[130]Ibid., 64.

[131]Ibid., 71.

[132]Ibid., 87.

[133]"Fitness is your ability to make friends relative to everybody else in your neighborhood...It is a quantitative measure of a node's ability to stay in front of the competition." Ibid., 95-96.

"Achieving robustness is the ultimate goal"[134] for networks, for it is their greatest protection against failure. In the life of a network, nodes are continually being added and taken out, so in order to maintain vitality multiple large hubs are needed. Connectivity is key for networks, for vulnerability comes when networks are not interconnected.[135] Without robustness a network can be dismantled by disabling only a few hubs.[136] Scale-free networks are how networks organize themselves for robustness. Scale-free networks increase their number of large hubs strategically throughout the network, making them less susceptible to failure. "Topological robustness is thus rooted in the structural unevenness of scale-free networks"[137] (see Illustration 5.4).

Illustration 5.4 – Scale-free Networks
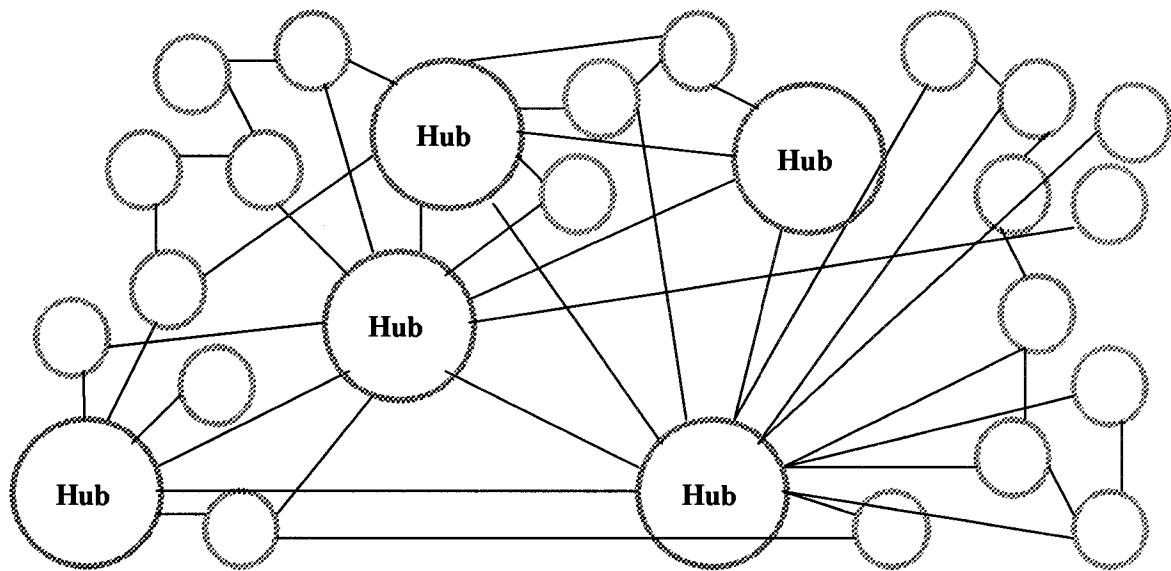
[134]Ibid., 111.

[135]Ibid., 130.

[136]Ibid., 118.

[137]Ibid., 114.

Each of the congregational systems studied in this research not only had networks as their topology, but they were robust, free-scale networks. If someone was to map the networks of these congregational systems people, worship, and ministry activities would have risen up as key hubs, with each strategically located throughout the network. While the robustness of the networks varied from one system to the next, the large number of keys hubs present demonstrated their vitality. One small example is the role of the pastoral staff. Each congregational system had pastors serving in key roles, as hubs, but their leadership was not solely defined by the pastors. The leadership systems within each congregational system allowed for multiple hubs, so that if one hub was removed the network could continue to be viable. While the congregational systems studied could not articulate this reality, each system had an innate understanding of the realities of robust networks and this topology was fluid enough that it helped them adapt and respond to the changing conditions, both internally and externally. Living with a network topology allowed them to create a multidimensional approach to their life and ministry together.[138]

Malcolm Gladwell's *The Tipping Point*, drawing on principles of networking, reminds organizations that "change happens not gradually but at one dramatic moment."[139] Embedded within Gladwell's work is the idea that there are three agents of change within networks: leadership, contagiousness, and context.[140] The three rules that

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[138]Ibid., 216.

[139]Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2000), 9.

[140]Ibid., 19-29.

are needed to create a movement or epidemic include: the law of a few, the stickiness

factor, and the power of context.[141]

The *law of a few* recognizes that within a movement not all people are created

equally. A few people "with a particular and rare set of social gifts"[142] are essential to

creating change and dramatically shape the diffusion process. The three significant

persons, or leaders, are connectors, mavens, and salesmen.[143] Connectors are "people

with a special gift for bringing the worlds together,"[144] for they know many people,[145]

and are "sprinkled among every walk of life."[146] Networks rely on connectors for "access

to opportunities and worlds to which [others] don't belong."[147] Using network language,

connectors are densely populated hubs; using missional language connectors cross

boundaries. But connectors need information to share. Connectors get their information

from another group of key people, the mavens, for they hold the knowledge.[148] A maven

has a thirst for solving other people's problems[149] and might be savvy enough to solve

their own problems while solving other's problems as well. The mavens are the data

banks that provide the message and the connectors act as the social glue spreading the

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[141]Ibid.

[142]Ibid., 33.

[143]Ibid., 30-88.

[144]Ibid., 38.

[145]Ibid.

[146]Ibid., 41.

[147]Ibid., 54.

[148]Ibid., 60.

[149]Ibid., 66.

message. The final key person is the salesman, the one that persuades.[150] With these three

roles dispersed throughout the network information quickly gets disseminated and a

network can experience a tipping point.

The second rule, *the stickiness factor*, speaks to the issue of contagiousness.[151]

This rule highlights that the specific way a message is communicated matters. For an

epidemic to occur the message has to be sticky and memorable for it be caught or be

contagious. It is not the message that is dramatically different in various networks, but

how the message is communicated that makes all the difference. While the missional

congregational systems studied were not compared to other ELCA congregational

systems not considered missional, it might be interesting to investigate *if* the stickiness

factor would surface as a distinguishing mark. Certainly within the congregational

systems studied the sermon and/or worship were considered sticky.

The final rule, *the power of context*, lifts up how vitally important context is.

Gladwell recognized that humans are sensitive to their environment and environmental

factors can and do influence the way people act.[152] Often context changes gradually and

is not noticed. Context, however, can change quickly, and when it does all the rules

change. Clearly epidemics have been influenced by environmental factors, yet this rule is

often underrecognized. Context, and the changes within, was clearly on the radar of each

of the congregational systems studied here.

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[150]Ibid., 70.

[151]Ibid., 22-25.

[152]Ibid., 26-29.

In studying networks in general, or studying the diffusion of a missional movement in particular, naming and tending to these three rules and types of leaders is critical. As the church moves into a new world with a new worldview Gladwell's rules and types of leaders can serve as a guide, not only for what the church needs to change and adapt, but also as it recognizes the need to operate within a new topology. Gladwell can both help the church understand networks and assist it in dealing with this paradigm shift.

The Dance of Leadership

"Leadership would be a safe undertaking if your organizations and communities only faced problems for which they already knew the solutions."[153] These types of problems, according to Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, are technical ones.[154] Treating problems as technical ones has been a common approach for church leaders as they deal with change. Yet the new worldview Wheatley suggests, and the one which these congregational systems are living into and out of, see change differently.

> [T]here is a whole host of problems that are not amenable to authoritative expertise or standard operating procedures...We call these adaptive challenges because they require experiments, new discoveries, and adjustments from numerous places in the organization and community. Without learning new ways – changing attitudes, values, and behaviors – people cannot make the adaptive leap necessary to thrive in the new environment. The sustainability of change depends on having the people with the problem internalize the change itself.[155]

This approach to change requires shifting one's perspective, and ultimately one's posture of leadership.

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[153]Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 13.

[154]Ibid.

[155]Ibid.

Most organizations look to leadership to solve their problems. Yet, "[w]hen people look to authorities for easy answers to adaptive challenges, they end up with dysfunction."[156] For too long organizations, congregational systems included, have relied on technical responses – restructuring, new leadership, changing methods, or adopting new styles – for the answers to problems that require major shifts; be they shifts within the culture as a whole or the church as one of the many subcultures.[157] Leadership within the congregational systems studied, however, operated with a different posture. These systems did not rely on quick fixes, but were willing and able to dig below the surface, seeking to discover the core issues, and changed not only programs but attitudes.

"In mobilizing adaptive work, you have to engage people in adjusting their unrealistic expectations, rather than try to satisfy them as if the situation were amenable primarily to a technical remedy,"[158] according to Heifetz and Linsky. For adaptive work leaders have to counteract dependency and "promote [the organization's] resourcefulness. This takes an extraordinary level of presence, time, and artful communication, but it may also take more time and trust than you have."[159] Adaptive change is hard work and can only be done from a posture of shared leadership.

Heifetz and Linsky's work speaks directly to the church. For just as the church is called to shift from an ecclesiocentric view of itself to a theocentric one, so too church

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[156]Ibid., 14.

[157]This issue is not only common within the church, but in organizations as a whole. Heifetz and Linsky says, "the single most common source of leadership failure we've been able to identify – in politics, community life, business, or the nonprofit section – is that people, especially those in positions of authority, treat adaptive challenges like technical problems." Ibid.

[158]Ibid., 15.

[159]Ibid.

leaders will need to shift their thinking from technical to adaptive leadership. With an adaptive posture to change leaders are not the experts who handle the problems, but the conveners of the people whom the problem directly effects. Together they journey through a process of dealing with it, likely requiring all of them to think and act differently (see Table 5.1). As one pastor stated, "You don't shape congregations rationally but behaviorally. Modeling is how you shape people...It's shaping the culture...Our job is to shape the culture."[160] Shared, adaptive leadership calls all involved to walk the talk of change.

Table 5.1 – Technical vs. Adaptive Change[161]

	What's the work?	**Who does the work?**
Technical	Apply current know-how	Authorities
Adaptive	Learn new ways	The people with the problem

So what does this shared leadership look like? A community of gifted people, sharing power and authority, called and sent by God to participate in God's mission in the world. This model of leadership is a dance to be discovered in the midst of a robust network, as God's people share their life together.

George Cladis, a Presbyterian pastor, lays out a framework for this adaptive and shared leadership dance in *Leading the Team-Based Church.*[162] Based on a perichoretic, Trinitarian view of God and taking seriously the current postmodern environment, Cladis addresses shared leadership not in a pragmatic, step-by-step process, but as the ongoing

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[160]Interview participant from Casa para Todos.

[161]Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading,* 14.

[162]George Cladis, *Leading the Team-Based Church: How Pastors and Church Staffs Can Grow Together into a Powerful Fellowship of Leaders* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999).

communal work of a congregational system's life together. He outlines the work of shared leadership as: covenanting, visioning, culture-creating, collaborating, trusting, empowering, and learning.[163]

This section will briefly unpack each of these seven aspects of Cladis' work. To start with, it is imperative that a faith community acknowledge that they are a living community centered on God's radical love. As a *covenanting* community they seek to incarnate this radical love from God.[164] This covenanting community is called to redeem and restore as it participates in the *missio Dei*. The leadership within this community is called to continually lift up the *vision* of the community,[165] and as they do so leaders tend to the work of *culture-creating*, one which strives to create "a culture of perichoretic love."[166] This community is *collaborative*, inviting all to come to the table with their particular gifts,[167] *trusting* each other, as they are continually reminded of their saint and sinner nature,[168] and *empowering* each other as they take "appropriate risks to innovate and surrender their responsibility in order to empower others."[169] Finally, this community is *learning* about their "role of discovering and experiencing the revealed presence of God."[170]

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[163]Ibid., 10-16.

[164]Ibid., 10.

[165]Ibid., 12.

[166]Ibid., 13.

[167]Ibid., 14.

[168]Ibid.

[169]Ibid., 15.

[170]Ibid.

While there are other examples of shared leadership, Cladis' example is one which frames leadership within a missional, communal view of God. This example, shaped around these seven ideas, has been tried and tested within the various congregational systems in which Cladis has served and is what he believes is needed in the church today. He says:

> The most effective churches today are the ones that are developing team-based leadership. This pattern will likely continue into the twenty-first century, both because Scripture emphasizes Spirit-led, Spirit-gifted collaborative team fellowship and because today's culture is receptive to such leadership.[171]

Cladis' beliefs were certainly confirmed in this study.

Gifts-Based Community

Congregational systems operating as self-organizing systems made up of robust networks with shared leadership have an active, missional view of God as the source of their life together. These complex, open systems, called congregations, will find the energy for their life together in the work of the Spirit and in the people themselves, living into and out of God's mission in the world. As was clear in the data analysis, people are what make up these congregational systems. Called and gifted, equipped by the Spirit and empowered by communities of faith, the baptized people of God live out their particular callings in the world and within their communities of faith. The people are the invisible force field present within each community of faith.[172]

Many theories have been developed, within both secular and Christian literature, which highlight human potential and help people discover their unique gifts and design.

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[171]Ibid., 1.

[172]The concept of fields has to do with the "invisible forces that occupy space and influence behavior." Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, 15.

Within the Christian literature, resources have emerged from teaching congregations, like

Willow Creek[173] and Saddleback,[174] as well as from individual authors, like Peter Wagner

and David Stark, et al.[175] Within the secular literature the resources are multiple and

range from personality-driven resources[176] to resources that help discover one's

strengths.[177] For the purposes of this missional view of leadership the particulars of these

various theories are secondary to the main point – missional leadership, rooted in a

theology of baptism and vocation, has a high regard for the gifts and passions of all of

God's people and intentionally seeks ways of recognizing and empowering God's gifted

people. The work of discovering and empowering the gifts of God's people will be done

within the holdings of one's individual vocations, located within community, and with an

eye to the world and God's preferred future.

Part Four: Strategic Action

But how is one to lead? What are the strategic actions of missional congregational

systems? These are some of the real questions facing the church today and are not easily

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[173]Willow Creek has developed their own gifts ministry called Network. They have packaged it and made it available to others. Here is one of their current resources: Bruce Bugbee, *Discover Your Spiritual Gifts the Network Way* (Barrington, IL: Willow Creek Association, 2007).

[174]Saddleback's gift ministry is SHAPE. See more on their website: www.saddlebackfamily.com/ministry/index.html.

[175]Jane A.G. Kise, David Stark, Sandra Krebs Hirsh, *Lifekeys: Discovering Who You Are, Why You're Here, What You Do Best* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1996), Peter Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow* (Oxnard, CA: Regal Books, 1995).

[176]Here is a sample of such resources: Renee Baron, *What Type Am I? Discover Who You Really Are* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), Renee Baron and Elizabeth Wagele, *The Enneagram Made Easy* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), David Keirsey, *Please Understand Me 2* (Del Mar, CA: Prometheus Nemesis Book Company, 1998), Otto Kroeger and Janet M. Thuesen, *Type Talk* (New York: Tilden Press Book, 1998), Don Richard Riso, *Personality Types: Using the Enneagram for Self-Discovery* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996).

[177]Here is one of the many resources developed by Marcus Buckingham on strengths: Marcus Buckingham and Donald O. Clifton, *Now, Discover Your Strengths* (New York: The Free Press, 2001).

answered. The reality is that the church will need to live into this new worldview *at the same time* it is discovering it and certainly before it can fully understand it. This is scary and unnerving, yet it is the work of current church leaders to lead in the midst of this real dilemma.

Within this mysterious, liminal time church leaders need to act, and do so strategically helping the church find its way forward. In the final section of this chapter, Van Gelder's fourth part of a hermeneutic of leading in mission, strategic action, will be addressed briefly at two levels: missional congregational leadership and Christian practices of missional faith communities.

Missional Congregational Leadership

Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk in *The Missional Leader*[178] have set out to be bridge builders. Deeply shaped by and committed to missional church theology, they have turned their attention to the work of helping congregational systems become missional, in particular addressing the issue of how one leads within such a system.[179] While there is much to be learned from their work, three key elements will be presented here: leadership as cultivation, the three zone model of missional leadership, and missional leadership as a dynamic interplay.

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

[179]Ibid., 4.

Leadership as Cultivation

"[W]e offer an alternative model of the missional leader who is a *cultivator* of an environment that discerns God's activities among the congregation and in its context."[180] Leadership focused on cultivation is organic and fluid, with its main role being to create an environment open to the Spirit and in which God's people can flourish. "[C]*ultivation* describes the leader as the one who works the soil of the congregation so as to invite and constitute the environment for the people of God to discern what the Spirit is doing in, with, and among them as a community."[181]

Being more of an art than a skill, Roxburgh and Romanuk lift up four elements of leadership as cultivation. The first is *cultivating three types of awareness*. These three types of awareness are "the awareness of what God is doing among the people of the congregation,"[182] an awareness "of how a congregation can imagine itself as being the center of God's activities,"[183] and an awareness of "what God is already up to in the congregation's context."[184] These three types of awareness in turn lead to a new understanding and open up the congregational system to think of its life together in new ways and plant the seed of missional thinking among the people within the faith community.

The second element is *cultivating co-learning networks*. "To create an environment that releases the missional imagination of a congregation, leaders need to

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[180]Ibid., 27.

[181]Ibid., 28.

[182]Ibid., 31.

[183]Ibid.

[184]Ibid., 32.

cultivate forms that give people space to experiment and test out actions with one another."[185] These networks allow the community to "discover together new habits for missional life."[186] These networks draw on the principles of networks already identified in this chapter, opening space as well as creating and dismantling hubs.

Cultivating fresh ways of engaging Scripture is the third element.[187] Missional congregational systems need to be deeply connected to God's Word. Their rootedness in Scripture is fresh and new as they engage it with missional eyes. It is this continual dialogue of the people of God in context with the Word of God that keeps them as a community of faith, alive, vibrant, and faithful.[188] Finally, the fourth element is *cultivating new practices, habits, and norms.*[189] More will be said about particular Christian practices later in this chapter, but missional congregational systems are not based primarily on programs and traditions as much as they are in Christian formation and disciplines of discipleship.[190] Cultivating an environment is not a linear, one-time process, but the ongoing work of missional leadership. It is a journey that has no end.

The congregational systems studied exhibited these actions as their ongoing work together. At times a large part of the faith community might be involved, while at other times a small groups might be working the process, but overall leadership as cultivation

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[185]Ibid.

[186]Ibid.

[187]Ibid., 33.

[188]Ibid., 33-34.

[189]Ibid., 34.

[190]Ibid.

was prevalent. This posture of leadership does translate into new missional practices,

habits, and norms, as was evident throughout the congregational systems studied.

The Three Zone Model of Missional Leadership

In addition to recognizing that leadership as cultivation is important, Roxburgh

and Romanuk also lay out a map for congregational systems as they move toward

becoming a missional congregational system. This map, focused on missional leadership,

has three zones: reactive leadership, performative leadership, and emergent leadership.[191]

This Three Zone Model provides a framework to:

> assist leaders in understanding the adaptive shift in leadership style required amid
> such change; identify the skills and competencies required in each zone; and help
> congregations understand their own location in massive change.[192]

The emergent zone, the preferred zone for missional congregational systems, is

one of pioneering and experimenting, with leadership being shared.[193] While there is no

rule book for leadership in this zone, there are six postures that enable such an

environment: allows for failure, free of hierarchy, allows for ambiguity, focuses on

culture rather than organizational formation, challenge is an opportunity not a crisis, and

strategy is emergent not linear.[194] Getting to this zone will require letting go and living

through transition, for which the authors offer a model of change.[195] The five aspects of

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[191]Ibid., 41.

[192]Ibid., 40.

[193]Ibid., 41-44.

[194]Ibid., 45.

[195]This model of change is a five step process based on Everett Roger's *Diffusion of Innovations*.
Ibid., 81-82.

this "Missional Change Model"[196] are: awareness, understanding, evaluation, experiment, and commitment.[197] This change process creates not only understanding of the current situation but also a new way, with new language and common commitments.

Roxburgh and Romanuk's emergent zone leadership is descriptive of the systems studied. All were on a journey, with an unforeseeable end, and allowed for ambiguity and failure. They were also about the work of creating new language with clear meaning, i.e. mission partners rather than church members.

Missional Leadership as a Dynamic Interplay

Finally, there are some skills leaders within a missional congregational system must have, as well as personal attributes which they must possess. These skills and personal attributes are two sides of the same missional leadership coin. The leadership skills are around cultivating people, forming mission environments and congregations, and engaging context. The personal attributes are personal maturity, conflict management, personal courage, and develops trust[198] (see Illustration 5.5).

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[196]Ibid., 84.

[197]Ibid.

[198]Ibid., 114.

Illustration 5.5 – Personal Attributes and Readiness Factors in Missional Leadership[199]
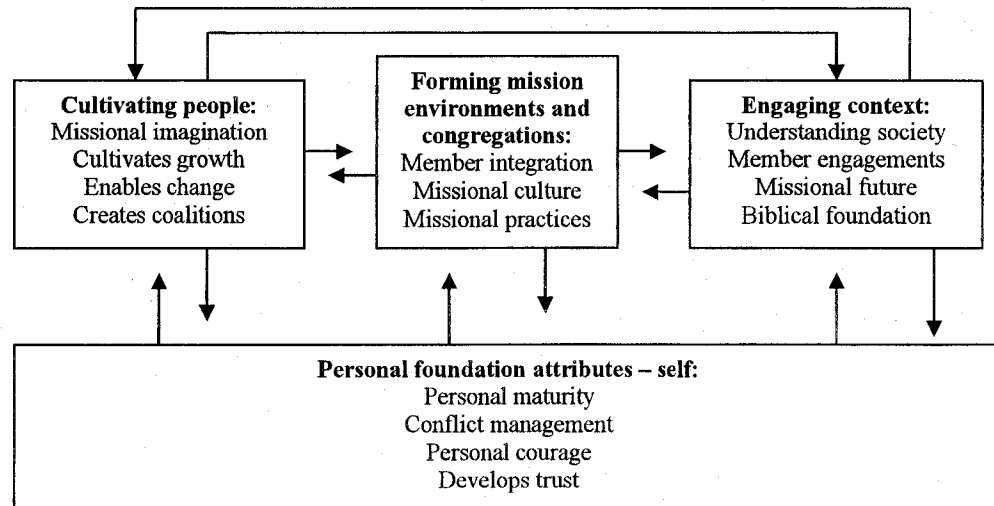
These four clusters of work and/or skills are vital for missional congregational systems and align with the cultural dynamics discovered in this study. For example, the cultural dynamic of discipleship as a way of life has to focus on cultivating people, particularities in their congregational system, skills to engage the context, and a commitment to the leadership's own discipleship journey. While different language is used, there is synchronicity between the *The Missional Leader* and the cultural dynamics discovered in this study.

The categories of skills needed for missional leadership, while not named directly in this research, certainly align with the spirit of the work identified within these congregational systems. The personal attributes were not a subject of this research, but might serve as part of a deeper study of missional leadership. Overall, *The Missional Leader* not only lays out a framework for leading missional congregational systems, but also provides current church leadership some particular skills and postures to tend to.

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[199]Ibid.

Christian Practices

Thus far, this section has highlighted the posture and skills of missional leadership within missional congregational systems. Looking at missional congregational systems with an eye toward leadership is one perspective. But what do missional congregational systems look like with an eye toward the practices of the people? In other words, What are the practices in which missional congregational systems partake? This final section will put the cultural dynamics discovered in this research into conversation with three other pieces of work: Diana Butler Bass' *The Practicing Congregation,*[200] Craig Dykstra and Dorothy Bass' "A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices,"[201] and Dietrich Bohoeffer's *Life Together.*[202]

Practicing Congregations

In *The Practicing Congregation* Bass sets forth the initial findings from her "three-year study of the role of Christian practices in fostering congregational vitality as experienced in churches of the historic mainline."[203] The churches in Bass' study had all experienced a renewed sense of "identity, vocation, and mission through intentionally embracing particular Christian practices that...embodied a way of life that made sense of

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[200]Diana Butler Bass, *The Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church* (Washington, DC: Alban, 2002).

[201]Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass, eds., *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2002).

[202]Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1954).

[203]This study included fifty congregations from various Mainline denominations, including the ELCA, Presbyterian Church (USA), United Methodist, Episcopal, United Church of Christ, and Reformed Church in America. Congregations were large, medium, and small and diverse geographically, pastorally, and in class, race, and ethnicity. Bass, *The Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church*, xi.

the Gospel in their unique cultural contexts."[204] While there were many differences

between Bass' work and this research, they have a similar spirit.

The findings of *The Practicing Congregation* report that the congregational

systems studied are intentional ones, as compared to established congregational systems.

Seeing these as two poles of a continuum, Bass identified the extremes of these two poles

around twelve ideals and characteristics of what it means to be a congregational system

(see Table 5.2).

Table 5.2 – Established vs. Intentional Congregational Systems[205]

Ideals and Characteristics	Established Congregations	Intentional Congregations
Image	Chapel	Community
God	Father, Rule, Judge, "Above Us"	Love, Spirit, "With Us"
Congregants	Members, family	Companions, pilgrims, friends
Ministry	Paid professionals	Shared, mentoring, teaching
Education	Information about Christian faith	Formation in Christian practices
Theology	Seminary-based, expertise	Communal task, lived, experiential
Piety	Introverted, private, devotional	Extroverted, expressive, spirituality
Orientation	Received, routinized, rules	Reflexive, reflective, risk
Space	Dwelling, structures, place	Fluid, dynamic, journey
Tradition	Deposit, inheritance, custom	Process, wisdom, flexible
Worldview	Compartmentalized, low tension with culture	Connected, medium-to-high tension with culture
Goal	Preservation, maintenance, salvation	Encounter, movement, way of life

In addition to the poles of established and intentional, congregational systems also

have roots along the liberal/conservative continuum. Bass notes that postliberal and

postevangelical churches are moving away from the established poles and moving toward

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[204]Ibid.

[205]Ibid., 83. Bass' findings are similar to the typology of *churches* and *sects*. Rodney Stark defines churches as "groups in a relatively low tension with their environment" and sects are "groups in a relatively high tension with their environment." Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 25.

the intentional one and in doing so are finding common ground (see illustration 5.6). What has emerged is "a layer of multidimensionality beyond the liberal-conservative line."[206] Currently there is both a protest against the traditional liberal/conservative continuum among churches, as well as a protest against the traditional or established view of church. The result is a new set of conversation partners, not bound by theological ties, which are crossing institutional boundaries.[207] "Intentionality about practice has the potential to *lift* a congregation out of the old theological divide."[208]

Illustration 5.6 Bass' Three-Dimensional Grid[209]
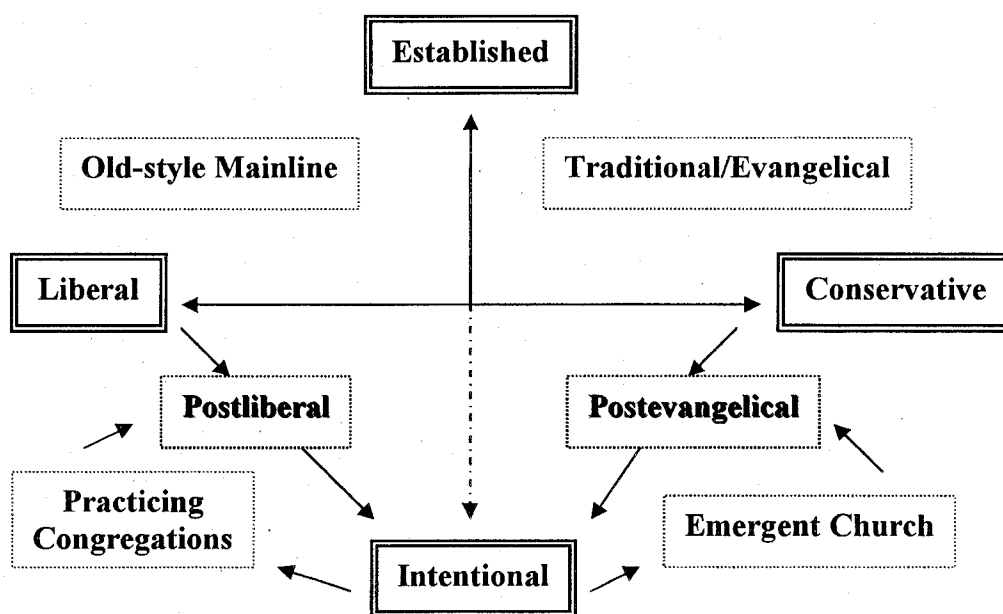
Bass' study honed in on the congregations identified as practicing congregations. She describes them as:

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[206]Bass, *The Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church*, 87.

[207]Ibid., 87-88.

[208]Ibid., 88.

[209]Ibid., 87.

Communities that choose to reword denominational tradition in light of local experience to create a web of practices that transmit identity, nurture community, cultivate mature spirituality, and advance mission. These practices – as varied as classical spiritual disciplines such as lectio divina and centering prayer, or moral and theological practices like householding, Sabbath keeping, forgiveness, doing justice, and hospitality – are drawn from, recover, or reclaim individual and corporate patterns of historic Christian living that provide meaning and enliven a sense of spiritual connection to God and others. In these congregations, transmission of identity and vocation does not occur primarily through familial religious tradition, civic structures, or the larger culture. Christian identity is neither assumed nor received. Rather, transmission occurs through choice, negotiation, and reflexive theological engagement, in community, by adopting a particular way of life as expressed by and sustained through historically grounded Christian practices.[210]

These congregational systems are very similar to the cultural dynamics found in this study (see Table 5.3).

Table 5.3 Comparing Cultural Dynamics with *Practicing Congregations*

This Study's Cultural Dynamics	*Bass' Practicing Congregations*
An Active View of God	Spiritual connection to God and others
The World as the Horizon	In light of local experience
Discipleship as a Way of Life	Cultivate mature spirituality A particular way of life
Congregational Systems as a Network of People	Web of practices that transmit identity, nurture community
The Dance of Leadership	Reflective engagement
Tension of Ministry and Mission	Advance mission
A Vibrant Lutheran Identity	Reword denominational tradition
Changing and Adapting Posture	Choice and negotiation

In summary, intentional congregations re-tradition, have certain practices that define their way of life, re-imagine the Mainline, and focus on telling their story in the midst of God's story.[211] Both have the dynamic, fluid nature, with a renewed focus on Christian practices, and the counter-cultural nature of church. Bass ultimately has two

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[210]Ibid., 14.

[211]Ibid., 18.

themes to her findings: the importance of narrative and community. Her summary could also describe the congregational systems in this study. "It is important for congregations to know their stories, to get them straight, to communicate them effectively, particularly to those who are partial to rival stories, and above all, to embody in their lives the stories that they tell."[212]

Christian Practices

"The distinctive understanding of *Christian practices*...[is] the constituent elements in a way of life that becomes incarnate when human beings live in the light of and in response to God's gift of abundant life."[213] Christian practices allow for something normative and theological to guide a faith community's life together.[214] These Christian practices are placed within a congregational system's participating in God's creative and redemptive mission in the world, while also attending to their internal life together.

While not creating a list of specifics, Dykstra and Bass articulate four areas that Christian practices address. First, "Christian practices address fundamental human needs and conditions."[215] Humanity has basic needs and Christian practices must take those needs into account as they live their life together. Human needs are present within the faith community and within the greater community. This area of Christian practices connects with the cultural dynamics of discipleship as a way of life, the tension between mission and ministry, and keeping the world as the horizon. Practices within this area

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[212]Ibid., 100.

[213]Volf and Bass, eds., *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, 21.

[214]Ibid.

[215]Ibid., 22.

include practices that have to do with relationships, the use of language, humanity's

temporal nature, and embodiment.[216] Practices within this area sustain human activity and

humanity flourishing in the world according to God's mission.

Second, Christian practices "involve a profound awareness, a deep knowing: they

are activities imbued with the knowledge of God and creation."[217] This area is a

hermeneutical circle, with Christian practices aiding one's awareness of God and one's

awareness of God shaping Christian practices.[218] Through participating in such Christian

practices Christians can see the world differently. These practices lift up the cultural

dynamic of an active view of God. Practices here include everything from prayer and

healing to the ongoing regularity of worship and reading the Bible. These practices are

both Christian habits and surprising moments.

"Christian practices are social and historical. They are activities people engage in

together over time."[219] This third area recognizes the historical dimension of Christian

practices as a social reality. Christian community has the benefit of being a people with

history, a history of God's engagement with the world throughout time. The cultural

dynamics of the people as a network, discipleship as a way of life, and a vibrant Lutheran

identity tap into the social and historical arena illuminated here. There is often, however,

a tension that exists between the immediate community and the practices of Christian

communities over time. Hence, worship practices and the particular theological premises

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[216]Ibid.

[217]Ibid., 24.

[218]Ibid., 25.

[219]Ibid., 26.

guiding decisions about leadership are two examples of Christian practices informed by this idea over time.

Finally, "Christian practices share in the mysterious dynamic of fall and redemption, sin and grace."[220] Christians are paradoxical people and have faith in a benevolent God. This is most clearly demonstrated within the vibrant Lutheran identity with practices of confession and the sacraments. Yet, this aspect also addresses the injustice in the world and calls the Christian community to critical thinking. This once again lifts up having the world on the horizon and the tensions of ministry and mission.

"Baptism is the rite that marks entry into such a way of life."[221] For Dykstra and Bass, "baptism is not so much a distinct practice as it is the liturgical summation of all the Christian practices."[222] Framed missionally, baptism tied to vocation launches God's people into participating in God's mission in the world. So, as the biblically and theologically framed section of this chapter highlighted, baptism shapes and refines all of the Christian practices for communities of faith. Christian practices help the body of Christ live into and out of God's extravagant promises, in a now and not yet world. In so doing, evil is not eliminated from the world, but the baptized are transformed and blessed with abundant life to be a blessing to the world.

Life Together

Placing Christian practices within a broader time period, it is worth contrasting the Christian practices highlighted in this current time with Christian practices of another

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[220]Ibid., 27.

[221]Ibid., 30.

[222]Ibid.

time. In *Life Together* Bonhoeffer explores Christian community by lifting up five key

concepts. These concepts translate into various postures with which a Christian

community is to make its way together, and will be briefly noted here.

The first of these key concepts is *Christian community*. "Christian community is

not an ideal we have to realize, but rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we

may participate."[223] Community, simply, is God's intended way of life and is the reality

in which the baptized enter in baptism. This Christian way of life is centered in Christ

himself. "Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No

Christian community is more or less than this."[224] God's way of community, as lived out

through Christ, is perichoretic in nature, always both communal in nature and opening

one's self up to the other. Christian community is always *lived in the midst of the world.*

Christian community is not centered on an ideal human sense of life together, but is a

divine reality which is spiritual in nature.[225]

Certain things order this faith community's life; namely time together, time alone,

service, and confession/communion. The *time together* has a rhyme and reason.[226] There

is ritual centered on prayer, song, God's Word, sharing bread, and work. This time

frames the day; beginning, middle, and end. There is also a rhythm to one's *time alone.*[227]

Solitude and silence, along with meditation on Scripture, prayer, intercession, and testing

serve as the Christian practices. The time together and time alone create a dynamic

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[223]Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 30.

[224]Ibid., 21.

[225]Ibid., 26.

[226]Ibid., 40-75.

[227]Ibid., 76-89.

communal, yet also personal, discipleship journey. *Ministry* or service allows the

Christian to keep the world always on the horizon.[228] Listening, active helpfulness,

bearing with others, and proclaiming the Word are all ways the Christian serves the

greater community. *Confession and communion* keep the Christian living in the

paradoxes of a grace-filled life.[229] Both individual and communal, these practices

continually remind God's people of their saint and sinner natures and that they are living

in the reality of the now and not yet.

The practices of *Life Together* are similar to cultural dynamics identified in this

study. Community as a divine reality was the glue within the congregational systems

studied in this research. Each was fully aware of their human limitations and looked

beyond emotions or human realities to shape their journey together. Their particular

practices, blending between internal ones and external ones, paralleled Bonhoeffer.

Christian practices of missional congregations, at their heart, are timely Christian

practices of Christian communities. As faith communities are always in tension with the

culture in which they live, there is a constant discernment process taking place, for while

elements remain the same, like prayer, worship, and reading Scripture, finding language

to communicate timeless truths in each new era in history requires continual attention, as

does seeing the real needs of people and the world. Missional Christian practices tend to

the forming of faith communities, but also take seriously the ever-changing translatability

and contextual realities also present. These strategic actions of missional leadership in

reality take the process back to where it began, communicative discernment.

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[228]Ibid., 90-109.

[229]Ibid., 110-22.

Conclusion

This chapter has explicitly laid out a missional theology of leadership. With the help of Van Gelder's hermeneutical approach to leading in mission, this missional view of leadership has taken into consideration texts, both biblical and theological; culture, and the forming of it; community, God's people working out their Christian way of life together; and strategic action, the lived practices.[230] Rooted in a grounded theory approach, the research of this dissertation combined with current theoretical resources and Lutheran theology has offered an innovative Lutheran missiology in these changing times at the dawn of the 21st century.

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[230]Van Gelder, "The Hermeneutics of Leading in Mission," 150-61.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

> And here is a parable for you to ponder on: A group of tourists sits in a bus that is passing through gorgeously beautiful country; lakes and mountains and green fields and rivers. But the shades of the bus are pulled down. They do not have the slightest idea of what lies beyond the windows of the bus. And all the time of their journey is spent in squabbling over who will have the seat of honor in the bus, who will be applauded, who will be well considered. And so they remain till the journey's end.[1]

This parable of a Jesuit missionary to India points out "the pitfalls of not seeing with the eyes of imagination – living in the same, tired narrative of mainline religion."[2] The world awaits!

It is the fear of this researcher that the Mainline Church, including the ELCA, will continue on their same journey with the posture of these people on the bus, when in fact, God's world awaits them. If we, church leaders in the 21st century, are going to become cartographers, mapping the continually changing landscape of our time, then it is time to open our eyes to the exciting land around us, to move past our internal squabbles, and to get off the bus and step out into the world.

This dissertation seeks to contribute to the missional church movement taking place in the United States and, in particular, to create an innovative Lutheran missional initiative. It has done so by seeking to answer a primary research question: *What are the*

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[1]Diana Butler Bass, *The Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church* (Washington, DC: Alban, 2002), 102.

[2]Ibid.

cultural dynamics within a congregational system that are vital to the empowering of missional leadership? Connected to it is a secondary question: *What commonalities, if any, exist between various ELCA congregational systems with regard to these vital cultural dynamics for empowering missional leadership?* Using grounded theory and a qualitative research approach, five ELCA congregational systems were studied to identify their unique cultural dynamics as well as their shared ones. Out of that research a Lutheran hermeneutic for leading in mission was developed using Van Gelder's four-part approach. So, what do we have?

This final chapter will answer that question by addressing the following issues: summarizing the research findings and the Lutheran hermeneutic for leading in mission; responding to two gaps put forth in the introductory chapter connecting the missional church movement with congregational systems and creating an innovative Lutheran missiology; and finally exploring how this work might advance the missional church movement in the United States.

Summary of this Dissertation

The core issue of this dissertation was missional leadership. Missional leadership was defined as persons who understand their calling as disciples of Jesus Christ, see themselves as equipped by God with certain gifts to be shared with the larger body of Christ, and believe they are empowered by the Spirit to engage the world through participating in the creative and redemptive mission of God. Missional leadership was placed within the faith community of a congregational system, with these congregational systems all placed within a particular denomination, the ELCA. With a primary focus on

missional leadership, it was recognized that leadership is closely tied to ecclesiology, hence ecclesiology was always on the horizon.

While intentionally seeking to engage in the use of social science research, the foundation of this dissertation was theological. This theological foundation centered on a missional view of God, church, and ministry. With the hope of advancing the missional church movement, this missional theological foundation was expanded in two areas: seeking to learn from the lived experiences of missional congregational systems and using a Lutheran hermeneutic. The lived experiences of missional congregational systems came through in the cultural dynamics identified, both individually and comparatively. The Lutheran hermeneutic rooted itself within a missional view of baptism tied with a theology of vocation.

In addition to the theological frame named above, the work of this dissertation also drew on several theoretical perspectives: grounded theory; ethnography; cultural anthropology; complex, open systems theory; and organizational leadership theory. These theoretical perspectives sought to deepen the understanding of the findings of the congregational systems, as well as create a Lutheran hermeneutic of missional leadership.

This qualitative, grounded theory approach set out to capture the cultural dynamics that define missional congregational systems' life together. Cultural dynamics were defined as any dynamic (words, action, space, or relationship) that shapes the meaning of the culture, influences its members, and perpetuates its life together. They were the *what* and *why* of these faith communities. Embedded in this understanding was the missiological inquiry of seeking to discover God's intent. What surfaced were eight common cultural dynamics: an active view of God, the world as the horizon, discipleship

as a way of life, congregational systems as a network of people, the dance of leadership,

the tension of ministry and mission, a vibrant Lutheran identity, and a changing and

adapting posture (see Table 6.1).

Table 6.1 Cultural Dynamics Summary

An Active View of God	A view of God that is active and alive in the world and working within them as a community of faith and as individuals.
The World as the Horizon	A community of faith that has an outward focus, an eye to the future, and exists for the sake of the world.
Discipleship as a Way of Life	People within this community are passionate about their faith and are on a journey, individually and communally.
Congregational Systems as a Network of People	Communities made up of people operate as a network or human system of relationships.
The Dance of Leadership	All people within these faith communities have a part in the leadership dance.
Tension of Ministry and Mission	Ministry and mission live in tension and move people back and forth between their internal, communal life together and their daily encounters with the world and their neighbor.
A Vibrant Lutheran Identity	A Lutheran identity in which Christian and Lutheran inform each other within the context of the world.
Changing and Adapting Posture	Faith communities that are fluid, living systems in a changing world, with an eye toward the future, and have an adaptive posture as they continually seek to discover what it means to be the church.

From these cultural dynamics, a Lutheran hermeneutic for leading in mission was

proposed. Using Van Gelder's frame, this theological and theoretical proposal was

shaped around four areas: communicatively discerned, biblically and theologically

framed, theoretically informed, and strategic action (see Table 6.2). Said differently,

while chapter three sought to let the voice of the everyday theologian speak, chapter five

sought to put those voices into conversation with the broader academic missional church

conversation. Both views are vital for understanding the missional church.

Table 6.2 Lutheran Hermeneutic for Leading in Mission Summary

Communicatively Discerned	Hybrid Identity that opens up the work of constructing local theologies which constitute a Christian way of life together.
	Congregation as complex, open system which self-regulate and seek to create themselves as a robust network.
Biblically and Theologically Framed	Theocentric view of church participating in the *missio Dei* that has the world as its horizon.
	An open Trinitarian view of God whose dynamic nature is both perichoretic and sending.
	Ministry is the community of the baptized united and empowered to participate in the creative and redemptive mission of God in the world.
	In addition to the general callings as Christians, missional leaders understand their particular callings, with vocations/stations being the places in which they live out their callings and participate in God's creative and redemptive mission in the world.
Theoretically Informed	New worldview based on relationships, in which chaos is a given and change is necessary. In the midst of chaos, however, organizations with a clear identity can self-regulate their life together.
	The topology of missional communities is networks. Connectivity is key for networks, so as they strive to be robust, free-scale networks emerge. Within networks particular rules pertain and there are key leadership roles.
	Missional leadership is about the work of adaptive change with a posture of shared leadership which is set within a gift-based community.
Strategic Action	Missional leadership focuses on the role of cultivation with the dynamic interplay of cultivating people, missional congregational systems, engaging context, and personal attributes.
	Missional congregational systems are intentional about the practices that define their way of life, re-imagine the Mainline, and focus on telling their story.
	Christian practices guide a community of faith's life together and center on human need, awareness of God, are framed socially and historically, and live into and out of the mysterious dynamic of the fall and redemption.
	The community of the baptized is not only a human, but also divine reality. Lived in the midst of the world, Christian communities have a rhythm for their shared life: time together, time alone, time in ministry or service, and confession and communion.

Limitations of the Study/Future Research

Clearly this study had limitations. Many of these limitations are also opportunities for future research. Six limitations/future research opportunities are named here. With a qualitative, grounded theory approach this study sought to discover the basis for the emergence of a theory with regard to empowering missional leadership within ELCA congregational systems. Because the study was of a small, purposive sample, one of the limitations was the sample size. This study could easily be repeated with a larger sample and/or by taking the cultural dynamic identified and conducting a quantitative study with a larger sample. Both of these approaches would deepen and extend the work begun here.

Second, the time frame of this study was limited, allowing little contact with ELCA missional congregational systems studied. While the congregational profile enhanced the researcher's perspective of each system, each was only visited once and for a short time. A study of missional congregational systems could do similar work, yet design it as a longitudinal study, allowing for various touch points over the course of a longer period of time. This approach could seek to discover which dynamics stayed the same and which changed or evolved over time.

Third, this study focused on congregations as holistic systems, seeking to discover systematic and cultural themes. The result was that the stories of individuals were not fully captured. This slant, focusing on individuals, would be another viable approach to studying missional leadership. Hence, another study could reverse the focus and follow identified missional leaders back into the communities of faith within which they were formed, seeking to find key factors.

Fourth, this study assumed congregational systems were framed theologically as it focused on seeking to discover systematic and cultural themes. What these theological assumptions were, however, was open to be discovered. Another approach would be to explicitly state some missional theological assertions, as was done in *Treasure in Clay Jars,* and then seek to prove or disprove those particular theological assertions. This would be another way to study missional leadership within congregational systems.

Fifth, this study used context as a secondary data source. While the congregational profile and the ethnographic visits sought to always keep the contextual realities in mind, another strategy for studying missional leadership would be to place congregational systems and context, both local and national, into a primary role, allowing for a more in-depth conservation. Contextual realities, then, would be primary in deciding which congregational systems to include in one's sample. This study, for example, had all suburban congregational systems operating primarily from a position of power. They were people with affluence, education, primarily White, and with the luxury of choice. What would it be like to study missional congregational systems that were not in such a *privileged* position?

Finally, it is important to remember that this study sought only to advance the study of missional leadership within ELCA congregations in the United States. Other denominations in the United States and churches in other countries could repeat this study or make it part of a larger multi-denominational research project.

The intent of this study was to deepen the missional understanding of ELCA churches in the United States and to open up further conversation, not to draw overarching conclusions. It was the hope of the researcher that this study may in fact spur

future research, seeking not to be an end, but an opening for future cartographic work of the new terrain that we, as church leaders, find ourselves in.

Comparing the Work of this Dissertation with Other Voices

This dissertation set out to address two gaps: a gap in the missional church movement with regard to connecting the conversation with the lived experience of missional congregations and an underdeveloped Lutheran voice in the missional church literature. Having summarized the findings and named the limitations, the closing sections of this chapter will compare the findings of this dissertation with two works that represent these two gaps and state some implications of this research for the missional church movement as a way of coming full circle.

Connecting the Missional Church Movement with Missional Congregational Systems

Treasure in Clay Jars[3] represents an advancement in the missional church work related to the life of congregational systems. As stated in the introductory chapter their work was underdeveloped in three areas,[4] three areas this research sought to address. When the eight cultural dynamics of this study are compared to the eight patterns of missional faithfulness, however, there is surprising similarity. While each utilized different vocabulary, the essence of each cultural dynamic/pattern is remarkably parallel (see Table 6.3).

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[3]Lois Y. Barrett, et al, ed., *Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2004).

[4]These areas were: not being grounded in social science research, of entering into sites seeking to find evidence of predetermined attributes, and a lack of focus specifically on missional leadership.

Table 6.3 Cultural Dynamics Comparison with *Treasure in Clay Jars*

Cultural Dynamics of this Study	Treasure in Clay Jars
An Active View of God	Dependence on the Holy Spirit[5]
The World as the Horizon	Practices that Demonstrate God's intent for the world[6]
Discipleship as a Way of Life	Biblical Formation and Discipleship[7]
Congregational Systems as a Network of People	Worship as Public Witness[8]
The Dance of Leadership	Missional Authority[9]
Tension of Ministry and Mission	Pointing Toward the Reign of God[10]
A Vibrant Lutheran Identity	Missional Vocation[11]
Changing and Adapting Posture	Taking Risks as a Contrast Community[12]

[5]"The missional community confesses its dependence upon the Holy Spirit, shown in particular in its practices of corporate prayer." Barrett, ed., *Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness*, xiv.

[6]"The pattern of the church's life as community is a demonstration of what God intends for the life of the whole world. The practices of the church embody mutual care, reconciliation, loving accountability, and hospitality. A missional church is indicated by how Christians behave toward one another." Ibid., xiii.

[7]"The missional church is a community in which all members are involved in learning what it means to be disciples of Jesus. The Bible is normative in this church's life. Biblical formation and discipling are essential for members of the congregation. "Ibid., xii.

[8]"Worship is the central act by which the community celebrates with joy and thanksgiving both God's presence and God's promised future. Flowing out of its worship, the community has a vital public witness." Ibid., xiii.

[9]"The Holy Spirit gives the missional church a community of persons who, in a variety of ways and with a diversity of functional roles and titles, together practice the missional authority that cultivates within the community the discernment of missional vocation and is intentional about the practices that embed that vocation in the community's life." Ibid., xiv.

[10]"The missional church understands its calling as witness to the gospel of the inbreaking reign of God, and strives to be an instrument, agent, and sign of that reign. As it makes its witness through its identity, activity, and communication, it is keenly aware of the provisional character of all that it is and does. It points toward the reign of God that God will certainly being about, but knows that its own response is incomplete, and that its own conversion is a continuing necessity." Ibid.

[11]"The congregation is discovering together the missional vocation of the community. It is beginning to redefine 'success' and 'vitality' in terms of faithfulness to God's calling and sending. It is seeking to discern God's specific missional vocation ('charisms') for the entire community and for all its members." Ibid., xii.

[12]"The missional church is learning to take risks for the sake of the gospel. It understands itself as different from the world because of its participation in the life, death, and resurrection of its Lord. It is raising questions, often threatening ones, about the church's cultural captivity, and it is grappling with the ethical and structural implications of its missional vocation. It is learning to deal with internal and external resistance." Ibid., xiii.

Without going into detail comparing each, two cultural dynamics/patterns will serve as examples. First, the pattern of *missional vocation* is compared with the cultural dynamic of *a vibrant Lutheran identity*. A missional vocation is described as the "congregation is discovering together the missional vocation of the community."[13] This missional attentiveness is both generally and communally, as well as particularly and individually. Missional vocation tends to the issue of time and place, as well as history.[14] The cultural dynamic of a vibrant Lutheran identity also deals with identity, both in general and in particular; framing this identity within a Lutheran hermeneutic. The congregational systems studied were intentional about continually asking the identity question in light of their current context and within a larger Lutheran story. There was an overall communal nature to their discernment, as well as an individual attentiveness. While *a vibrant Lutheran identity* was more specific than *missional vocation*, the work of the each is similar.

A second, and perhaps less obvious, comparison is the pattern of *missional authority* and the cultural dynamic of *the dance of leadership*. The pattern of missional authority acknowledges that the:

> Holy Spirit gives the missional church a community of people who, in a variety of ways and with a diversity of functional roles, together practice the missional authority that cultivates within the community the discernment of missional vocation and is intentional about the practices that embed that vocation in the community's life.[15]

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[13]Ibid., xii.

[14]Ibid., 38-39.

[15]Ibid., xiv.

In *Treasure in Clay Jars* missional authority is the umbrella under which leadership was placed. They acknowledged that the typical "business-related books on 'leadership' were not adequate to describe the leaders of the congregations in [their] sample."[16] Hence, while this pattern may miss some elements of missional leadership, it does highlight a key aspect also found in the cultural dynamic of the dance of leadership, that missional leadership is not an office or position, but the posture of all within the missional community, including those in called positions. And both see leadership within a faith community as coming from God.

Creating an Innovative Lutheran Missiology

Just as there were significant similarities between the cultural dynamics of this study and the patterns of missional faithfulness in *Treasure in Clay Jars*, so too were there similarities between this research and Bishop Hanson's eight-pronged vision. As has already been stated there were striking similarities between the findings of ELCA missional congregational systems and Hanson's vision of being a witnessing, worshipping, engaging, equipping, inviting, connecting, changing, and praying church.[17] While Hanson's vision emerged mostly out of his own theological understanding of the Lutheran church set within this time and place and alongside his own personal experience in the church, his intuitive vision is affirmed by this work.

The findings of this research and Hanson's vision can be compared at various levels. Let two comparisons serve as examples. Witnessing, one of Hanson's eight words,

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[16]Ibid., 140.

[17]Mark S. Hanson, *Faithful, yet Changing: The Church in Challenging Times* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Books, 2002), 3.

is more than simply verbally sharing one's faith with another. It is "pointing to what God is doing"[18] in the world and is the "vocation of all the baptized."[19] Rooted in worship, Word and sacrament, and the teachings of the church, "we witness to the creating, sustaining, redeeming, reconciling, sanctifying, and empowering work of the triune [*sic*] God."[20] This element is about participating in God's creative and redemptive mission in the world. Witnessing, as Hanson understands it, is similar to the cultural dynamic of discipleship as a way of life.

In addition, many of the words used to describe the congregational systems in this study match Hanson's words: connect, invite, equip/empower, pray, and change.[21] More importantly than the shared words, however, are the shared meanings behind the words. For example, Hanson says, "The change that is needed is the change that grows out of our call to be a witnessing, worshiping, engaging, equipping, inviting church in the world. It is not change for the sake of change, but change for the sake of the gospel."[22] The church is to change as it keeps the world as the horizon (this is developed in Hanson's engaging church[23]) and continually seeks to discover ways of proclaiming the gospel in its particular time and place.

In the end what was discovered in this dissertation in some ways is not new. Perhaps that in itself is good news. It is good news for the missional church movement

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[18]Ibid., 7.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Ibid., 8.

[21]See Table 4.2 for details.

[22]Hanson, *Faithful, yet Changing: The Church in Challenging Times*, 67.

[23]Ibid., 23-32.

that social science research, with a missional understanding of the church and God, set out to discover what the lived experiences of missional congregational systems were, and the discoveries of this research aligned with the work of others. It is also good news that the vision set before the ELCA in 2002-2003, challenging the church to be "Faithful, yet Changing,"[24] is being lived out in some missional ELCA congregational systems today. While there is no explicit tie between the Hanson's vision and these missional congregational systems, the two have landed in similar places and might serve as grounds for an innovative Lutheran missiology.

This researcher believes that the work of this dissertation does more than simply affirm previous work, however. Bringing social science research, theological discourse, and theoretical perspective together both deepens the work of the missional church movement, as well as launches it into new areas of discovery. The implications of this work for the missional church movement and the ELCA will be covered in the next section.

Implications for the Missional Church Movement

What does this mean? Three implications of the work of this dissertation are highlighted here: implications for the ELCA as it seeks to become a missional church, implications for studying missional congregations as complex, open systems, and outlining the cartographic work for the 21st century missional church.

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[24]Ibid.

Implications for the ELCA

How might the vital cultural dynamics discovered in this study and the Lutheran hermeneutic for leading in mission connect with the ELCA? As stated in the introductory chapter, the findings of this dissertation are significant for congregational systems seeking to be missional, for theological education seeking to empower missional leadership, and for denominational leaders seeking to ignite, challenge, and support missional congregational systems. Let some implications be suggested here for each of these areas. First, a significant number of congregational systems within the ELCA are living with maps which are decades old; maps with uniform worship, clergy-centered leadership, and program-driven ministry. These maps were helpful in the context of the United States when Lutheranism grew based on immigration and family commitments and in which there was denominational loyalty and Christianity was supported. The times have changed and ELCA congregational systems must now seek new and faithful ways of being the church. The cultural dynamics discovered in this study, which emerged from missional congregational systems themselves, can provide opportunities for guiding new discussions. These cultural dynamics are not programs or quick-fix solutions, but rather aspects of a missional faith community's life together that deserve attention.

Second, theological education has its roots in a university-based education system. Most, if not all, Lutheran seminaries are currently asking hard questions about what church leadership looks like in this time in history. As a denomination that values theological education, this is an important discernment process. There is, however, little data about missional congregational systems, say nothing about leading them, and with so many of the ELCA congregational systems stuck within an established view of church,

often the results of such discussion lead to technical, rather than adaptive, change. These cultural dynamics have the potential to guide different types of conversations, including different partners, as leaders shaping theological education prepare the church for a new day.

Finally, denominational leaders have the opportunity to become key hubs in the ELCA network. If denominational leaders capture a vision for a missional ELCA and take advantage of the opportunities in their midst to ignite, challenge, and support congregational systems that already are or seeking to become missional, then the findings of this dissertation can help them advance their work. Alone each of these three areas may help move the missional church movement forward, but put these three aspects together and this could indeed be create a "tipping point"[25] for the missional church movement within the ELCA.

The Lutheran church has within it, as these five congregational systems demonstrate, the ability to be Lutheran and missional. Yet, the question surfaces, What will define Lutheranism? If the European, ethnic packaging of Lutheranism must remain the prevalent Lutheran posture, then its future seems limited. But if a vibrant Lutheran missional theology is articulated and lived, one that actively engages its context, then Lutherans have a promising future. This new future will require exploring new ways of structuring the church, moving beyond a clerical model of congregational life, and seeing congregations as systems empowering missional leaders, equipped to live their faith in the changing and complex world.

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[25]Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2000).

Implications for Studying Congregations as Complex, Open Systems

As previously acknowledged, very little work has been done in studying congregational systems utilizing complex, open systems theories. As the field of systems theory grows there is ample opportunity for drawing upon these disciplines as the church seeks to understand its complex congregational systems. The work of this dissertation with a disciplined theological perspective drew upon some of these complex, open systems theories, namely the findings of new sciences as applied to organizational theory by Wheatley and current discoveries in networking theory. These approaches to understanding organizations fit well with a missional view of congregational systems and are awaiting future study, to say nothing about future learning with regard to missional leadership. The work of this dissertation is only a beginning. Work in this area would not only have to take into account the congregational system, but would also have to be mindful of the larger denominational systems in which it is embedded. Hence, there is the opportunity to ask more and deeper ecclesiological questions.

Implications for Cartographic Work

Cartography is a craft, not a science or a skill. And creating maps is harder work than reading maps. Yet that is what this dissertation is proposing, that church leaders at the dawn of the 21st century learn a new craft, that of creating maps. The mapping of this dissertation started with a plan of discovery laid out in chapter two and then offered an initial sweep of the landscape in chapter three. From the data collected from five separate adventures a deeper analysis was done, adding not only one but two additional layers of details to the map in chapters four and five. What has emerged is a map with three layers

of perspectives of missional ELCA congregational systems, each with similarities and overlap, in addition to differences and unique characteristics.

Current leaders could be content with the mapping offered here, using it to navigate the current ELCA landscape within the context of United States. This map lifts up eight cultural dynamics of missional ELCA congregational systems and highlights particular areas of focus for a Lutheran hermeneutic of missional leadership. Yet, like any map, it will only be a matter of time before this map will become outdated and, without future attention, obsolete. What is at the heart of this cartographic work is igniting a missional imagination. Perhaps what has been discovered in this work is that missional leadership must continually be seeking ways to ignite among God's people the imagination of what it means to be a faithful follower of Jesus in the time and place in which they live. Just as it was stated in the introductory chapter, the people of God with a missional imagination seek to continue to give expression to God's dynamic relationship within the world and intentionally engage the world with the message of the Christian faith as they themselves seek to embody Christian community.

Missional leadership, then, is both a continuation and a rediscovery of leadership expressed in the Old and New Testaments, and in the early church. So, yes, the question is about missional leadership and the activities in which missional leaders and/or communities participate, but it is also about the essence of missional leadership, which is igniting and fanning missional imagination among God's people in Christian community. Missional leadership is about rediscovering congregations as systems for empowering discipleship as a way of life together. Therefore, an implication of this dissertation is both attending to and testing the map offered here, but it is also an invitation to ignite a

missional imagination among God's people throughout the church, as we, God's people, seek to be faithful to our callings to witness to the gospel.

Conclusion

This study has sought to live within the tension of planning and being surprised, of walking into territory that is known and familiar, while also being prepared to discover something new. It has been intentional, but open; defined, but not rigid. The situation the Mainline Church finds itself in today is real. The landscape is changing at rates faster than ever before. The church has the opportunity to jump into this fast-paced world or stand back, watching and waiting. This researcher believes that the Mainline Church has resources to draw upon that can serve the world in this time and that, indeed, God has in fact called the church to do just that. Will you join the missional church movement? Are you willing to step out of line and lead the church in the 21st century?

APPENDIX A

INVITATION LETTER

Dear Rev. _____,

My name is Terri Elton and I am a Ph.D. student in the Congregational Mission and Leadership program at Luther Seminary. My interest is in studying congregations that are empowering missional leadership.[1]

Currently, I am in the process of identifying ELCA congregations to study. As a starting point, I have asked twenty ELCA bishops, pastors, professors, and leaders to identify congregations that excel in helping people in their community discover their calling as a disciple of Jesus and empower them to live their faith in the world. Your congregation has been named by _____ as one such congregation.

At this time, I am in the process of refining the list of ELCA congregations to study to five. Studying these congregations will include an on-site weekend visit, as well as creating a brief historical and demographic profile. During the weekend visit, the staff would be interviewed, three focus groups held, and I would attend weekend worship along with any other appropriate congregational events. It is my intent to visit these five congregations yet this summer.

If you are NOT interested in being considered for this study, I encourage you to simply reply to this e-mail saying so. If you ARE interested in being considered for this study, you may also reply to this e-mail saying so and I will follow-up with a phone call. If I have not heard back from you within one week's time, I will contact you again to check-in.

Regardless of your interest in being part of this study, please know that you have been recognized as a congregation seeking to be missional! So, thank you for your ministry. I have already enjoyed learning about each of the congregations that have been suggested. Each has their own unique story and missional qualities. Learning about each of these congregations has given me hope for the future and it is with this positive energy that I move into this next step of my research. If you have any further questions, please let me know.

God's blessings to you in your continued work,

Terri Elton
Ph.D. Student
Luther Seminary
telton@luthersem.edu
Cell # 612-865-9531

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[1]The characteristics of missional leadership used in this study are: persons who understand their calling as disciples of Jesus Christ, see themselves as equipped by God with certain gifts to be shared with the larger body of Christ, and believe they are empowered by the Spirit to engage the world through participating in the creative and redemptive mission of God. In addition, I've attached an overview of my dissertation proposal to this e-mail.

APPENDIX B

OVERVIEW OF DISSERTATION

This dissertation will look at congregations as systems for empowering missional leadership. ELCA congregations will be studied in an effort to explore the significant cultural dynamics of congregational systems that have been recognized for empowering missional leaders.

This study is born out of three impulses:
(a) a curiosity about why some ELCA congregations cultivate more leaders with a missionary mind-set than others;
(b) an assertion that missional leadership is needed to advance a missionary movement of the church; and
(c) a core belief that communities of faith are significant in shaping missional leaders.

The **primary research question** of this dissertation is: "What are the cultural dynamics within a congregational system that are vital to the empowering of missional leadership?"

Connected to this primary question is a **secondary** one: "What commonalities, if any, exist between various ELCA congregational systems with regard to these vital cultural dynamics?"

Three key definitions:
> **Missional Leadership:** The characteristics of missional leadership are:
> o   persons who understand their calling as disciples of Jesus Christ,
> o   see themselves as equipped by God with certain gifts to be shared with the larger body of Christ,
> o   and believe they are empowered by the Spirit to engage the world through participating in the creative and redemptive mission of God.
> Missional leadership will include, but not be limited to, ordained clergy, paid congregational lay staff, Christians serving in ministry areas outside of the church, and Christians called to serve in leadership in vocations other than ministry.
>
> **Congregational system** will be the term used when referring to congregations. This particular term will serve as a reminder of the complex nature of faith communities, and will draw learnings from systems theory.
>
> **Cultural dynamics** in this study will refer to any dynamic that shapes the meaning of the culture, influences its members, and perpetuates its life together.

Theological and Theoretical Perspectives:
Theologically, a missiological view of God and the church will frame this work, as well as a vocational understanding of baptism.

Theoretically, grounded theory influenced the choice of qualitative methods, with influence from ethnography, cultural anthropology and systems theory.

Method:
Five congregations from across the United States will be identified and studied using qualitative methods of field observation, focus groups, and journaling. In addition, a brief profile will be created of each congregation before each visit, placing these congregations within a larger frame.

Cultural dynamics will be identified within each congregation and **between congregations**, allowing for the uniqueness of each congregation to stand on its own, as well as to identify commonalities.

Significance:
There exists a need for congregations to be studies from a missional perspective and as systems, with an eye toward the empowering of missional leadership. It is the desire of this study to set forth **hypotheses for future research** that can be used to test these initial findings across a broader section of ELCA congregations, or to repeat this qualitative study within or across other denominations.

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APPENDIX C

PHONE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Share a bit about your mission and vision (if the mission and vision is on the website, ask to explain a piece of it more fully).

2. What's core to this mission and vision?

3. I'm looking at congregations that empower missional leadership – defined as helping people see themselves as disciples, empowering them, and then seeing them live their faith in the world. Does this ring true for your congregation? If so, share some examples or stories.

4. Describe your context.

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SAMPLE OF CONGREGATION PROFILE

Bread for the Journey Lutheran Church
Congregation Profile
Date of Visit: **August 19-21, 2006**

Contact information
Address: XXXX
Phone: 555-555-5555
E-mail: pastor@bread.lutheran.org
Website: www.bread.lutheran.org

Sections:
1. History of the Congregation
2. Vision and Mission of Congregation
3. Ministry
4. Context
5. Schedule
6. Phone Interview

(All of the information is from the congregation's website unless noted.)

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1. History of the Congregation
Organized 1965. Just celebrated forty year anniversary this past November. All of the former Senior Pastors attended.

Facilities:
They currently are in the design stage of a building campaign. In September 2005, a plan was laid before the congregation. This plan was brought to the city and it was rejected. In June 2006 a redesign was placed in front of the congregation for approval and was approved in July. They are now in the process of going back to the city for approval.

Membership: (from ELCA Trend Report)

	Baptized:	Confirmed:	Average Worship	
1998	1,449	983	577	39.8%
1999	1,475	1,007	647	43.9%
2000	1,483	1,065	661	44.6%
2001	1,559	1,128	650	41.7%
2002	1,255	1,128	772	61.5%
2003	1,185	1,091	782	66.0%
2004	1,258	1,104	736	58.5%
2005	1,348	1,115	804	59.6%
	-7%	+13.4%	+39.3%	+49.8

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Sunday School: 322 with 44 leaders

Ethnic diversity: Very little ethnic diversity in baptized membership until the last year when it reported the following: 10 African American/Black, 65 Asian/Pacific Islander, 70 Latino/Hispanic, 3 American Indian/Alaska Native, and 91 multiethnic. Of the 1,449 baptized members, 239 of them were "other than" white. Previous to 2005, less than 20 "other than" white members were reported.

Pastoral leadership/staff:
Pastoral staff —
Lead Pastor, been there since 1998.
Pastor of Congregational Care
Pastor of Youth and Family, been there since 1999.
Executive Pastor, ordained in January 2005 (second career). Did his internship here
Intern, just left a week before this visit/new one coming.

Program staff —
Director of Worship and Music	Assistant Director of Worship and Music
Director of Children's Ministry	Small Groups and Connecting Ministries, Alpha.
Nursery Coordinator	Wedding Coordinator

Administrative staff —
Parish Administrator	Database and Finances
Finance Manager	AV/Sound Technician
Custodian	Teen Ministry assistant
Connecting Ministry assistant	Children's Ministry assistant
Administrative assistant	

Budget: (from ELCA Trend Report)

	Regular giving	Total income	Operations	Mission Support
1998	836,000	956,044	599,523	67,000/8.0%
1999	1,063,353	1,109,740	668,716	70,000/6.6%
2000	1,110,512	1,368,149	953,817	60,000/5.4%
2001	1,177,549	1,445,549	908,617	50,000/4.2%
2002	1,176,448	1,440,422	909,275	41,000/3.5%
2003	1,280,700	1,599,870	978,355	20,000/1.6%
2004	1,872,648	1,945,916	881,304	10,000/.5%
2005	1,626,559	1,729,178	1,043,728	2,500/.2%
	+ 94.8 %	+80.9%	+ 74.1%	-96.3%

2. Vision and Mission of Congregation
Vision:
Our vision is that you find a home in this authentic community of faith where God's grace transforms lives, Christ's love fills hearts, and the Holy Spirit's power restores health.

Mission:
To INVITE people to faith in a living God. To GROW and EQUIP people to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. To SERVE others by the Holy Spirit.

Strategy:
In May 2005, the Lead Pastor facilitated the Healthy Church Index. Almost 200 staff and members participated by filling out the extensive survey. This was followed up with four focus groups.

What they say about themselves:
Bread for the Journey Lutheran Church welcomes one and all! We are a church on a Mission–to reach everyone we can with the message of God's love, forgiveness and power shown in Jesus Christ, our Lord. We are always looking for mission partners– people who would like to join us in this mission. If you do not have a church home in the Valley, we invite you to consider becoming a mission partner at Bread for the Journey. Bread for the Journey is a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, a member of the Willow Creek Association, networked with other purpose-driven Saddleback congregations, a member of the Joy Leadership Network, and the Thriving Congregation Network.

Mission partners: God is calling us to be partners on a mission: to invite ourselves and others into a relationship with the Living God, to grow, and be equipped to be fully devoted followers and missionaries, to serve to the needs of the Body of Christ and all people that God is calling to join this missionary movement.

Mission partner expectations: *Worship* – the central place where our church family gathers each week is in worship. We expect that the members of Bread for the Journey will be in church every Sunday that they are in town. *Find a place to belong* – the key to feeling like you belong at Bread for the Journey is involvement beyond Sunday morning. God wants every mission partner to be involved in a Bridge Builders group, two sessions each year. *Support the work of the ministry* – with prayerful consideration, we are asking that every family in our congregation tithe (giving 10% of their income to God's work, primarily through Bread for the Journey). If you are not yet able to tithe, we are asking that every family in our congregation consider giving at least an equal share (our budget divided by the number of families - $78 per week.) If you are unable to make that level of commitment at this time, we ask you to stand with us by pledging a half-share ($39 per week), or at the very least a quarter share ($19.50 per week).

3. Ministry

Worship:
Sunday 8:30 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. Communion at both.
In the fall there is also a Sunday evening and Wednesday evening service as well.

Youth/College Zone:
Kid Zone: For our preschool and elementary children there is Promiseland on Sunday mornings. Promiseland is our alternative to Sunday School where children feel welcomed, valued, and cared for while learning who Jesus is and how to follow Him now and

throughout their lives. During the week Junior Youth Club, Cherub Choir and Kid's Choir help the children to build closer relationships and worship God in a meaningful way.

Middle School: Middle school students can connect with Impact worship on Sundays, Wildside Bible study on Wednesdays, the Lunch Bunch, and special events during the year.

High School: Students can connect with Impact worship on Sundays, Area Bible Study (ABS) on Thursdays, Dinner 46, and special events during the year.

College Zone: You may be away at college, but you are not forgotten. Even if you are too far away to attend services at Bread for the Journey, you are still in our thoughts and prayers.

Connecting Ministries:

Small groups are at the heart of our congregation and keep us in close community as we experience Christian life together. There are over forty small groups which meet in a variety of locations from the Downtown Financial district and homes to local restaurants and church. We have groups specifically for young singles, couples, retirees, men, and women as well as groups open to everyone. Small groups meet from six to eight weeks and enable us to:

> ➢ Find a place to connect with others in a meaningful way
> ➢ Ask questions and share struggles together
> ➢ Learn about prayer and studying the Bible
> ➢ Wrestle with issues of faith together
> ➢ Prayerfully support and encourage each other
> ➢ Serve others in the community
> ➢ Have fun together

Serving Others:

We seek to fulfill the Great Commission by reaching out across cultural and national boundaries to spread the gospel and build up the body of Christ. We pray for, serve, and financially support many local community outreach and world missions. We also provide individual support for those who are in need with our T.L.C. (Tender Loving Care) Ministry and In-As-Much Fund.

World Missions: The "Mission Beyond Bread for the Journey" includes supporting missions and missionaries around the world. Their partners include: Katrina Mission trip to New Orleans; ELCA: Jim and Judy Bangsund who teach at Makumira University College (MUCO) in Tanzania; ELCA World Hunger; Lutheran World Relief; Mexico Youth Mission Trip/Amore Ministry; UCC Mobara; Chiba-ken Japan: Emiko Hirokawa UCC Katakai; Chiba-ken Japan: Toshia Asaka; Wycliffe Bible Translators; Young Life in Krasnodor, Russia; and Young Life in Russia & Baltic States.

Community Missions: The "Mission Beyond Bread for the Journey" includes many local ministries: Bread for the Journey Angel Tree Project; Caring Hands in partnership with local hospital; County Food Bank; Habitat for Humanity; Kairos Outside; Loaves and Fishes Organization; Layette Ministry; Love-a-Child Mission; Meals on Wheels; Monument Crisis Center; New Directions Counseling Center; Puppets of Praise; and STAND! Against Domestic Violence.

Other:

Pastoral Care: Dependency Process, Hunger for Life (3 parts), Opening the Compassionate Heart, How the Compassionate Heart works, and the Release of the Compassionate Heart.
Bread for the Journey Foundation: three forms: one's will, name Foundation as beneficiary of insurance or annuity, or gifts of cash/stock/bonds/mutual funds.
Columbarium: the church has a Memorial Garden.

4. Context *(Demographics are for the county from 2004 US Census Bureau, unless otherwise noted.)*

Population:
- o had a population of 998,000 with 50% males and females.
- o Median age was 37.1 years and 26% of the population was under 18 and 11% 65 or older.
- o There were 354,000 households with the average size being 2.8 persons.
- o Families make up 70% of the households, with married couple families being 53% and other at 17%. (Non-family households made up 30%.)

Ethnicity:
Those reporting one race alone:
- o 64% White
- o 10% Black/African American
- o 1% American Indian and Alaska Native
- o 14% Asian
- o less than .5% Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander
- o 11% Other
For those reporting two or more races:
- o 21% Hispanic
- o 54% White/non-Hispanic
Nativity:
- o 21% were foreign born
- o 79% were native, with 56% being born in state.

Language:
Of people at least five years old:
- o 29% spoke a language other than English at home.
- o Of those speaking other than English, 56% spoke Spanish and 44% other languages. 42% reported they did not speak English very well.

Geographic Mobility:
83% of people living in the county for at least a year were in the same residence a year earlier. 10% moved from another residence in the same county, 5% from another county in the state, 1% moved from another state, and 1% moved from abroad.

Education:
- o 90% of people 25 years and over, had at least graduated from high school and
- o 36% also had a bachelor's degree or higher.
- o Among the 16 to 19 year olds, 4% were dropouts (not enrolled in school and not having graduated from high school).
- o Total enrollment in schools – 31,000
  - o Preprimary – 141,000
  - o Elementary and High School – 186,000
  - o College – 64,000

Industries/Occupations:
For the employed population 16 years old and older, the leading industries are:
- o Education, Health and Social Services (21%)
- o Professional, Management, Administrative, and Waste Management Services (14%)
- o Finance/insurance/real estate/rental (12%) and Retail (11%)
- o Construction (8%) and Manufacturing (8%)

The most common occupations:
- o Management, Professional, and related occupations (41%)
- o Sale and office occupations (27%)
- o Service occupations (15%)
- o Production, transportation, and material moving (9%)
- o Construction, extraction, and maintenance occupations (8%)

Of people employed:
- o 71% were private wage and salary workers
- o 14% were federal, state, or local government
- o 9% were self employed

The top employers in the area are: (*2003 Chamber of Commerce Business Directory*)
- o Long's Drug Store
- o John Muir Medical Center
- o Kaiser Permanent Medical Center
- o Bank of the West
- o Safeway, Inc.
- o Local Newspapers
- o Verizon
- o Macy's
- o ManorCare Health Services
- o Target
- o PMI

Income:
- o Median income of household = $67,823
- o 81% received earnings and 19% received retirement income other than Social Security.
- o 24% received Social Security with the average income being $13,501.

Poverty:
- o 10% of people were in poverty.
  - o 12% were children under 18 and
  - o 7% were people 65 and older.
- o 7% of all families and
- o 18% of families with a female householder and no husband present had income below the poverty level.

Housing:
- o 376,000 total housing units with 6% vacant.
- o 74% were single-unit structures
- o 24% were multi-unit structures
- o 2% were mobile homes
- o 19% of housing units were built since 1990!!!
- o 32% of owners with mortgages, 15% of owners without mortgages, and 46% of renters spent 30% of household income on housing!

The median monthly housing cost
- o for mortgaged owners = $2,120
- o for nonmortgaged owners = $369
- o for renters = $1,127

Religious Affiliation: (The Association of Religion Data Archives, Religious Affiliations, 2000.)
In 2000, the following were reported for the county:
- o 204,070 Roman Catholics
- o 74,449 Evangelical Protestants
- o 40,234 Mainline Protestants
- o 2,035 Orthodox
- o 48,191 Other
- o 579,837 unclaimed

Particular denominational breakdowns:

1.	Catholic	34 churches/ 204,070 people (0/13.4%)
2.	Baptist General Conference	5 churches/24,803 people (+2/1,866.9% -all)
3.	Jewish (estimate)	15/22,000 (+11/4.8%)
4.	Church of J.C. of Latter-Day Saints	46/18,562 (0/-5.5%)
5.	Presbyterian (USA)	15/11,799 (0/-9.1%)
6.	Southern Baptist Convention	20/7,779 (+5/-35.2%)
7.	United Methodist Church	21/7,468 (0/-8.7%)
8.	**ELCA**	**15/6,652 (-1/-2.5%)**
9.	Episcopal Church	17/6,505 (0/4.3%)
10.	Muslim (estimate)	6/6,503 (n.a.)

5. Schedule
Saturday:

    3:00 p.m. Arrival, Check-in at hotel. Visit neighborhood. Dinner with Lead Pastor.

Sunday:
>Worship at 8:30 and 10:30 a.m.
>Noon – Focus Group
>1:00 – Focus Group
>2:00 – Focus Group

Monday:
>10:00 a.m. – Staff meeting
>Noon – Depart for Airport

6. Phone Interview information

The Lead Pastor has been at Bread for the Journey for seven and a half years. Before that he served at another church in the same state and before that with Lutheran Youth Alive.

Bread for the Journey's history: Much of what is happening now is not new. What's new is how these things have become part of the DNA. For example, when the Lead Pastor came to Bread for the Journey they had several worship services, some traditional and some contemporary. What has evolved is a *blended* style with a liturgical format mixing hymns with a band and both services are the same. The *worship wars* have now moved aside. A similar thing can be said of small group ministry. Small groups had been done before the Lead Pastor came, but now they are woven into the DNA of their ministry from preschool through adult ministry. The story goes that six months after the Lead Pastor came to Bread for the Journey a woman came to him and volunteered to work full-time for the church. The two of them took some time to pray about what that work might be and soon she was brought on to work with small groups. Today she is a vital part of the staff. Finally, the Lead Pastor noted that teen ministry had been a key part of their past ministry but when he arrived was struggling. Soon after the Lead Pastor arrived, he brought on an ordained pastor of youth and family ministry and now that area has once again become a core strength of their ministry with over 200 Jr. and Sr. high students involved on a weekly basis. Involvement of these students in high throughout their time at Bread for the Journey and many have become very active in ministry after leaving Bread for the Journey's.

Bread for the Journey has intentional missional language. In fact one does not become a member of Bread for the Journey, but one becomes a mission partner. Mission partners commit to three things – worship regularly (when in town, they are there), participate in a small group (the year is divided into four – eight week quarters and people are expected to be active in a small group two of the four quarters), and tithing (or working toward a tithe). As part of the assimilation process people are interviewed when they join, six months later, and then one year later. In this process the interview staff help people decipher which of the many small group experiences might be best for them. In the Lead Pastor's D.Min. work, he studied low and high commitment churches. He believes there is another way. He calls Bread for the Journey's as a middle commitment church.

ELCA/theology: Bread for the Journey draws from Saddleback, Willow Creek, Community Church of Joy, and others. They are Christian first and ELCA second. They

are less worried about the theological pieces and more about the welcoming focus. Most recently the Lead Pastor was studying in England as part of his sabbatical.

Context: Lead Pastor in his D.Min. project studied ten of the largest ELCA congregations in the state. All, including his own, were located in suburban, affluent areas. They, in fact, draw from very well-to-do business people. While primarily young families, they also have singles, as well as gay and lesbian couples. They hope in the next year to add a Korean pastor to their ministry, for there is a growing Korean population near by. Much of what their church is about is drawing in the consumer driven people in the culture, transforming them into disciples of Christ. Many of the people who they draw into their ministry have a Roman Catholic background and are divorced and remarried or struggle with some of the choices of the Catholic church. These people often find the liturgical format welcoming, as well as the theology. For this reason, communion is served every week.

Leadership: There are several pastors and/or interns at this church. They have a lead pastor, a youth pastor, an executive pastor, a visitation pastor, as well as a pastoral intern. Alongside this team are many other staff.

APPENDIX E

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Four broad sections will be covered in the focus group. Within each section one or two key questions will be asked. A series of additional questions are available as needed to help unpack each of the key questions.

Introduction:
1. Invite the participants to fill out the demographic data sheet upon arrival.
2. Introduce Interviewer and Scribe.
3. Brief explanation of the site visit and purpose.
4. Invite the participants to say a bit about his/her role and tenure in the congregation.

Section #1 – Overall Personal Experience

1.1 What past experiences are most significant in empowering you to live your faith?
   a. Have you put your faith into action in the past? If so, what has most impacted your ability to exercise your faith in the world?
   b. What impact has your faith had in your leadership? Tell of a time when you enjoyed being in a leadership position in which you exercised your faith.

1.2 What has been your leadership experience within the church?
   a. Tell about your ministry involvement in the past several years.
   b. What has nurtured your leadership abilities within the church?
   c. Where do you turn for help in your leadership?
   d. Tell of a time when others recognized your leadership potential.
   e. What motivates you to lead in ministry?
   f. Do you feel God working through you? If so, how?
   g. How do you hope to exercise your leadership in the church in the future?

Section #2– Congregational Support

2.1 What is this congregation's view of leadership?
   a. Tell about the leaders in this congregation. Name some ways people lead in this congregation.
   b. Describe how a person new to this congregation might get involved in ministry. If one was interested in seeking ways to live out their passions or discover their gifts, how might this congregation support this person?
   c. What resources are in place to help people carry out their ministry? How do people get connected with serving in various ministries in this congregation?
   d. Was there a time when this congregation recognized a new view of leadership? Describe that moment in this congregation's history.

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2.2 Name others in this congregation that understand their leadership as part of a calling as a disciple of Jesus.
    a. Describe their leadership and the ways they exercise it.
    b. What impact does their presence have in this congregation?

Section #3 – Theological and Biblical View of Leadership

3.0 As the congregation seeks to empower leaders, what is God's role?
    a. What teachings from the Bible most impact the empowering of leaders in this congregation?
    b. What traditions of the Lutheran church are most important to this community's view of leadership?
    c. Describe the role faith has in leadership development in the congregation. Has prayer or Bible Study had an impact?

Section #4 - Engagement with the world

4.0 How does this congregation engage the greater community?
    a. How does this congregation engage with other congregations, both Lutheran and others? What, if any, denominational connections does this congregation have?
    b. Name some ways leaders from this congregation are engaged in the greater community.
    c. What is this congregation most proud of with regard to its relationship with the community?
    d. How is faith put into action outside the church property?

Closure:
1. Have we missed anything important about the ministry of this congregation?
2. Is there anything else that would be helpful for us to know?
3. Offer thanks for the interview and the good work they are doing.

SAMPLE OF SITE VISIT SUMMARY REPORT

Mission Central
On-Site Visit Conducted: August 25-28, 2006 Terri Martinson Elton (Interviewer) Dawn Trautman (Scribe)

I. Table of Contents

II. Executive Summary

Terry Muck, editor of *Missiology*, asks, "What is a missiological description of an event?"[1] Extending Clifford Geertz's thick description, which he describes as the Event + Human Intention, Muck pushes theologians and missiologists beyond merely sociological descriptions to describe the Event + Human Intention + God's Intention or the missiological description.[2] Added to the *what happened* and *why did it happen* is another question, *what was God's intention for this event?*

This study seeks to articulate a thick description of the events studied, with this executive summary being a first cut. Yet, it is also important to keep in mind that ultimately what is desired is more than a thick description, but a missiological description. Both may be dangerous places to tread, but without moving beyond, behind or beneath the events themselves, this research is of little value to the study of the missional church. So, with fear and trembling, and recognizing that this is sacred ground, this summary is set forth.

Scott Moreau, utilizing Ninian Smart's seven dimensions as an overarching model for understanding religions of the world, has proposed a comprehensive contextualization of the Christian faith.[3] These seven dimensions (doctrinal, mythic, ethical, social, ritual, experiential, and material) will be used as an outline for developing this missiological description.

Doctrinal: "Christ is the focus." "Seek first the kingdom of God and all else will follow." "It's about transcendence, not attendance." "Confession and communion." These are all phrases used to describe the substance of this congregation by the people themselves. This congregation is a group of sinners who believe in someone greater than themselves. They confess that they fall short and desire to be part of a community that accepts them as they are, challenges them to grow in their journey with God and with one another and reminds them what's central in their life. Communion each week shapes and forms this community as well as defines it. The living Word of God proclaimed sustains and centers them. Yet, they are also about planting seeds. They believe that if the seeds are planted, God will tend to the growing. There is a high trust among the people that God's at work within and among them.

Mythic: This congregation has one continuous story. Three Senior Pastors are credited for being formative in shaping this story – an initial pastor who led before they moved to their current location shaped it around tending to the needs of the people, the pastor that served as one of the community developers for the area (who has been a member of this congregation for decades, but only served on staff for a short time) shaped it around evangelism and reaching out to those in the surrounding community and the previous Senior Pastor enhanced the internal environment to being one of empowerment and

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[1]Terry C. Muck, "The Missiological Perspective," *Missiology: An International Review* (Vol. 34, No. 3, July 2006), 307.

[2]Muck, 308.

[3]Scott Moreau, "Contextualization that is Comprehensive," *Missiology: An International Review* (Vol. 34, No. 3, July 2006), 325-334.

service. While these three leaders were named as important, in reality they were simply the ones recognized for shepherding movements that were already present. The people themselves have been the ones that have caught a hold of the ideas and made them part of the congregation. Easy, welcoming, personable, accepting and supportive were some of the words used to describe this congregation's atmosphere. Underneath these words, however, exists something deeper, richer and more profound.

Ethical: Humble service is a thread woven through this congregation. People within this congregation have eyes to see the hurts and needs of the world and quietly find ways to make the world a different place. They do not have grandiose visions, rather they look for intersections of people's needs and their own resources. Many within this congregation have positions of power in the greater community. Some see their ministry as holding onto their Christian values as they maneuver their way through the complexities of leading in what can be harsh business realities. Others make themselves available, in whatever way they can, to those in need through their community involvements. For some it is the church that has helped them make important connections to those in need. No matter how these connections are made, the impact is the same. People understand that living their faith happens outside of the church sanctuary and, at least in part, is about helping those in need. This is a deeply held value that's more about action and less about talk. One way this is apparent is in their tithing the money they have brought in for the building campaign, something they are proud to say is just part of who they are and how they operate.

Social: This congregation has a "social agenda," as one member said. Being in relationship with one another is important to them and they give it attention. On Sunday mornings it is present in the welcome team, the fellowship taking place in the coffee area, and in the prayers for the people during worship. It also takes place in the ongoing small groups throughout the year, allowing people to meet with others for a short-time in a social setting. But its bigger sign is in the number of social events this congregation has throughout the year. And they are fun! These events have many purposes (including raising money and celebrating various times of the years), but the main purpose it simply to be together and to invite others from the community to join them. This element is as critical to their health as Bible Study, worship, and service. This *social agenda* is also lived out through the various networks alive within the congregation. Some of these networks are formal (council and staff) and others are informal, but all seek to be channels of communication, invitation, support, and challenge. As this congregation has grown, and added additional services, these networks have become very critical and have helped them stay connected as one community.

Ritual: The rituals present in this congregation certainly include worship, with the sacrament of communion being critical. This weekly ritual cannot be overestimated. But there are other centering pieces as well, like the role staff plays within this congregation. Staff focus more on about equipping and less on doing ministry. This posture has set within this congregation a rhythm. The staff (and council), in a sense, are the rudders, but the congregation rows the boat. This has been tended over time and gives the ministry its shape or backbone. Also, there are the ongoing events throughout the year for the

congregation as a whole. These events provide great relational energy and become ways of putting flesh on the social values they hold deeply. Finally, the birthing of mission congregations has also become a ritual. As this congregation intentionally chose to not become a mega-church, they have birthed other ELCA congregations. This has both created a spirit of collaboration, as well as helped seed the church with leadership with a kingdom mind-set. While this is a less frequent ritual, it is one they will seek to continue.

Experiential: Although not explicitly stated, there is a connection to the Spirit in this place. Prayer is one place it is witnessed, allowing people to connect to one another and to God at the same time. There is also a growing desire to learn, not only for the children, but also within the adults. This learning is wide and varied, be it learning more about the Bible itself or other faiths, people are trying to make connections intellectually, as well as between faith and their lived experiences. While most of the members of this congregation have some church background, there is not an assumption that everyone knows church language. Because of this, there is attention given to help people work through what it means to have a living faith.

Material: Music within worship is very important. While the sermon often touches people's head and life experience, music seems to reach a deeper place in the heart. Each worship service seeks to touch people with different styles of music and different formats. Each format operates with a slightly different feel. For example, the worship leaders wear robes at some services and not at others. This difference in upfront leadership style is also reflected in those in attendance. Their rose window is another important piece and has become their *logo* of sorts. This window is seen outside the church, as well as within. Yet, overall this aspect is the least developed. One reason might be that much of their ministry is not visible within the church building itself; it is in the community and within the people. Hence, the material diversity is as varied as the people themselves.

III. Interview Transcripts

A. Interview with *Living Their Faith Focus Group*
Sunday evening, August 27, 2006
Present: 5 men, 5 women
Home of a member

Introduction:
T: [introduction] Share your name, how long you've been in the area, how long have you been at this congregation, and anything you want to tell me about your involvement, although you're not here because of a role, it just gives me perspective.

➤ We moved here in 1985 and have been members of this congregation since 1985. My wife worked at the High School for years and she's now at the elementary school as a counselor. I've been a criminal defense lawyer forever.

➤ I think what you want to know is why the Senior Pastor asked us. We worked with at-risk kids in the High School for twenty-one years. By an unusual circumstance a young man in our community was homeless. He'd lived here since kindergarten and been raised by his grandmother who spoke only Spanish and she didn't have enough money to stay here. He was in an abandoned house and he came to stay with us. We were to keep him for three weeks, that was eight years ago. He's now twenty-five and in college and he ended up being a part of our lives. He's just like our son. By another fluke, a judge asked us to take another boy in this past fall and he had a lot of ....

➤ He had similar issues, but a large number of additional issues.

➤ So it was a very stressful year. Our kids are older. We have a thirty year old daughter and a twenty-six year old son. It's hard to go back and be parents again. We feel good this weekend, because we're coming out the other side. The first boy turned his life around the second he moved in, the other one was hard.

➤ After two months in the wilderness, if you've ever had someone with drug problems, this was the greatest thing I'd ever seen in my life.

➤ We would not have taken him in if we'd known he had drug problems, but once you have him in your house and you realize he has no one else, you love him. It was the hardest year I've ever spent, but so worth it.

➤ I moved here fifteen years ago from Delaware. When we moved here my son was three and my daughter was nine months old. I was an accountant when we moved here. My husband and I decided that I would be a stay-at-home mom. I'm now a professional volunteer. I love our church. I'm very involved. I'm on church council, I usher, am a communion assistant, and have been a Sunday School teacher. Lately, I have a son who just graduated from High School, I've been involved with the High School youth group – Bible Study at my house, mission trips to Mexico with them, and Sweden and London this summer, which was a blast. I try to know the kids. I hug each one and make them feel welcome. Our assistant youth director had cancer and has done time at the hospital, so I've helped our Youth Director, because our assistant is gone so much. She has to take care of herself, and I love it. I was just with my daughter. She's a junior in High School. I get to be with her. Sometimes she doesn't

want to go to Bible Study, they are on Sunday evenings. When she said she wanted to go tonight I said, "Let's go."

> I moved here from London nine and half years ago and have been here ever since. My husband is more involved than I am with Habitat for Humanity and as a handyman at the church.

> I coordinate the Habitat activities for the church and some other repairs. Rita damaged homes.

T: We've heard rumors about your group, all speaking very highly.

> I'm retired.

> It's a win-win. It gets him out of the house (laughter).

> The altar guide sink is stopped up (laughter).

> We've been at this church since 1999. We moved our business up here in 2000. My bride of forty-one years is more active, but I love this church a lot. I go every time I can. It's a great church to be in. We have an eighty-employee software company and I try to apply my Christian principles to the business, as much as possible. My family, besides my wife and I, are also involved in the business. My function at this time is in the personnel side. We have a very talented group in our company, great programmers, *summa cum laude* types. We have to balance our company and keep everybody happy. For example, we have a lady with three kids who is having some issues. She does a good job, but has diabetes and I would no more put her out in the streets than anything. I always try to apply WWJD. I use that and they know that this is a WWJD employer. In another case, I had an individual who got cancer. He could only work part-time. I kept him the whole year until he died. There is a decision like that every now and then that I try to apply WWJD principles as much as I can. It doesn't hurt the business. You can do it. We had another individual who wasn't comfortable and we allowed her to go home and work on a contract basis. I try to apply my basic principles and I have learned a lot.

> We moved here in 1997. The average stay at that time was three years, people now stay a little longer, but still people rotate pretty fast. I visited this congregation one time figuring we would go to a Lutheran church, because we went to a similar church in Cincinnati. The first time I was there someone on staff told us about the mission congregation. They were very open from day one. We'd love to have you here, but check out the mission start down the street. The mission congregation was only a few months old. After ten years of a more mature church that we were really involved in and in the leadership group, this sounded like both something more interesting, but also something where our talents could be used. So we never worshipped at this congregation, but went to the mission congregation. This congregation was in such good shape and going great. This appealed to us on one hand, but we have always had more of a missional sense and we really wanted to grow something and help churches grow. So the mission congregation was great. But we also got to know people at this congregation as well. The support network was certainly there. I managed the building campaign and this room was basically the youth room.

> We had done youth group for eight or ten years at the other church.

> That was the confirmation room (pointing) and youth group was right here. We started all that. The church grew. We moved into the new building and it was wildly successful. I won't go into the whole eight years, but a few years ago we started

thinking it was time for a change. We started talking to the previous Senior Pastor. He came over and met with us. The partnership was there. He said, "You can stay or come to this congregation or we're starting a third one if you want to go there." We landed at this congregation, with a three year transition. For awhile, we went to two services – the 9:50 service at this congregation and the 10:45 at the mission congregation. The pastors were good about counseling us. Earlier this year we landed here. We intentionally said, "On the seventh day Jesus rested." So we rested for a year. Now we're just starting to think about ...

➢ While we're resting we still do the apartments, because it doesn't feel like work. Youth group after all those years felt like work, but the apartments we do through Lutheran Helping Hands. It has been such a gift to us. These people have cancer. There is a girl that now stays with us. She's a teenager who was there for a year and a half. She has been an incredible gift. This is where we belong for now. I hate to say it's through people's sufferings, but we just knock on doors and some want to visit and others don't. We make phone calls and we chat with them and then we visit in another month. We listen and chat.

➢ He's also raised some money for this ministry.

T: How did you find out about that ministry?

➢ We were invited. One of the staff invited us.

➢ This congregation has always supported it financially. There's been a small group here and there, but it's not been consistent. It takes us a hour and ten minutes to get there. It's far from here.

➢ One of the things about this congregation is that the support is incredible if you just ask. You don't have to work too hard. The funds just flow. We went from seven to eight years of public ministry, and we're proud of the mission congregation and love the building we just wish there was more substance inside, now a more private one-on-one ministry. We'll see what the future holds.

➢ We moved here in 1997. We were Episcopalian. I was raised Southern Baptist and my wife was Episcopalian. When we got married I became Episcopalian. We came here in 1997 with our two daughters. We went to an Episcopal church, but we weren't happy after a year. We were not getting out of that church what we needed and we were not giving back, not participating. We visited this congregation and fell in love with the people and the service.

➢ When we walked in we felt the Holy Spirit was here, where at other churches it felt like it was about the people.

➢ Since then, for two to three years, we just went to church. We started getting involved – our daughters were baptized Episcopalian, but confirmed Lutheran and our older daughter was married by the Associate Pastor here last year. I've been on church council and have participated in Habitat for Humanity, but not as much as I'd like. Currently one of the things I enjoy is teaching adult Sunday School. The open forum Sunday School class, it's a broad discussion and I teach with two other people.

➢ Three other people.

➢ We teach and have a good time in our Sunday School class. That's one of the things that has come to life over the last three years is Sunday School. Being Southern Baptist we went to church Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday. Through

the Episcopalian years I missed that, they did not have a strong Sunday School. When we got to this congregation the youth programs were there, but the adult programs didn't come to life until the last few years. I look forward to that, the interaction with the people. Now that our daughters are gone, we've joined small groups. We've enjoyed the growing range of people participating, like people in our small group. They've become like family. We had small group members at our daughter's wedding. We don't know a lot of people here, but we had them as part of our family.

T: Incredible stories! It makes me want to ask a whole bunch of questions.

Questions:

T: *Has this congregation helped you live your faith more vibrantly in your everyday life?*

➢ We could all agree on one thing about this congregation, the leadership that's been here over the years is interesting and dynamic. No one has been allowed to plant their flag and make this their church. That's an interesting concept. Looking back at others congregations I've been in, there's always a group or a small number of people who have planted their flag and this has become their forum, their baby. That's never been allowed to happen here. Instead ideas and concepts about how you live your life and how your faith takes root is just open. They don't demand anything from you. It's just a very interesting dynamic that I find here. In the late 1980s, before the previous Senior Pastor came, we had some problems from within. But the two pastors handled it so well. They didn't try to defend their turf. They accepted whatever was going on and somehow the way that that was handled has played out over the years to leave this congregation open to movement.

➢ Everybody's ideas are OK.

➢ Yes.

➢ There is confident leadership, they don't feel threatened. It's amazing you said that. I could say the opposite about the mission congregation. It did become people's alter ego. A real loss of focus on the center. The Lutheran theology keeps our focus on the center which is Christ and seeking first the kingdom and all else will follow. We became focused on all else and lost the center. That's what drew us to this congregation, the focus on the center. And there's one thing in our life that's rock solid and it's this congregation. It's the most humble group of people.

➢ There are a lot of people doing things quietly. It's catchy. You see other people do things and you want to get involved. It's the most active congregation we've been in.

➢ Very humble, no fanfare, and I think what helps is the focus on worship. There's an excellence in worship. A lot of churches in the area get gimmicky.

➢ Like a Broadway show.

➢ You come every Sunday here and are fed. It is solid. You can go out in your screwed up world, 'cuz Sunday's coming.

➢ We were always the youth group leaders and everybody knew you. We were always known. Coming here and doing the apartment ministry, for me it was, "Wow, you can serve and nobody has to know about it and that's very cool." It's a totally different ministry. Nobody has a clue we do that every month. That is freeing for me. I can serve and I can do it on my own, nobody has expectations.

➢ The church enables it.

➤ The church lets us do that.

➤ Yet when you see people struggling, like they needed parking passes and my husband gave a three minute talk and $3,500. We now have parking passes for every time we go. Everyone is so quietly doing amazing work. You don't have to be upfront to do ministry, it's a gift to do it quietly. That's a huge gift for people who have always been up there.

T: It seems like one of the key things is that you have a passion, but you see a greater need and the system (the council, staff, whatever) helps you get to the next level.

➤ The church enables it.

➤ There's opportunity for involvement. There are a lot of things going. There is no pressure, but you are encouraged to participate. If you want to get something out of it you can participate and you feel it in your daily life.

➤ This congregation's small groups – you meet with three couples four times. Who figures all that out? It's always a different group. You're always getting to know somebody new. It's a nice experience, another really nice thing about this congregation. They sponsor these other two churches instead of trying to grow to a mega-church. Most of them try to grow to 9,000 members. Somebody took the leadership and said, "Let's sponsor some others."

➤ It's the Pastor Emeritus.

➤ It sounds like the Pastor Emeritus.

➤ It's amazing, the leadership doesn't feel threatened. At some churches the pastor retires and they have to leave because it's a threat. Both of the Pastor Emeriti have stayed around. They know their role and jump in when needed. There's continuity from twenty-five years ago. It takes a real confident pastor, like our new Senior Pastor and the Associate Pastor. It is a strength of the church. It is continuous, not starting over all the time.

➤ There's strength and support in our church, not just in the ministry, but from fellow members. We've lost our son since we've been here and both pastors, as well as other people, were great about supporting us. I've been a patient at the hospital for the last two years and people prayed for me. People that didn't even know me would come up and ask how I was doing. I wouldn't have made it through if it weren't for this church.

T: There's a *not spoken about*, underground prayer force happening here. It hasn't come up, it's not in your face, like here's our prayer team, but it is seen in the quilt this weekend and the Saturday knitting group making prayer shawls and during prayers of the people, people prayed for others who needed to be prayed for. There wasn't silence, people were comfortable about praying in public. That's a resource to draw on like Bible Study. It's not flashy, it's just there. Is that a fair statement?

➤ There's so much that happens and people aren't proud. It's humble, but the accomplishments are amazing. I think it's because worship is at the center, we're not at the center, and in this area that's a rarity.

➤ That's why we didn't stay at the Episcopal Church, because the leadership there made it feel like it was all about them. We could tell the minute we walked into this congregation that it was different. Give credit to the Pastor Emeritus who is

charismatic and could have easily led with his talent. It was never about him. Our new Senior Pastor is the same way, always making people refocus.

➤ The previous Senior Pastor would give these incredible sermons and you would walk out thinking about your relationship with Christ, not him.

➤ Normally when you have a change of pastors or when you go from a male to a female you might loose people. But the church has been full and the transition has been easy. This new Senior Pastor was who we needed at this time. That doesn't always happen, it was handled correctly. Things have gone really well.

T: Was today's middle service typical?

➤ More people than normal.

➤ It was packed.

➤ Not because of the baptism, either.

➤ We had several visitors in the middle service.

➤ And the choir was absent.

➤ We're still in summer mode until Rally Sunday.

➤ We had 240 people in the middle service.

➤ That was close to 8:30.

➤ Everyone was still sleeping.

➤ Once we get to Rally Sunday there will be more people.

➤ We're 9:50 people, that's our style. That's a lot of work for the pastors to do three services. That's amazing. We laugh about it. We won't be there at the eleven. Some people still want that traditional Lutheran, whereas I get stifled. They each have their own personality. I think it is amazing that the pastors are willing to do the work.

T: But it doesn't feel like three congregations. Small groups or other ministries intersect? What's the factor?

➤ One thing might be that we also have a social agenda. We get to know one another.

T: I've heard its pretty fun.

➤ You should come to Oktoberfest.

➤ It wasn't that long ago when our church was in the other part (older section). There's a large number of 8:30 people who hang around to catch the 9:50 people, have coffee and another bagel. And then those that come before the 11:00 and talk with others.

➤ We didn't leave until 11:40 today.

➤ We have other things that pull our congregation together beside the three services, like Oktoberfest, Habitat, pig roast and small groups.

➤ The golf tournament.

➤ Bible studies, Thanksgiving chili cook-off.

➤ Sometimes where you lose members, or problems crop up, is when people's needs aren't being met. After being in the congregation twenty years, my husband's dad was sick and the Associate Pastor was there for us. He was just there for us.

➤ It's more amazing than that. We didn't even call anyone or say one word to one person. A person who we know, only in passing, was in the hospital and the pastor came through to see her and her husband saw us and told the Associate Pastor he should visit us. People taking care of people.

> It's not like they just do the hospital. I've known of young kids, if a kid has a criminal problem or emotional problem, the people's individual needs are met. As you were speaking I was relating this back to other churches at other times in our life. If the pastor isn't there the people ...

> There's a moment of truth. People do serve quietly; it's the most humble congregation. I find it affirming and it's very odd. Usually people who are visible are the people who draw the attention and get the affirmation. I find it affirming that people here know what we are doing and they'll comment on it, in a quiet way.

> People in the congregation are also aware. Even those who aren't performing. Those of us passengers on the train are aware of those who are pulling the train. We quietly support them. I found it never more apparent then when the boy we took in was being baptized. I looked up and everyone had tears in their eyes.

> He went downhill after that.

> But I'm telling you, he's something.

> He's a gifted athlete.

> The family life was hard.

> Anyway, that was nice. I experienced this, because both of the young men we took in were bi-racial. I had white kids and lived in a white world. The first boy being with us that year, I'd been in the hospital with him or went to orientation at school and did everything with him, because he didn't have a mother. And I noticed they were accepted at the church, he wanted to come to church. He wanted to be baptized, because the new Senior Pastor was there. Everybody is welcome, be a CEO or whatever – even if you're a kid that's never had anything. You're treated the same.

> I think it goes right to the basics and I think this is where a lot of churches miss it. You keep Christ as the center and excellence in worship and don't sell out. There's a song, "We seek for transcendence and they give us attendance." Too many churches are seeking attendance and missing the transcendence – it's seek first the kingdom and all else follows. It is so simple. Paul started it in his letters – I thank my God for you.

T: Final question: *How would you describe this congregation to someone new to the area?*

> It's easy. Everything about it is easy. They don't demand from you, there's no requirement. They're gracious for whatever you do. Everyone in the congregation is easy.

> There's no crap going on. If people want a traditional service they got it. We don't have to argue, we don't talk about it. Just go to the one you want. We focus on Christ and focus on the mission.

> People are accepting of where people are in their faith walk. Some people, like my husband, do not question faith, but then there is his wife who does every couple of years. Some people want to just come in and write a check, but that's where you are in your path. No one expects you to sign up for fifteen things. The expectation is just that you come. We want you here, everything else is a bonus. We want you here and worshipping.

> We're not a small church and we're not a mega-church, but we're big enough to offer a lot of programs. If you're involved you don't have to be the director – we have staff to cover. Our staff work hard and you can fit in where you want. Where at a small church it is a lot of work when you did youth group, because it was a small church.

> We did Senior Youth group and ran the initial building campaign. That's a lot!

> Yet, we're not a mega-church. For a Lutheran church we're large, but take all the churches and we are a good size. You can go in and know the names of people.

T: But large enough to ask someone's name.

> Everybody's easy. No one's offended by anything. If you don't remember their name its OK. If you don't remember to usher it is OK. People are willing to plug in every gap.

> Today with the wine, three people jumped up to help cover it.

T: Anything you want to add?

> Wish there were more like ours.

> Home, comfort.

> Bunch of friendly people.

T: Thanks, etc

B. Reflections on Interview with *Living Their Faith Focus Group*

➢ *It's easy* – This became a catch phrase for the environment of this congregation. In one way it refers to the expectations of people. People can come in and there are plenty of opportunities to get involved, but there is nothing demanded of you. In another way it describes how people relate to one another.

➢ *Humble* – People are very active in service, but there is not the need for public recognition. People are quieter in how they recognize each other. It's overall an affirming community. The flip side is that the attention does not go to the loudest voice. There isn't a small group of people that seek to push their own agenda.

➢ *Worship is central* – One participant said it well, "It's about transcendence, not attendance." This congregation seeks to have worship be a centering and defining part of their life together. The three worship styles allows for diversity in how it is lived out, but the aim of all is the same. It is recognized that the pastors go to extra work to make this happen, and it is appreciated.

➢ *Spirit-filled* – The focus is not on the people or any particular leader, the focus is on Christ and this translates into the mysterious working of the Spirit in and through the various leaders and/or programs. These leaders/programs are the forms in which the Spirit's presence is realized. The *invisible* prayer ministry is an example of this. It was never named as a ministry team or being intentional, but it was present in various ways in the congregation's life.

➢ *Confident and continuous leadership* – Their is a sense that the whole life of this congregation is one story with various chapters. These chapters include staff and pastor leadership, but staff doesn't dictate the story. Also, many of the previous pastors retired and are welcomed into the congregation with a new role. New leadership has welcomed them and partnered with them. Old leadership has welcomed the new role and acted in appropriate ways, passing on knowledge while transferring power.

➢ *Accepting* – They shared stories of this congregation being accepting of a wide range of people from various background and in various situations. Perhaps some of this comes from so many *not being from the area* that everyone feels, at least to some degree, that they are an outcast.

➢ *Supportive* – During times of personal trials, people have felt supported by both the overall congregation (both those they are deeply connected with and those they know as acquaintances) and from the staff/pastors. This has been as critical as any program. This suggests that this congregation is networked socially and/or cares about each other as people.

➢ *Connected* – One member said it well, "This congregation has a social agenda." He's not referring to advocating for social justice, but with regard to tending to the social relationships of the congregation. Small groups and all-community events are two of the formal ways this is lived out.

➢ *Large enough and small enough* – They appreciate that there is staff to connect, coordinate, and empower, but they also appreciate that they can get their head around their size. They can actually be a community that tries to get to know the people there and that it is possible. It's not a small inward facing family, but an outward facing community that seeks to get to know those there personally.

IV. Field Notes

Trees – There are trees everywhere. You cannot see through them. They are in groves, not just one or two trees. Along the drive, it is hard to tell where you are. Also, the roads are not straight, they all curve.

The layout and design of the area is apparent. The signs for businesses, restaurants, and shopping are not the main focus, they are small and low to the ground and uniform, which makes them hard to see at times. They, like the homes, are hidden behind the trees. As one moves around, you can see that this community had a plan. The churches are by the school and the village centers all have similar options.

Churches – There are tons of churches! The first one we saw was a large Methodist church. (We found it because we were lost trying to get to our hotel.) It is a large and prominent campus with a large parking lot (something most churches here do not have – they use the school parking lots nearby), yet from the direction we came it was hard to see the sign. It was on the corner and we could not see it until we passed the entrance to the church.

The neighborhood – The homes are clustered in *neighborhoods* and each one is named. In these neighborhoods are *Village Centers* with a grocery story, a few restaurants, a video store, a bank, a gas station, a Starbucks, and a few other businesses. Each of the Village Centers has the same type of stores, but the stores vary. Near these stores is a service center with places to get your oil changed, a childcare center, and various other things.

The neighborhoods have been built in various stages. The area near the church is one of the older areas, probably built in the early 1980s. There are homes that are modest, ramblers with single car garages, homes that are a bit larger, but with smaller lots, and then homes that are on the higher end. We learned later that each area was designed to have multiple levels of housing, including apartments and HUD homes. The interesting deal is that each of these areas is set behind all of these trees, so you cannot see them from the road. There are several main roads that serve as arteries for the whole area and then roads off of the main ones servicing the neighborhoods. The newer areas have some larger homes and fewer smaller ones, it seems, although we did see some twin homes and townhomes being built.

Across from the congregation is a Junior High School that used to be the High School. A student told us it is half a mile from end to the other. The church uses the school primarily for parking on Sundays, but also for other things, like the youth garage sale.

Diversity – In our visit there we saw mostly white people, with a few Hispanics at the Mexican restaurant and doing yard work. There was also some diversity at the church. In talking with people at the church, it seems that they are more diverse than that, but economically they certainly are similar.

This congregation – The people are very friendly. Granted, they knew we were coming, but several noticed we were not familiar and came up to us and introduced themselves. It was clear that this group has fun together. They socialize very well with each other. Also the group seemed to have a high level of trust. The leaders of the weekend event we attended were as much among the group as in charge of it. The two leaders from the Presbyterian Church led with two people from this congregation. It was a nice mix and flow. They worked well together. It was not a polished event, but informative and real. They had a plan, but also moved with the flow of the people at the event. Also, one of the youth ran the PowerPoint. She was great.

Worship – The worship space has a contemporary feel, it's open and very bright. Windows make up the wall to the right of the chancel (looking from the back). There are no screens. Pews with pads form a semi-circle around the chancel area that is open on all sides with an altar rail for folks to kneel all the way around. The choir loft was a group of chairs to the left of the chancel area near the organ and band area. There was a visitor area right outside the narthex and children's bags in baskets by each entrance. The narthex had many greeters there to welcome.

Sunday's worship was easy and flowed well. There are three services – 8:30 a blended service with a leaning toward traditional, 9:50 is their New Life service that was their most contemporary and fullest, and 11:00 traditional service that was the least full on this particular Sunday but done well. The sermon was the same, but in two (the first and third) the leadership wear robes. Communion is served at each worship service. They use real bread and had the option of individual cups of wine or grape juice or the common cup. They tried something new this week, by starting the worship with announcements, then had a quiet time for centering before worship. I thought it went well. One overall comment on their prayers, they were vibrant. They had made a prayer quilt for someone struggling with West Nile Virus and it was mentioned and he was prayed for in a very direct way. Also, during the prayer time, people were invited to pray for others and many did so out loud.

Here are some particular comments on each service:
8:30 – Robes. Children's sermon and then the children were invited to leave for children's church and returned for communion. Two acolytes, about fifth grade, were also robed. The space felt comfortably full with many young families. Didn't see any teenagers at this service, but there were several elderly and one or two with walkers. The music was led by the Director of Music singing, a piano, and bass guitar. (No drums, but a name was listed, so wondering if that person just didn't show.) All in the band were males. The Associate Pastor presided. He did a good job. A lay person read a lesson. The Senior Pastor read the gospel. She was very energetic and dramatic. It was a good reading! The sermon had three good stories in it and people seemed to connect and paid attention. It was preached from the pulpit. We used the bulletin for the liturgy, but sang out of hymnals. We used *Praise and Worship* on this Sunday.

9:50 – No robes, but each of the pastors wore collars with their outfit. A band led this worship. The band was a bit larger than the first service. It also included a drummer and another guitar. Many families with small children, as well as teenagers, were in attendance. It was full; in fact the ushers had to help people find seats once the worship began. There was a baptism at this service. The Senior Pastor did a nice job explaining baptism and about the significance of water. The child was almost one year old and was very alert. That was fun! The baptismal font moves, so was moved in front of the altar rail for the baptism and then the Associate Pastor moved it back to the side afterwards. It was out of the way after that. Again, there was a children's sermon and the children were invited to children's church. More kids at this service. There was a choir, a contemporary one. It was a small group of about eight people on this Sunday. One was in a wheelchair in the front. At this service, they were one usher short for taking the offering and several people from the congregation stepped up and one filled in. It felt very natural. The Senior Pastor preached from a music stand in front of the altar rail.

11:00 – Robes. The worship assistant also wore a robe. It was the smallest attendance of the three services, but still at least half full. A bit of an older crowd and people a bit more formally dressed. (Yet at all the services people were dressed well.) The energy at this service was a bit more subdued. The choir sang, did a nice job, and the choir loft was mostly full, perhaps thirty people. This was a different choir then at the 9:50 service. (I found out they sometimes sing at this service and sometimes at the 8:30.) They use the organ. The Director of Music directed the choir. The Senior Pastor preached from the pulpit.

Pastors stood at the back and shook hands with people as people left after each service. After the 11:00 service, the Senior Pastor engaged with a visitor for quite awhile and then connected her to someone at the visitors center and offered to meet her for lunch some time.

In the fellowship area, people could gather between services. There were rolls and coffee and *booths* set-up for each of the ministry areas with round tables and chairs set-up in the middle. A lot going on within this congregation. That was evident by looking around.

Adult opportunities going on during the 9:50 and 11:00 service times. School has already begun for the children, but Sunday School does not begin for a few more weeks.

Their logo is the round rose stained glass window. It is on everything with their name. They have name tags with the rose window and people's names on a stand right outside the Sanctuary. Not too many people, however, wore them. People greeting or in official capacities did.

Other comments – Met the previous Senior Pastor in between the first and second service. He shared about his experience there and was just reengaging after his retirement (eighteen months ago). All kinds of people stopped to say hello in our brief time. You can tell he was beloved there. During his tenure, he engaged the congregation in Stienke's *Healthy Congregations* process several times, both staff and council. He was instructed

that the best way for him to lead at this congregation was *to get out of the way*. His previous experience was in inner city Dallas, Baltimore, then Dallas and Austin before coming to this congregation.

Most people we talked to were not from this state, but from various other places. Some were from places outside the United States (England and Sweden were two places). Only talked to one or two people that identified themselves as being from this state. Within the congregation they were mostly white, with some Pacific Islanders and a few Blacks. This fit with their congregational trend report.

The facility has three parts, but in the latest remodel it has come together very well and looks seamless. (The Associate Pastor helped with that project.) There are three main areas: to the farthest right is the Sanctuary, conference room/welcome area, narthex, and offices. The middle area is the kitchen, nursery, and fellowship hall. To the left is a two story section that houses the preschool on the lower level (also the Sunday School rooms for preschool – fifth grade) and then upstairs is the sixth grade Sunday School, Junior High room, Senior High room, and three adult meeting areas. There is an elevator as well.

At lunch on Sunday the Associate Pastor told us much of the history of the area. After our conversation with him we also asked some of the people at various focus groups about some of the questions we had. Here are some of the interesting details:
This area was a vision of one man as a planned community. He received some grant money that initially helped develop the area. The vision began by having it be a place where all people could afford a place to live. It was built in sections. The first sections had apartments and HUD homes on the one end and very nice, luxury homes on the other end. The Associate Pastor drove us by some of the various levels of housing. Churches were part of the plan and lots were set aside in all the development areas for churches. Village Centers were designed so that people from the neighborhoods would be able to walk there. The area is groomed, even to the point that the walking/biking trails, which are surrounded by trees, are cut so that the trees grow to form an archway.

After awhile the original developer didn't need the grant money and things were picking up. So at that time the vision began to shift some, although the rate of growth was still controlled.

Several years ago it was sold to a company and then sold again to another company; this company oversees it now. With these sales, the rate of growth has dramatically increased. The rules have also relaxed a bit since 2000. This area is not a town or incorporated. There are no taxes, only association fees. The schools are part of another town's school system which makes some of the schools quite economically mixed. There are many rules in this area. For example you cannot cut down a tree that has a trunk bigger then 5" (another person told us 3"). Grass cannot be longer then 3" tall. Garbage cannot be out after pick-up day. If you go against these rules you receive a citation. One of the results of these rules is that most people have a lawn service and most of the workers are Hispanic. Another rule is that the streets cannot be straight for more than so many feet.

It was also designed so that at least one of the family members could work in the area. The Village Centers were originally designed to have local people run their own businesses out of them, but now slowly bigger commercial companies are taking over.

Golf is a central piece and there are many golf courses spread out throughout the overall area.

The Marketplace area and the Mall are located on the east end, near the freeway. There is also a Marriott Hotel and Convention Center there, with an outdoor Pavilion for concerts. Around this area is a man-made waterway with a water taxi and a lot of green space.

A community adjacent to this area was built as a practice run. Some people from this congregation live in that area. It is more affordable, as well as a bit older.

PROTOCOLS FOR SITE VISITS

Protocols for Missional Leadership Congregation Site Visits

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Appendix II – Questions for Phone Interviews (See Appendix C)
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Appendix IV – Consent Forms and Demographic Survey (See Appendix H)

Objective of Research

This study is born out of three impulses: (a) a curiosity about why some ELCA congregations cultivate more leaders with a missionary mind-set than others; (b) an assertion that missional leadership is needed to advance a missionary movement of the church; and (c) a core belief that communities of faith are significant in shaping missional leaders. These impulses lead to the formation of the primary research question of this dissertation: **"What are the cultural dynamics within a congregational system that are vital to the empowering of missional leadership?"** Connected to this primary question is a secondary one: "What commonalities, if any, exist between various ELCA congregational systems with regard to these vital cultural dynamics?"

How will this research be done?

The purpose of this qualitative, grounded theory approach will be to discover what congregational cultural dynamics stand out as vital to the empowering of missional leaders.[1] This research will study a purposeful sample of six ELCA congregations that have demonstrated an ability to empower missional leaders. The selection of these congregations has happened through a three-stage discernment process.

First, nominations of missional congregations were solicited from various ELCA leaders.[2] From the congregations named, a preliminary list of eleven congregations was created that include congregations from various parts of the United States, with a range of sizes, and with varied pastoral tenure.[3] A letter was e-mailed to these congregations stating the purpose of this research project[4] and inviting them to consider being a participant site. All but two responded with interest. Between June 27th and July 12th, phone interviews were conducted with the lead pastor of each congregation. The purpose of the phone interview was to gather more information about the congregation, indeed seeing if they fit as a missional congregation,[5] and to clarifying the purpose/expectations of the study and determine their availability. All of the congregations fit the missional church profile and all were willing to participate. Upon reflection and consultation with

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[1] Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990), 23-32.

[2] Leaders that were invited to nominate congregations were several Luther Seminary professors, several ELCA bishops, parachurch leaders and ELCA pastors from around the country. They were asked to name a congregation that excels in helping their community discover their calling as a disciple of Jesus and empowers them live their faith in the world.

[3] This process of discerning also included taking out congregations in which the researcher had a previous relationship with the pastor or congregation and gathering information about the congregation from their website (all had current websites) and from the ELCA trend reports.

[4] Attached to the e-mail was an overview of the dissertation proposal included in Appendix I.

[5] See Appendix II for the list of questions for the phone interview.

other colleagues and considering available dates, six congregations were chosen as the "A" list[6] and site visits scheduled. At this point a church profile was created.[7]

Data Collection during Site Visits

The primary task of the site visits is to gather as much qualitative (focus groups and observation) data as possible from each of the congregations visited. Three streams of data will be collected during the visit.

The first data stream is from simply observing the congregation's life together. This will be done by attending weekend worship and any other congregational events available during the extended weekend period. Field notes will be gathered from the official activities within the congregation as well as from general observations and impressions (see Observation Protocols section for more details).

A second data stream will come from the focus groups and meeting with available staff. Three focus groups will be hosted at each site: one consisting of persons currently serving in official leadership capacities within the congregational system (i.e., church council), one of persons currently involved in other leadership within the congregational system, and one of persons known for living their faith through their vocations in the world.[8] In addition, time will be spent with all available staff. It will be the scribe's role to take notes from the focus groups and staff meetings. Summaries will be created from the first two data streams and coded in an effort to identify themes.

A third stream of data will come from the researcher herself. In order to gather as much of an emic perspective as possible, the researcher will keep a journal throughout the experience. While direct observation and focus groups will help capture much of the explicit and, hopefully some implicit, cultural dynamics, journaling will add another qualitative component from an outside-in vantage point.

How this be done?

Each congregation will be visited over an extended weekend, typically a Saturday to Monday. The following process will be used:

In preparation of the site visit – The interviewer will make arrangements for the site visits. Based on schedule, one of three or four scribes will accompany the interviewer on each of the site visits. The interviewer will prepare the congregational profile and make a copy available to the scribe prior to their arrival on site.

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[6]This list represented the most diversity based on size and location of the congregation, on the tenure of the lead pastor, and on any other "unique" characteristics they might have.

[7]This profile was created by reviewing demographics of the surrounding area, their website, and recent annual reports as available.

[8]Persons for these focus groups will be gathered by the staff. A list of questions is included in Appendix III.

First day of the site visit – Travel to the site. Do an initial walk around the neighborhood and the facilities upon arrival. Possibly do a focus group if schedule allows.

Sunday of the site visit – Observe worship, attend any congregational events and do focus groups. Scribe takes notes during the meeting, interviewer jots down notes afterwards and then they talk together.

Monday of the site visit – Attend any congregational events, host focus group (if needed) and meet with the staff. Scribe and interviewer do notes individually and then talk together. Travel home.

Within one to two weeks of the site visit – The scribe is tasked with providing typed up field notes of the focus groups and staff meeting to the interviewer (see Appendix IV for the outline).

Within one month of the site visit – The interviewer will write up a summary of the site visit.

The interviewer will be responsible for conducting the focus groups and adding any additional or follow up questions that they felt would provide helpful additional information. They will also provide a consent form for all the focus group and staff participants, along with a brief demographic survey (see Appendix IV). The scribe will be responsible for running the audio tape recorder during each of the focus groups.

Observation Protocols

The congregational profile will provide a great deal of background on each congregation. The following is an overview of what will be included in this profile:
- Brief history (including age) of congregation. Tenure of the Lead Pastor.
- Size and ethnicities of congregation.
- Vision, mission, goals, objective of the congregation. Key missional activities.
- Annual budget.
- Number of paid staff.
- Any key historical events.
- Demographics and profile of the surrounding area (based on census data).
Any information not available before the visit should be obtained while on-site.

As the research team arrives, additional information will be added to the congregations profile by observation. The three main areas are:
- Note from signs, facilities and conversations with congregation members the understood mission, vision and key ministries of the congregation.
- Setting and context of congregation, including socioeconomic, ethnic and age.
- Description of campus including type(s) of building(s), size, and age of facilities.
- Any other observations worth noting.

Budget

Travel costs for the scribe and interviewer will be covered by the research project. This includes airfare (or mileage if driving), lodging and meals. In addition, scribes will be paid a stipend of $100 per weekend visit for their work. The interviewer will be in contact with each scribe to set-up travel arrangements.

Congregations to Visit and Schedule

The following is the *tentative* list of congregations and schedule of visits:

Date	Congregation, location	Scribe
July 29-31, 2006	Casa para Todos	Nancy Lee Gauche
August 19-21, 2006	Bread for the Journey	Erin Martinson
August 25-27, 2006	Mission Central	Dawn Trautman
September 9-11, 2006	New Wine	Kris Bjorke
September 30-October 2, 2006	Cross in the Road	Karis Thompson

Table of Contents for Site Visit Final Report

Cover should include: Name of Congregation
City and State
When visit was conducted
Site Visit team
Date of report

What's to be covered in Site Visit Final Report	Written by
Cover	Scribe
Table of Contents	Scribe
Summary of the Site Visit: - Any additions to the congregation profile	Interviewer
For each of the Focus Groups: - Typed up raw data - Themes that emerged from focus group.	Scribe Interviewer
Field Notes	Interviewer

CONSENT FORM AND DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a study of missional leadership. This focus group is part of a larger study of ELCA congregations conducted by me, Terri Elton, as part of my Ph.D. dissertation.[13] The overall project is a study of ELCA congregations as systems for empowering missional leaders, with the intent of identifying some key cultural dynamics within congregations. The hope of this study is to learn about ELCA congregations that are empowering leaders from ELCA missional congregation themselves. (Copies of the overview of the dissertation are available upon request.) These focus groups are an important way of capturing key insights of the congregation in the language of the people themselves.

The information from this focus group will be collected in three forms: an audio recording will be made, a written transcript will be made by a scribe present during the focus group and the interviewer will journal on her reflections on the focus group after the experience itself. Names of the focus group participants will not be used in reporting any of the data. The demographic information collected from the survey, however, will be reported.

You have been chosen by the leadership of this congregation to participate in this focus group. If you decide to participate, you will be part of a group of six to eight people asked a series of questions about your congregation. This process will be done in a single sitting and is estimated to take approximately one hour.

Upon completion of this research, each participating congregation will receive a copy of the final report, as well as a summary of the data from their own congregation. The transcripts and tapes of these sessions will be archived by Terri Elton for future reference. Tapes and transcripts will be archived for ten years and then destroyed.

Please note that your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with your congregation in any way. If you decide to participate, you are free to request that the tape recorder be stopped or you may discontinue participation at any time without affecting such relationships.

By signing this consent form you agree to be a willing and contributing party in this study, as well as agree to the terms listed above.

If you have any questions about the research and/or research participants' rights or wish to report a research related injury, please call me, Terri Elton, at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN (telton@luthersem.edu or (651) 641-1622).

_____

_____   _____
Signature   Date

_____   _____
Signature(s) of Interviewer & Scribe   Date

_____

[13]Terri Elton is a fourth year Ph.D. student at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN. The focus of her Ph.D. is Congregational Mission and Leadership, an interdisciplinary degree studying theology, missiology, leadership theory, and sociology.

Demographic Survey

Congregation: **Group:**   **Date:**

I. For all:	Please circle your answer	
1. Are you male or female?	Male	Female
2. How old are you?	Less than 15 15 – 20 21 – 24 25 – 29 30 – 39	40 – 49 50 – 59 60 – 69 70 – 79 80 or older
3. How do you describe yourself?	American Indian Asian or Pacific Islander Black	Latino or Hispanic White Bi-racial or bi-cultural

II. For paid church staff:	Please circle your answer	
4. Number of years in ministry?	Less than 1 1 – 5 6 – 9 10 – 14	15 – 19 20 – 25 26 – 29 30 or more
5. Number of years at this congregation?	Less than 1 1 – 5 6 – 9 10 – 14	15 – 19 20 – 25 26 – 29 30 or more
6. Position(s) held here?		

III. For congregation members:	Please circle your answer	
7. How many years have you been going to this church?	Less than 1 1 – 5 6 – 9 10 – 14	15 – 19 20 – 25 26 – 29 30 or more
8. Type of volunteer position(s) you've held in the congregation?		
9. How many years have you volunteered at this congregation?	Less than 1 1 – 5 6 – 9	10 – 15 16 – 20 21 or more

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