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RECONCILING THE BELIEVING NONBELONGER:

READINESS TO REACH AND RECEIVE LOST SHEEP

by

ROBERT E. SACHS, JR.

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Luther Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment of

The Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

2007

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ABSTRACT

Reconciling the Believing Nonbelonger:
Congregational Readiness to Find and Reach Lost Sheep

by

Robert E. Sachs, Jr.

This study examines and explains readiness of reconciling with believing nonbelongers from 284 respondents in two categories of 139 systematically selected ELCA congregations in the western United States that received adults during 2001-2005. A concurrent-nested, mixed-method design integrates biblical-theological *missio Dei* and *missio ecclesia* foundations with Prochaska's Transtheoretical Stages of Change and Parshall's Contextualization Spectrum. Chi-square crosstabulations, simple logistical regression, and Centering Resonance Analyses show: faith of origin, worship attendance growth trend, regional location, population size and growth trend, clergy and lay partnership, and programmatic emphasis has significant effects on the readiness of congregations and respondents to receive the unaffiliated.

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I am indebted to the 284 clergy and lay respondents from 139 ELCA congregations who participated in my research and returned the questionnaire. Their observations, opinions, and perceptions have provided my research with information and stories that give substance to my study.

I deeply appreciate the five years of accountability and virtual companionship received from my clergy cohorts in this Doctor of Ministry program. They have enriched me with critical comments and prayerful support both online and in seminars. I greatly appreciate Dr. Craig Van Gelder, my Doctorate of Ministry Advisor and primary Professor, for his valued knowledge and passion and imagination for the missional church. His ability to integrate theological foundations with theoretical framework has inspired my own creativity and imagination. I am beholden to Dr. Alvin Luedke, one of my Doctorate of Ministry professors, for his patience and persistence in instructing and mentoring me through survey methodology and statistical analysis. I am grateful to Kris Payne, Luther Seminary's Graduate Studies Administrative Assistant, for her tremendous help with technical support and templates; Shelia S. Smith, a Luther Seminary Doctorate

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Finally, I dedicate my thesis to Connie Johnson, my loving and supportive wife. She has been my constant companion from the beginning of my journey through the Doctorate of Ministry in Congregational Mission and Leadership program. Her help with countless hours of folding, stamping, stuffing, and sealing the questionnaires, and endless days of reading and editing various drafts of this thesis in preparation for submission are forever treasured. Most of all, her gracious presence in my life these past five years when my attention has focused on the requirements of reading, writing, and research has been a constant reminder that I am loved by God through her for the person I am.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFER	African Ecclesial Review
ALC	American Lutheran Church
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
AWA	Average Worship Attendance
CCSP	Cooperative Congregational Studies Project
CRA	Centering Resonance Analysis
CWME	Commission on World Mission and Evangelism
ELCA	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
GOCN	Gospel and Our Culture Network
IRM	International Review of Mission
JR	*Journal of Religion*
LCA	Lutheran Church in America
LC-MS	Lutheran Church Missouri Synod
LW	*Luther's Works,* American Edition
MMSA	Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Area
Metro.	Metropolitan
NECTA	New England City and Town Areas
Nonmetro.	Nonmetropolitan
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version

OMB	Office of Management and Budget
OLS	Ordinary Least Squares regression test
Pop.	Population
SLR	Simple Logistic Regression test
SPSS®	Statistical Product and Service Solutions
US	United States
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor
WCC	World Council of Churches

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

About twenty years ago I saw an illustration in a magazine showing a crowd of attendees entering a large church through the front door where the pastor stood greeting the people while about the same number of people where exiting out the back door. This could have been the illustration a bishop had in mind near the closing of the fall 2006 Conference of Bishops (ELCA) when it was asked by a bishop, "When are we going to deal with the elephant in the room?"[1] The reality of loosing some 275,000 ELCA baptized members over the past five years (2001-2005) is the reason for my passion to enter into the conversation about *the elephant in the room*. As a pastor, I enter into this conversation from a perspective of asking, "What does it take for congregations to readily find, reach, and reconcile with believers who have gone out the back door of our ELCA congregations and no longer affiliate with any church?"

The focus of this research is not directly on the inactive member who has walked out or dropped out of the church. My emphasis in this study is on the process and practices, praxis and perceptions of those ELCA congregations and their active members, particularly those in the western United States, who are finding and receiving as members, people who previously were unaffiliated with a church. Some congregations seem to seek and receive the lost sheep of God's fold more readily and actively within the

[1] Mark S. Hanson, "Tackling Membership Decline," *The Lutheran*, January 2007, 58.

community and congregational context, while other churches seem to attract and receive sheep from other congregations. This study asks: 1) is there a significant difference between congregations who reach out to and receive inactives and the unchurched and those who don't? 2) If so, what are those differences?

Every year, the Secretary of the ELCA requests rostered clergy submit an annual parochial report of members received and removed. Since my first call in 1978 I have struggled with this administrative task. Regardless of the congregation's age or size, or location, what does a church do with members who cease to commune, stop financial support, and disengage from the fellowship with those who believe and belong? Are these baptized believers no longer belongers? Behind my concern lies a deeper question: "How do clergy and congregations reconcile with those members who have quietly dropped out of sight and mind to become unaffiliated with any church?" Do we continue to count these who have lost their way from active communion with Christ and regular participation within the community of faith the same as active members, hoping that if we leave them alone they'll come home?

How often do we as pastors seek to visit inactive members, actively listening to their story and readily inviting them back? Have we learned to ignore them, presumably because the task is difficult or from past unpleasant experiences, and their names are unceremoniously removed as statistical adjustments? Responses from both clergy and laity to this study's mailed questionnaire, such as "attempts to reconcile with inactives is an exercise in futility and a waste of time with little or no response or results," confirmed what I have heard many others say over the past thirty years. However, as I hear the word of God proclaimed in scripture, especially those presented in this thesis' chapter on

biblical and theological foundations, I believe the Lord calls and sends all believers to reach out to the lost sheep that no longer belong.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my study is to examine and explain the readiness of systematically selected ELCA congregations and respondents to reach out to and reconcile with inactive adults. The primary comparison is between two categories of sampled congregations: Group One, those that received twenty or more adults by means of baptism and reaffirmation of faith than by transfer, and Group Two, those who received more adults by transfer than by baptism and reaffirmation of faith. This comparison analyzes the readiness praxis, practices, and processes of congregations who reached out to or reconciled with the adults who were recently received into membership between 2001 and 2005. Identified and included in this study are categorical variables within the demographics of the participant, the congregation, and the community. Perceptions, opinions, and observations of individuals and collective attitudes and practices by the respondents from each congregation (clergy, newly received member, and life-long member) are compared within the two groups. Significant differences on the effects these categorical variables have toward a readiness for outreach and reconciliation are analyzed and explained in detail. For those seeking insight into what changes with readiness of a congregation to move from maintenance of ministry to a missional contextualization, I offer this study as a contribution to the existing and emerging research on reaching out to and reconciling with the believing non-belonger within the United States.

This study reflects my passion to discern the motivation and the discipline, or lack thereof, found within clergy and laity in ELCA congregations to reach out to one of the

largest growing groups, those unaffiliated with any church. It is my belief based on personal and professional experiences that some congregations maintain a Christendom culture in the emerging postmodern era, and are attempting to perpetuate the myth (people are attracted to a church by their long standing tradition, current location and condition of facilities, conventional programs, and availability of staff). This stands in contrast to a congregation with a missional culture based on biblical and theological foundations, which seems to respond more actively and contextually to the call of the gospel by sending clergy and laity as partners to those unaffiliated and disengaged from the Church. I use three primary questions to open up the heart of this proposed study: What do believers think is the mission of God, and thus is their individual vocation and their congregation's mission? What do believers understand as the meaning of being baptized and belonging to God within communion with Christ, and fellowship within a congregation? How do believers respond with the love of God through practices of reconciliation toward those who have dropped out from participating in the covenant membership of a congregation of Christ's Church? To address these questions I will examine existing literature, probe biblical narratives and theological insights, and conduct specific statistical and analytical research from systematically sampled ELCA congregations.

Defining Important Terms

The readiness of congregations to reconcile with those who believe, but do not belong, needs to begin with an examination of *missio Dei* (mission of God). Theologian Lesslie Newbigin was one of the first persons in the emerging post-Christendom era to

reintroduce the Latin phrase *missio Dei*.[2] Since then, other theologians including (but not limited to) David Bosch,[3] Richard Bliese,[4] George Hunsberger,[5] and Craig Van Gelder,[6] have also used the term *missio Dei* to define and describe the vision and work of God's Holy Spirit as the "sending of the Church" to reconcile and redeem God's broken creation.[7] Frost and Hirsh have identified essential characteristics of missional congregations as communities of believers who have begun reversing the assumptions and mistakes of the Christendom model.[8] The Christendom model spans a history that began with the Church's legalized entry into the Roman Empire and continued nearly 1600 years into modern times.[9] The outdated hierarchical congregational model of Christendom assumes people are attracted to Christ and the Church. However, annual parochial and denominational reports showing major declines in worship attendance and

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[2] Darrell L. Guder and Lois Barrett, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*. The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 3.

[3] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. American Society of Missiology Series; No. 16 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 10.

[4] Richard H. Bliese, "Lutheran Missiology: Struggling to Move from Reactive Reform to Innovative Initiative," Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 2003.

[5] George R. Hunsberger, "The Newbigin Gauntlet: Developing a Domestic Missiology for North America," in *The Church between Gospel and Culture*, ed. George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 2-25.

[6] Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 33.

[7] Guder and Barrett, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, 4.

[8] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the Twenty-First Century Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 7.

[9] David Lose, *Confessing Jesus Christ: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 7-29.

membership prove otherwise.[10] I suspect the actual process, larger praxis, and authentic practice of sending believers verses attracting nonbelongers to be a primary difference between a missional congregation and a congregation whose purpose is maintenance.

When speaking about mission, it is also helpful to remember the missional distinction between *missio Dei* and *missio ecclesia* (mission of the Church). Missional language focuses on God as the subject who is acting upon what belongs to God. The *missio ecclesia* is the Latin phrase for the mission of the church. The sending of the church is directed by the relationship with the incarnational Christ and spirit of God working in the world and the response of the people to the gospel. The theological link between *missio Dei* and *missio ecclesia* is the biblical language of mission is God's calling and sending of *prophets* and *apostles* by acts of the Holy Spirit to reconcile with those who are separated from God. The incarnation of *missio Dei* can be summarized, as the Father sent his beloved Son, Jesus the Christ, into the world, so the Son sends all believers to announce the presence of the kingdom of God where they are in the world. This progression of sending of people to continue *missio Dei* becomes *missio ecclesia*.

To limit the work of *missio Dei* as only the response and responsibility of those identified as *apostles* such as Peter, James, John, and Paul, or ordained clergy, is an inappropriate and incomplete understanding of Christian baptismal vocation. In my research, I found the biblical term *apostolic* to have an inclusive identification with one's responses in faith to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Yet, many ELCA clergy and laity who responded to my questionnaire do not appear to understand or appreciate this as mission.

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[10] Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the Twenty-First Century Church*, 30.

Nevertheless, a lack of understanding or misinterpretation does not negate the biblical witness that all are called and sent by the Spirit of Christ to reach out to and reconcile with the lost.

Another perspective of *missio Dei* is to speak of a missional partnership with Jesus expressed and experienced within communion of a congregation that embodies what Volf calls a *perichoreti*c relationship or partnership.[11] A *perichoretic relationship* means the basic understanding of belonging to Christ as a Christian cannot be separated from belonging to Christ's church.[12] However, for the believing nonbelonger within the United States, the inherited social culture of individual, private, spirituality can lead each individual to be disconnected from actually belonging to a congregation. This disconnect from a congregation is in conflict with the biblical understanding and orthodox theological interpretation of what it means to be Christian. Nevertheless, Christians in the United States who believe have created a vocabulary of oxymoronic terms to describe those who are unaffiliated, such as: *inactive members, church dropouts,* and *believing nonbelongers*.

In describing the believers' *partnership* with God, Scott Gustafson also subscribes to an understanding of faith where the baptized adult member cannot commune with Christ without connecting to the fellowship of a community in order to have the gifts and strength to reach out beyond ones self.[13] Believing belongers who do not or will not

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[11] Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*. Sacra Doctrina (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 208-13.

[12] Ibid., x.

[13] Scott W. Gustafson, *Biblical Amnesia: A Forgotten Story of Redemption, Resistance, and Renewal* (West Conshohocken, PA: Infinity Publishing Company, 2004), 19.

reconcile with inactives are just as likely to be captured by what Gustafson calls a *dominator system* of their own sin to remain individual and private as is the believing nonbelonger to remain unaffiliated with the church. *Missio ecclesia* is not about satisfying ones own individual and personal needs. *Missio Dei*, and therefore *missio ecclesia*, according to Matthey, is to satisfy the love of God by engaging believers in worldwide communities.[14] The work of the church is not mere personal entertainment, individual achievement, and/or private life enrichment. Although it may include these, the work of the believing belongers, from the perspective of Hendricks, is to be equipped, encouraged, and to be sent to those who are disengaged from Christ and the church.[15] I believe that such a *perichoretic relationship* with God and others is only ready and realized when directly connected to and manifested as *missio Dei*. Even so, a New Testament understanding of our baptismal vocation within *missio Dei* needs to articulate that we live and serve in the kingdom of God already but not yet fulfilled. God's new creation for the world, according to Hunsberger, is "not about the church's outward moving actions . . . to convert or to make a difference . . . it is about conversion as a way of life for the church."[16]

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[14] Jacques Matthey, "Believing without Belonging? Reports from Groups to the Consultation," *International Review of Mission* 92, no. 364 (2003): 110.

[15] William Hendricks, *Exit Interviews* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1993), 270.

[16] George R. Hunsberger, "Acquiring the Posture of a Missionary Church," in *The Church between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America*, ed. George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 292.

This thesis relies heavily on the research of David Lose in using the terms *Christendom*, *modernity*, and *postmodernity*.[17] For the purpose of this study, *Christendom* is the period of time of Church's dominate role in western society between the formation of the Holy Roman Empire and the end of World War II. Within this period the age of *modernity* came into being after the Thirty Years War following the Protestant Reformation with a desire to be free of religious and sectarian domination and institutions through the application of human reason and foundations. *Postmodernity* entered into western society about the time the United States withdrew from the Vietnam War as a protest against modernity unfinished accomplishments and promises based on human ingenuity by opposing modernity's claim, there is no eternal and universal essence or existence.

Another perspective of belonging is to reverse additional assumptions and mistakes of the Christendom model. I have already mentioned the church needs to be *apostolic* rather than attractive. Another way to say this is that missional churches are incarnational movements of people rather than appealing institutions of heritage. Missional models embrace Jesus' messianic teachings of healing and hospitality in order to empower a priesthood of all believers rather than dogmatic hierarchical leadership models that categorize believers. By linking biblical and cultural language like *apostolic*, *incarnational*, and *messianic*, a postmodern understanding of the mission of the Church becomes an outreach to the people of the host community.[18] These three responses of

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[17] Lose, *Confessing Jesus Christ: Preaching in a Postmodern World*, 7-29.

[18] Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the Twenty-First Century Church*, 30.

apostolic, incarnational, and *messianic,* become the marks of a people ready to participate, rather than contemplation or speculation on *missio Dei.*

> The essence of a church is relationship, and these three types of relationships (communion, community, and commission) interact so much that it is impossible to differentiate one from another. We show our love for God in our love for others. We cannot be in a right relationship with the world if we are not living in a healthy relationship with God and his people.[19]

Reconciliation has several different theological and sociological meanings within the world and this study. For the purpose of this study, I define the term theologically as "the restoration of relationships among different groups, but especially with the church." This definition is illustrated by congregations who through various ways of hospitality and out reach to believing nonbelongers within the context of their congregation and community, seek to restore believing nonbelongers to communion with Christ and fellowship within the congregation. It is not the intent of this study to examine all the possible definitions and specific descriptions of biblical, theological, and contemporary contextual reconciliation. There are others who have done this biblical and theological research and still the subject is not exhausted.[20] Nevertheless, within the context of this study, reconciliation will be defined and described as the renovation of the three relationships (communion, community, commission) for the believing belonger and the believing nonbelonger as clarified by Frost and Hirsch.

A second definition of *reconciliation* I use within this study is from a sociological perspective. From this theoretical perspective, I use the term *reconciliation* to mean "the

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[19] Ibid., 77.

[20] George M. Nalunnakkal, "Come Holy Spirit, Heal and Reconcile," *International Review of Mission* 94, no. 372 (2005): 7-19.

acceptance of transformation or the readiness to change from contemplation to preparation, to activation, and to sustained relationships." Here the connection is to examine and measure the *readiness* of the believers' responses toward the fulfillment of the mission of God within the context of the congregation. *Readiness* is used to describe the dynamics progression of responses to a perichoretic partnership with *missio Dei*. One theoretical model used to describe the dynamic progression of readiness is called *Transtheoretical Stages of Change*.[21] Another theoretical model used to explain readiness is called *Contextualization Spectrums* of the church.[22] Both of these will be examined in more detail later in this chapter.

Often, change does not occur easily or immediately, it develops in time. For the purposes of this study, *readiness* evolves as a response from the heart to the gospel of *missio Dei*; applying biblical foundations and theological interpretations to an integration of sociological willingness of the mind to understand ones vocational responsibility as a Christian. The effect is the physical desire to reach out to believing nonbelongers to form and sustain caring relationships. John Kotter has helped frame my understanding by writing, "The first step in a major transformation is to alter the norms and values. After the culture has been shifted, the rest of the church effort becomes more feasible and easier to put into effect."[23] Without an attitude change rooted in what is of primary value to Jesus, "Where your treasure is there your heart will be also," (Matthew 6:21) the

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[21] James O. Prochaska and John C. Norcross, *Systems of Psychotherapy: A Transtheoretical Analysis*, 5th ed. (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing, 2003), 495-505.

[22] Phil Parshall, *Muslim Evangelism: Contemporary Approaches to Contextualization*, revised ed. (Waynesboro, GA: Gabriel Publishers, 2003), 59-63.

[23] John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1996), 156.

behavioral changes of believing belongers, both individuals and congregations, will not bear fruit. There is no argument that change is indeed happening to ELCA congregations large and small, rural and urban, new and long time existing. The concern is in what ways and how urgent are pastors and people of ELCA congregations ready to reach, reconcile, and receive believing nonbelongers.

This study references the one holy catholic and apostolic *Church* as the earthly and confessional manifestation of the world-wide body of Christ. The term *church* is used interchangeably with an individual congregation. Both have biblical basis as the body of Christ expressed as gathered believers. I find no biblical distinction between *Church* and *church* since both refer to believing followers of Jesus and both are considered to be the members of the body of Christ. The distinction is to emphasize that these words do not primarily mean either the institution that exercises and experiences Christian worship, or the holy place where God meets us.[24] The *Church* and the *church* are people baptized in the name of the Trinity, called, gathered, enlightened, and sanctified to be sent with good news to confess and witness faith together in Jesus Christ, for the purpose of reaching, reconciling, and receiving others, including inactive members.[25]

Use of the phrase, *believing nonbelonger*, was first popularized in the 1990s by Grace Davie,[26] who borrowed the concept from Carl Dudley.[27] Dudley introduced the

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[24] Marva J. Dawn, *Reaching out without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn-of-the-Century Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 75-104.

[25] Thom S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 78.

[26] Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 1.

phrase in 1979. The term, *believing nonbelonger,* may sound like an oxymoron, calling into question whether a baptized person can believe but who does not belong to or actively affiliate with a church can be honestly be called a Christian. For Davie and Dudley and other orthodox theologians like them, the term *believing nonbelonger* would be more accurately called a believer in Jesus as a real man from God than one who communes with the risen spirit Christ and response to the gospel through the fellowship and stewardship of his body, the Church expressed as a congregation.

I share the concerns of the WCC which, in June 2003 at Breklum, Germany, held a consultation with the theme, The Believing Nonbelonger.[28] Several groups submitted and published reports that named the challenges and opportunities of postmodern spirituality on the Northern European, North American, and Asian continents.[29] My own experience and perspective as a parish pastor echoes the unease with this growing phenomenon of believers who, for a variety of reasons, have chosen to disengage their affiliation and participation in the core ministries of congregations, yet believe their access to congregational ministries and services is an entitlement. For those of us who claim and confess to believe and belong to Jesus Christ, to not actively find, reach out, and reconcile with those who have left the ELCA or other expressions of the Church is tantamount to neglecting our call and vocation as Christians.

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[27] Carl S. Dudley, *Where Have All Our People Gone? New Choices for Old Churches* (New York, NY: Pilgrim Press, 1979), 3.

[28] Michael Stahl, "Listening to People's Spirituality: Looking for New Forms of Church Belonging," *International Review of Mission* 92, no. 364 (2003): 114.

[29] Matthey, "Believing without Belonging? Reports from Groups to the Consultation," 98-113.

Most ELCA congregations refer to believing nonbelongers as *inactive* confirmed, communing, and contributing members whose names have been or need to be removed from the membership roles. It has been my experience that membership in an ELCA congregation gives an implicit if not explicit constitutional privilege and genuine responsibility to baptized members, not a lifetime entitlement. ELCA model constitutions suggest *confirming members* are those adults who participate regularly in worship by receiving the Lord's Supper, and financially support the mission and ministries of the congregation. While many congregations don't specifically state the length of time before one becomes inactive, usually lack of attendance is measured within the previous two-three years. Reasons for non-compliance may include fear of conflict or retribution from family members of inactives, anxiety within the congregation as the membership numbers shrink, or ambivalence regarding how to deal with the issue or the inactives. Reasons for not reaching out to and reconciling with inactives probably have most to do with neglect of a congregation's responsibility to offer care and a lack of true understanding of the biblical message of God's mission. Nevertheless, adults not in compliance with constitutional guidelines for membership can be statistically removed from the active church rolls by the congregation's pastor. I suspect, however, that not all ELCA pastors remove inactive members from the membership rolls.

The annual ELCA parochial report instructions indicate that a baptized adult unable to provide a letter of transfer from a Lutheran congregation or who was removed from a Lutheran congregation and reinstated by action of the Congregational Council, is to be listed as received by *affirmation of faith*. A baptized adult from a non-Lutheran congregation unable to provide a letter of transfer and by action of the Church Council is

received into membership, is to be listed as a *statistical adjustment*. However, the consistency of reporting for these former believing nonbelongers does not appear to be consistent from congregation to congregation.

I believe it is important to note that Jesus *never* refers to those absent from the life of the worshipping, fellowshipping, and giving assembly as inactive, dropouts, unaffiliated, or believing non-belongers. Jesus described those not included in the life and service of their local assembly as *lost.* Jesus' metaphoric image of lost sheep illustrates that those outside the assembly believed and belonged to God's kingdom. The *lost* of Jesus' time were not people who chose to exit the community of faith; they were children of Abraham intentionally excluded as unclean sinners, unworthy to belong.

Within our American postmodern context there has been a paradigm change moving away from Jesus' perspective of the lost. Various authors and researchers have defined and labeled *lost sheep* as adults who have chosen to withdraw from active participation. David Roozen was the first to coin the phrase, *church dropouts,* referring to adults who no longer regularly participated in worship.[30] William Hendricks through exit interviews with those who have been disillusioned and disappointed with the institutional Church and left their congregation refer to the lost as *back-door believers*.[31] Hendricks defines these disenfranchised Christians by the fact that they have stopped attending worship, receiving education, or supporting mission and ministries, ranging from

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[30] David A. Roozen, "Church Dropouts: Changing Patterns of Disengagement and Re-Entry," *Review of Religious Research* 21, no. 4 (1980): 427.

[31] Hendricks, *Exit Interviews,* 17.

sporadic participation to non-existent participation over a period of several years.[32] George Barna calls these adults *backsliding Christians,*[33] but is also known to use the word *unchurched,* which is also most commonly used by Thom Rainer,[34] Lee Strobel[35] and the Gallup Poll.[36] Philip Fogarty labels those who were once active in the life of a congregation *outsiders* and *strangers,* right along with the unchurched.[37] Philip Richter and Leslie Francis use the term *church leavers* in their mixed-method study of "people having attended church at least six times a year (not including Christmas and Easter) to describe those subsequently lapsed into attending church less than six times a year."[38] Robert Wuthnow most frequently uses the term *seekers.*[39] Gallup's description is a stringent definition of the unchurched meaning the adult Christian has not participated in any core ministries (worship, stewardship) within the past six months. Gallup does not consider attendance during Christmas and Easter, weddings and funerals, as active participation within a congregation. Martin E. Marty uses the phrase *a mishmash of*

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[32] Ibid., 19-20.

[33] George Barna, *Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005), 7.

[34] Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them*, 19.

[35] Lee Strobel, *Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary: How to Reach Friends and Family Who Avoid God and the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 11.

[36] George Gallup and Jim Castelli, *The People's Religion: American Faith in the 90's* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1989), 146.

[37] Philip Fogarty, *The Missing God Who Is Not Missed: Christian Belief in a Secular Society* (Chester Springs, PA: Columbia Press, 2003), 98-123.

[38] Philip J. Richter and Leslie J. Francis, *Gone but Not Forgotten: Church Leaving and Returning* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1998), xiv.

[39] Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 3.

religiously unaffiliated to capture an emerging trend in the late 1970s. In America's "highly secular and low-commitment remembered religion where many people can talk about their family's religious history or even their own religious past better than they can affirm what they actually believe."[40] However, none of these descriptions of believers who no longer belong or members who have dropped out and are inactive in the life and service of the church address what congregations of believing belongers are doing to reach them.

The term *region* is an important cultural and categorical variable defined as "a predictable geographic area of the United States," according to criteria established by Mark Silk, editor of the series *Religion by Region*.[41] He defines distinct regions within the United States having unique religious and broad life-style features of cultural attitudes, opinions, and praxis, which follows my own experience growing up in California and serving congregations on the East Coast, in the Pacific Northwest and the Midwest. This study includes four of Silk's eight geographic regions: the Midwest,[42] Mountain West,[43] Pacific Northwest,[44] and Pacific.[45] These four geographic regions

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[40] Martin E. Marty, ed., *Religion in America: 1950 to the Present*, Interpreting American Pluralism (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1979), 83.

[41] Mark Silk, "Religion and Region in American Public Life," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 44, no. 3 (2005): 265.

[42] Philip L. Barlow and Mark Silk, eds., *Religion and Public Life in the Midwest: America's Common Denominator?*, Religion by Region (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004), 11-16.

[43] Jan Shipps, Mark Silk, and Kathleen Flake, eds., *Religion and Public Life in the Mountain West: Sacred Landscapes in Transition*, Religion by Region (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004), 9-14.

[44] Patricia O'Connell Killen and Mark Silk, eds., *Religion and Public Life in the Pacific Northwest: The None Zone*, Religion by Region (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004), 9-20.

correlate closely with the Regions of the ELCA: Regions One and Two, Silk calls the Mountain West, Pacific Northwest, and Pacific; and Regions Three, Four, and Five, Silk defines as the Midwest. For the purpose of this study, I recode these five regions into two geographic and ecclesiastical areas, the West Coast and the Midwest.

Finally, I use the terms, the *Bible*, *God's word* according to the Old and New Testaments, and *scripture* as the same source. For the purpose of this study, citations are taken from the English translation of the New Revised Standard Version.[46]

Maintenance and Mission

In my life I have belonged to Lutheran congregations in California, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Washington, and Nebraska, with no two congregations alike. There have been demographic differences such as location, age, size, and predecessor Church body and contextual differences like rural-farming, rural-recreational, large city urban, medium sized city, and large city suburban some ten miles away. Nonetheless, the membership's cultural, economical, educational, and racial distribution has been primarily homogenous: white, middle-class, and English speaking. The most notable characteristics they share are a decline in worship attendance, membership and financial support, and a proportionate increase in inactives.

Even with seminary training and the eagerness to make a difference in people's lives through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, I discovered early in my first

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[45] Wade Clark Roof and Mark Silk, eds., *Religion and Public Life in the Pacific Region: Fluid Identities*, Religion by Region (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2005), 9-19.

[46] *The Holy Bible: The New Revised Standard Version*, ed. Inc. Logos© Research Systems and Digital Library System© Libronix, 1.1 ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989).

call that I was not equipped to motivate people to change the congregation's Christendom culture. My efforts at preaching, teaching, and pastoral care were not sufficient to encourage life-long Lutherans to partner with me as a theological coach in reaching and reconciling inactives. This scenario was repeated in many of the congregations I served. After my third call, it became clear to me most life-long Lutherans resisted talking with family and neighbors about a commitment to faith or a religious community. My experiences were not unique. As I listened to my colleagues through the years, a majority of congregations maintained inactives or drop-outs on their membership roles with the assumption that they would eventually return. This trend was not unique to my experience or those of my colleagues.

The literature reviewed in my research reports Lutherans within the United States have replicated the European heritage of infant baptism, Sunday school education, catechesis and public affirmation in the formative teenage years and, following high school graduation, disengagement from the church. I fit this pattern myself. Along my own rite of passage I joined a Jewish social fraternity in college and attended synagogue on the Sabbath. This might seem strange for a life-long Lutheran, but as a teenager in the late 1960s, I was a typical Baby-boomer who dropped out of the Church. I did not return to the Lutheran Church until I was married. This typical pattern has been explained by David Roozen's research from the 1930s to the 1950s showing the historical drop-out rate of teenagers due to lessening parental influence. During those years Baby Boomers left because they reportedly felt the church had little to offer.[47]

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[47] Roozen, "Church Dropouts: Changing Patterns of Disengagement and Re-Entry," 427.

The challenges of serving congregations resistant or unprepared to reconcile with their inactives continue. An astounding number of clergy within ELCA congregations and other mainline denominations don't know how to address the large number of inactives in their churches. The believing nonbelongers are the elephant in the room, and the line going out the wide open back door that I referred to in the opening of this thesis. Conversations dealing with declining active membership of the Baby-boomer generation *and their children* (italics mine) are what Hendricks calls "the dark-side of ministry."[48] At the time of my first call in the late 1970s, I was trained with the mission to preserve and perpetuate the mainline faith tradition. Mission was the business of converting people living in over-seas to foreign, non-English speaking people. Twenty years later, the ELCA leadership began to recognize the United States was the world's fourth largest inactive and unchurched population "with over 120 million non-Christians."[49] Since then the ELCA churchwide assemblies have taken this report of the growing number of unaffiliated American make the United State the third largest mission field in the world (following China and India).[50] Such reports have gained the attention of ELCA leadership and seminaries.[51] However, it would seem by the decline in annual congregational parochial reports the urgency for involvement in out reach by churches

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[48] Hendricks, *Exit Interviews*, 259.

[49] H. George Anderson, "Mission Field U.S.A.," *The Lutheran* (1997): 58.

[50] "Report of the Memorials Committee," in *2003 Pre-Assembly Report* (Chicago, IL: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2003), 41-43.

[51] Dick Magnus, "Greetings from the Executive Director for Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission," (Chicago, IL: Evangelical Lutheran Church) http://www.elca.org/outreach/resources/greetings.html (accessed December 30).

within their communities has yet to capture the attention or imagination of the average life-long Lutheran in the pew. I believe this means both clergy and laity need to partner and listen to what believing nonbelongers say are their reasons for leaving and what it will take for us welcome them back and include them. As believing belongers, we all need to recognize that our calling to be sent to our unaffiliated neighbors isn't about success, but about our faith to regain their trust and friendship.[52] Believing nonbelongers know there is a God, but they need believing belongers to bring about their gradual conversions and transformations for their return into communion with Christ and fellowship with the church.

It's ironic that a Lutheran denomination that claims by its name to be *evangelical* has so few congregations reporting inactives returning. The reasons appear multiple and complex. Why do ELCA confirmed members leave the community rather than be reconciled? One answer, suggested by Hendricks:

> The church is worse off precisely because of Christendom's failure to evangelize its own context and establish gospel communities that transform the culture. The missional church with all its fluidity and lack of buildings, its failure to institutionalize, has been far more successful from the margins.[53]

Recent Research on Former Church Members

Recent research points to a pattern. From reflection on existing literature as well as personal and professional experiences, the pattern is this: the believing nonbelongers

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[52] Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the Twenty-First Century Church*, 99.

[53] Ibid., 14.

exit congregations with their feet and their wallets because they are disillusioned by Christians who, in their perception, don't practice the biblical message of the gospel.

Hendrik Kraemer first reported to the International Missionary Council in 1947, "Strictly speaking, one ought to say that the Church is always in a state of crisis and that its greatest shortcoming is that it is only occasionally aware of it."[54] The recognition that a growing number of Americans chose to express their spirituality individually and privately without participation in worship identifies a challenge for church leaders and active members to admit there are hard questions to be asked, such as: Why have baptized adults left the church? Are pastors and members of congregations doing anything to change the attrition; if so what? What do inactive adults whose names remain on congregational roles have to say about their church and the ELCA?

David Roozen's study identifies a noticeable number of adults who dropped out after their children grew up and left the church. The adult dropout pattern was significantly different in the 1960s and, according to Roozen, leveled off in the 1970s due to personal situations, economic developments, and social mobility.[55] Several decades of study on church membership has disclosed that the dominant force of social ties, traditionally sustained by family, friends, and communities, has been significantly disrupted by the modern culture of mobility within the United States.[56] Faith and spirituality within the United States has become an individual and private expression of

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[54] Hendrik Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1947), 24.

[55] Roozen, "Church Dropouts: Changing Patterns of Disengagement and Re-Entry," 428.

[56] Roof and Silk, eds., *Religion and Public Life in the Pacific Region: Fluid Identities*, 106.

personal experience, interpretation and application. From this context the believing nonbelonger has emerged in western postmodernity culture and society.

The exodus from the church has not ended with the Baby-boomer generation; their grown children—Generations X and Y, and their grandchildren. The Millennial Generation has also become disenchanted and dissatisfied with the church. In the words of Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, "The strategic focus must now shift from revitalization to mission, i.e. from a focus on the *insiders* to the *outsiders*; and in so doing, we believe the church will rediscover its true nature and fulfill its purpose."[57]

Philip Richter and Leslie Francis published a mixed-method, two-phase exploratory research that began with surveys of Anglicans they called *leavers*.[58] Their study relied on previous research and studies by Carl Dudley, James Fowler, George Gallup, Wade Roof, and David Roozen. In their second phase, Richter and Francis interviewed a selected sample to qualitatively explain their quantitative survey findings. In their conclusion as to why people leave the church they offer suggestions on how to attract their return. In summary they stated: "There is no one magic solution to the problem of church leaving. As we have seen, churches need to consider a cocktail of remedies, because people drop out of church for a whole variety of reasons."[59] This thesis examines some of the attitudes and practices missional ELCA congregations have changed to be ready to seek and reconcile with those who have left the church.

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[57] Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the Twenty-First Century Church*, x.

[58] Richter and Francis, *Gone but Not Forgotten: Church Leaving and Returning*, viii-xvi.

[59] Ibid., 165-66.

Additional studies on this phenomenon within the United States have been conducted since the mid 1960s by numerous missiologists, psychologists, and social-scientists. Rev. Kent S. Knutson, president of the ALC in 1972 warned, "We must never allow our tradition to become deadened by our inability to comprehend its (the Gospel's) richness or to be romanticized by a mere formal acquiescence. The question is . . . whether we have fully understood and proclaimed it."[60] The Rev. Mark Hansen, presiding bishop of the ELCA, wrote in 2002, "If we are to be an engaging church, answering the call of God to be engaged in the world as individuals and as congregations, we need to be . . . a witnessing, worshiping, engaging, equipping, inviting, and connecting church."[61] These messages, for whatever reason, seem to have fallen on deaf ears. The Gospel has not always been translated into a postmodern praxis at the congregational level, as reported by Kirk Hadaway and Penny Marler: "Given a steady erosion of traditional religious belonging, behaving, and believing as measured by national surveys over the past half-century, the stability and significance (as an indicator) of worship attendance begs explanation."[62] Statistics show that while the ELCA has an open door policy for receiving new members, the back door seems to have been left wide open and unattended for existing members to depart. In a report published in the *Lutheran* by the Church Secretary of the ELCA, it was stated:

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[60] Kent S. Knutson, *Gospel, Church, Mission* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1976), 35-36.

[61] Mark S. Hanson, *Faithful yet Changing* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2002), 33.

[62] Kirk Hadaway and Penny Long Marler, "How Many Americans Attend Worship Each Week? An Alternative Approach to Measurement," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 44, no. 3 (2005): 318.

> Membership has declined slightly for the past 14 years, down about 300,000 members from 5,240,739 reported in 1990. More than half of the decrease, a drop in 169,448 baptized members, occurred between 2002 and 2004, which included losses from the removal of long-time inactive members from congregational rolls.[63]

The cycle of concern regarding inactives over the past forty years has raised the level of interest in evangelism and out reach for short periods of time, introduced by programmatic ways to *fix-the symptoms.* However, there has yet to be extensive conversation about the disease within the ELCA tradition and need for a paradigm change to move from a Christendom vocation to a postmodern mission. This in spite of the reports, the ELCA Department of Evaluation and Research has concluded:

> The single most important factor associated with a change in average worship attendance is a clear sense of mission and purpose; the findings suggest that evangelism programs and new ways of sharing the faith are effective but only when associated with a sense of purpose and change in a congregation along with an ability to negotiate change positively.[64]

Other factors including the variables of anxiety, conflict, and grief between believing belongers and believing nonbelongers are addressed in other existing and emerging studies. The emphasis of this study focuses on the missional *readiness* of congregations, leaders, and members to reach and reconcile with the believing nonbelonger.

Reconciling New Ways of Thinking and Acting about Mission

Attitudes and behaviors do not easily change. Today there is no over-arching theory that explains how people change their behaviors; in fact, there are at least 300

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[63] Office of the Secretary ELCA, "ELCA Income up, Membership under Five Million," *The Lutheran* 18, no. 10 (2005): 54.

[64] Kenneth W. Inskeep and Jeffrey L. Drake, *Worship Attendance in the ELCA*, ed Department of Research and Evaluation (Chicago, IL: ELCA, 2000), http://www.elca.org/re/reports/ccspwrsp1.PDF (accessed December 17, 2005).

approaches and explanations fragmenting the field of behavioral change.[65] This diversity has not furthered conclusions on how the ELCA can reverse the denial and failure of its baptized adult members to participate in *missio Dei* as the *missio ecclesia* and their congregation.

Reformations in postmodern ways of thinking are needed to master greater levels of readiness and response to mission in the United States. Changing perspectives in patriarchal and hierarchical systems of the Church and congregations toward partnerships of pastor and people will be essential for every baptized member and leader of the ELCA to interface with an emerging postmodern culture and context that accepts that "the learning process is to be more and more a dialogue of equals" who are newly received and long time members.[66] The need to undo the romantic myth that churches attract members today as they did in the 1950s and 1960s is vital if ELCA congregations are going survive within the cultural context of the United States in the new millennium. However, the acceptance of this paradigm shift and changes to existing praxis that don't effectively proclaim the gospel in our American culture depends on congregational and individual readiness, especially when responding to Jesus' call to love our all of our neighbors, including our lost neighbor.

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[65] Prochaska and Norcross, *Systems of Psychotherapy: A Transtheoretical Analysis*, 495-505.

[66] Jennifer James, *Thinking in the Future Tense: Leadership Skills for a New Age* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 178.

This study incorporated the Transtheoretical Model or Stages of Change, developed and used by James Prochaska.[67] This behavioral theory models a perspective to understanding readiness for congregational change. Prochaska's theory (originally used with persons fighting nicotine addiction) is based on several key insights that radically shift the way behavioral psychologists and others in the health field understand the process of behavioral change. By applying Prochaska's model to the process of readiness, transformed attitudes, changed plans, and formulated actions can be measured so that the reconciliation of relationships, essential to change, can be observed. His model is characterized by six stages and departs from previous theoretical assumptions about behavior as a one time decision by suggesting that change in individual behavior is a process that takes months if not years. Each behavioral stage of change corresponds to a level of individual readiness over time. Furthermore, this theory's design and methodology increases the measurement by defining change as "any sign of readiness to move from the previous stage to the next, with an emphasis on sustaining change."[68]

Before the introduction of the Transtheoretical Model, it was common to assume that a few classes, seminars, or support groups might lead someone to change an addicted behavior.[69] Previous theories approached change in individual behavior with the assumption that everyone reacted similarly to information received and responded either

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[67] James O. Prochaska, Sara S. Johnson, and Terrence P. Lee, "The Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change," in *The Handbook of Health Behavior Change*, ed. Sally A. Shumaker, et al. (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 1998), 38-48.

[68] James O. Prochaska, C.C. DeClemente, and J.C. Norcross, "In Search of How People Change: Applications to Addictive Behaviors," *American Psychologist* 47 (1992): 1002.

[69] Prochaska and Norcross, *Systems of Psychotherapy: A Transtheoretical Analysis*, 5.

in a positive manner or in stages of grief. If, after time, there was no change in one's attitude or behavior, simply a return to the status-quo, it was assumed the people lacked motivation.

Another new way of thinking applied to this study was Parshall's spectrum of community contextualization. He defined *contextualization* not a syncretism, but as process of immersing an outsider into a community's entire culture without compromising the gospel.[70] His spectrum was originally designed to discern and describe levels of involvement by Christ-centered communities with Asian Muslims.[71] I use Parshall's spectrum to describe contextualization levels that range from applying traditional language and praxis within a congregation to a congregation that assimilates their host community's language and praxis.

It is my opinion that Parshall's spectrum is similar to Prochaska's model in that they can be nominally used to measure individual behaviors and applied collectively to an entire congregation. As such, I intentionally integrate Prochaska's readiness theory with Parshall's theology of contextualization to suggest that readiness to reach out and reconcile with believing nonbelongers is a process of changes in attitudes and actions that, over time, may become behavioral changes for individuals that transform congregations. By integrating these two theoretical models within the development of this concurrent-nested, mix-method design, I have subscribed to a new way of thinking that is re-emerging, the marriage of science and religion. This will be discussed in more detail in

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[70] Parshall, *Muslim Evangelism: Contemporary Approaches to Contextualization*, 22.

[71] Ibid., 59-63.

the chapter on Literature Review and Methodology. Therefore, changing the paradigm and perspective to God's mission of reconciliation of nonbelongers is, I believe, an essential link in the conversation and process for the future of the ELCA to be, "committed to a Christ-centered community-communion-commission."[72]

Methodology, Sample, and Ethical Considerations

The data collection of this study uses a two-phased *concurrent-nested, mixed method design* with criteria guided by Creswell.[73] A concurrent-nested, mixed-method design is a combination of questionnaire and narrative responses from the same population sample to gather various kinds of information, experiences, observations, perceptions, and personal stories. The first of two phases collected a systematic sampling of a large ELCA congregational population with specific variables as criteria for selection. The second phase took another systematic sample from the first phase in order to assure the diversity of ELCA congregations in the western United States represented additional criteria. Specifics about this approach are described in chapter four.

What made this approach unique as a concurrent-nested, mixed-method study was the primary quantitative data gathering tool, a questionnaire, used with a secondary qualitative data collection element inviting each participate to provide a descriptive written narrative to two open-ended statements. The first open-ended statement solicited a narration from the respondent if they had been inactive, and the second open-ended

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[72] Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the Twenty-First Century Church*, 77.

[73] John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed-Method Approaches*, 2d ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), 218-19.

statement solicited a narration if they had conversation with an inactive or someone unchurched. Tashakkori and Teddlie call this approach a *parallel mixed-method study* that combines the primary collection of quantitative data with the qualitative information collected.[74] The findings of the qualitative information obtained by the participants' written narratives are dependant on the nominal data generated in the previous phase. Therefore the personal stories are statistically tested to support the quantitative statistical findings.

A concern for this study was the potential limitations of the receiving a small number of responses from the second phased systematically sampled population of ELCA congregations. I was seeking a response greater than 15% so the statistical analysis would validate the findings. Of the 600 potential respondents in the first phase for each group, 132 clergy and lay respondents (22.0%) in Group One returned their questionnaire; and 152 clergy and lay respondents (25.3%) in Group Two responded. From Group One, 53 of the 132 respondents (40.2%) provided concurrent-nested narratives as former inactives and 101 of the 132 respondents (76.5%) submitted narratives about their contacts with people unaffiliated with a church. From Group Two, 37 of the 152 (24.3%) respondents provided concurrent-nested narratives as former inactives and 91 of 158 (59.9%) submitted narratives about their contacts with people unaffiliated with a church. All of these levels of responses by the sample number of

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[74] Abbas Tashakkori and Charles Teddlie, *Mixed Methodology: Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Applied Social Research Methods Series (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), 153-54.

missional and maintenance congregational were sufficient to provide a significant return to validate the finds of the data.

My request for 400 systematically selected ELCA congregations from the Office of Research and Evaluation was to receive a large enough sample of two categories of ELCA congregations that would become the study's dependent variable. The dichotomous congregations included a plurality of demographic criteria: congregations from predecessor church bodies, congregational ages, congregations that represented various membership and worship attendance sizes, various membership and worship growth trends, congregations located in various population sizes throughout ELCA Regions One, Two, Three, Four, and Five, and congregations located in rural and urban types with various population growth trends. Therefore, until I ran a frequency distribution on the 400 congregations, I had no idea what proportions in each ELCA I would receive, nor did I have control of what three respondents would participate in this study's questionnaire.

A third limitation considered was the integrity of the responses to the binomial and multinomial questions. Based on the research of Vassilis Saroglou[75] and Kirk Hadaway,[76] an exaggeration of responses can be significant. I hoped to receive at least questionnaires from 15% of the 200 congregations in each of the two groups to provide a mean validation of consistency from the participants' responses. There were 200 systematically selected congregations in each group; 66 (33.0%) responded from

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[75] Vassilis Saroglou et al., "Prosocial Behavior and Religion: New Evidence Based on Projective Measures and Peer Ratings," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 44, no. 3 (2005): 323.

[76] Hadaway and Marler, "How Many Americans Attend Worship Each Week? An Alternative Approach to Measurement," 307.

congregations in Group One, and 73 (36.5%) responded from congregations in Group Two. From the 66 congregations in Group One participating, 42 (21.0%) congregations had two or three respondents; and from the 73 congregations in Group Two participating, 52 congregations (26.0%) had two or three respondents. The count and percent of these returns are acceptable levels to validate the integrity of congregational responses from each group and continue with the statistical testing and analysis of the questionnaire.

The strength of this concurrent-nested, mixed-method approach is that quantitative and qualitative data "tests a theory by specifying narrow hypotheses and the collection of data to support or refute the hypothesis."[77] This allows greater insight into a theoretically informed process of readiness to reconcile with inactives from congregations and their host community. Such an analytical methodology was important in comparing ELCA missional congregations that primarily reconcile with believing nonbelongers with ELCA maintenance congregations that are sustained primarily through the reception of transferred believers.

Throughout the study and research a comprehensive plan was implemented to consider ethical issues related to respondent confidentiality and literature copyright laws. The anonymity of respondents has been protected using codes and aliases. Explicit written permission from the respondents was obtained by researcher for the sole purpose of collecting data and information for this thesis. My role was to design and implement the questionnaire, select the population sample measured, then analyze and interpret the data. Once the raw demographic and statistical data was collected and analyzed, and the

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[77] Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed-Method Approaches*, 20.

respondents' narratives transcribed, the collected information has become the secured property of this researcher. Analysis and interpretation of the data received from the ELCA and respondents was my sole responsibility.

The language used throughout this thesis is in accordance with the guidelines and standards of Luther Seminary. Throughout this thesis and supporting research (i.e. questionnaire, cover letters, and thesis text) I use language sensitive to respondents' answers and narratives, whether from the believing belonger or believing nonbelonger point of view. Furthermore, when the occasion necessitated, permission to quote or use citations or resources covered by copyright laws, explicit written permission was obtained. Repercussions resulting in the conduct or release of this thesis will be the sole responsibility of this researcher. Finally, the credibility of analysis, interpretation, and conclusions of the data associated with this study will be determined by the reader.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

I introduced some of the existing literature in the previous chapter pertaining to significant terms and previous studies. This chapter expands the references of related literature to this study in five primary sections: Mission of God as reconciliation by the church; Reconciling the vocation of believers; Postmodern readiness toward reconciliation; Reconciliation in theoretical stages, and Reconciling the culture of believing nonbelongers. Before I proceed, I offer an overview of how reconciling religious change has witnessed the integration of two disciplines: missional theology and theory over the last forty years in the United States.

A Brief Overview of Reconciling Religious Change

Acceptance of missional theology and theory as interdisciplinary studies on the changing religious culture in the United States emerged at the end of modernity in the mid-1960s. Previously theologians and social scientists studied culture and religion independently, rarely sharing or reviewing each other's qualitative and quantitative analytical findings or conclusions. In the late-1960s, researcher Peter Berger dared to explore crossing over modernity's separation and specialization barriers between social science and theology stating, "Every human society is an enterprise of world-building.

Religion occupies a distinctive place in this enterprise."[1] Lyle Schaller, one of the most respected church consultants in the United States, also took notice of existing congregational trends in the 1960s and wrote a three-volume series of non-research qualitative prescriptions, the third of which describes how "the local church looks at planning and practices from the perspective of building a team ministry approach in which the pastor and laity work together."[2] By the mid-1970s, Schaller wrote a less optimistic book about the social along with the spiritual conditions and culture within congregations saying, "We are living in a time when the rights of the individual are expanding and the cultural pressures lessening. We are immersed in liberation, rebellion, and abandonment of tradition."[3] As a seminarian with an undergraduate degree in city and regional planning, these interdisciplinary studies of culture and religion caught my attention, but I didn't have the capacity to understand the vision of what God was doing through this emerging literature about cultural and religious change at that time.

At the time of my ordination in 1978, church historian Martin Marty drew attention to a cultural change in the church. The church was becoming "a consumer society that assures great freedom, including the freedom to be nonreligious or utterly selective, and finding meaning without belonging and religion without community."[4] By 1980, another sociologist, Russell Hale, expanded Peter Berger's theory and used an

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[1] Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), 1.

[2] Lyle E. Schaller, *The Pastor and the People*, Rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1986), 16-17.

[3] Lyle E. Schaller, *Understanding Tomorrow* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1976), 3.

[4] Martin E. Marty, ed., *Religion in America: 1950 to the Present*, Interpreting American Pluralism (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1979), 83.

ethnographic method to estimate that 80 million Americans were no longer practicing their Christian faith in the context of a congregation.[5] The 1980s also saw the first appearance of papers published by David Roozen, Dean Hoge, Kirk Hadaway, and Wade Roof to describe Christians who believe but who no longer belong. These early interdisciplinary explorers shed extensive light of the emerging and existing influences on the church. These post World War II influences included: an affluent economy, the American population's mobility and technological advances. Combine these influences with the integration of theological interpretation and social science application and the descriptions of Church growth in the United States have a correlation to the changing composition of the religious culture and praxis of society. A primary influence this change has been a growing number of believing nonbelongers who prefer to experience independent spirituality outside of religious institutions.

To explain the purpose of church in terms of out reach instead of attraction to members over the age of fifty who belong to ELCA congregations that are declining in membership is a challenge which faces all mainline, denominational congregations. In response to these emerging challenges a volume emerged on the missional church in the 1980s that received contributions form a variety of theological perspectives. Darrell Guder (ordained in the Presbyterian Church) served as editor of the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN) and included six contributors: Lois Barrett (ordained in the Mennonite Church), Inagrace Ditterich (ordained in the United Methodist Church), George Hunsberger (ordained in the Presbyterian Church), Alan Roxburgh (ordained in the Baptist Church of Canada), and Craig Van Gelder (ordained in the Christian

[5] J. Russell Hale, *The Unchurched: Who They Are and Why They Stay Away*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1980), 4-7.

Reformed Church).[6] By 2005 the GOCN partnership had published seven volumes in *The Gospel and Our Culture Series* to explore, describe, and suggest the need to reexamination *missio Dei* as the solution to the growing widespread crisis.

During the late 1990s, Philip Richter and Leslie Francis used a mixed-method study that explored eight broad categories of complex motivations and reasons why Anglicans left congregations.[7] Richter and Francis relied heavily on James Fowler's theory of faith development, psychological, sociological perspectives, and the generational value studies by Wade Roof, Jackson Carroll, and David Roozen.[8] Richter and Francis include a section called, *in listening to the statistics*, in each chapter of their book.[9] These sections were statistically and analytically insightful for this study and encouraged me to ask my participants open questions so that I might really listen to their personal narrative responses. Richter and Francis conclude that congregations need to "offer people a sense of community, but not just any sort of community . . . one that incarnates the values of God's kingdom as a community that looks outward . . . is hospitable toward strangers, affirms of others, and offers room to breathe and grow."[10] I wonder if their study had been influenced by Marva Dawn's study on Romans, *Truly the Community*, in which she says, "As modern Western culture has moved beyond the industrial Revolution into the Technological Revolution, a myriad of factors have caused

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[6] Darrell L. Guder and Lois Barrett, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*. The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), vi-vii.

[7] Philip J. Richter and Leslie J. Francis, *Gone but Not Forgotten: Church Leaving and Returning* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1998), xiv.

[8] Ibid., 39-52.

[9] Ibid., 133.

[10] Ibid., 164.

persons to become more and more isolated from one another."[11] There has been, to my knowledge, no quantitative or mixed method follow-up study to Richter and Francis' proposal.

Finally, in addition to the literature mentioned above, I have reviewed articles to insure I have considered the most recent literature related to my thesis topic. These sources included journals and online websites published within the past ten years, such as: Alban Institute Publications, Barna Research Group, Christian Century, International Review of Mission, Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, and Review of Religious Research. Of the six doctoral dissertations written within the past ten years identifying primary descriptors used in this thesis, only Charles Kyker used a qualitative method to describe an apostolic approach to mission.[12] To date, I have found no other study within the existing literature on a missional approach to reconciling believing nonbelongers. I believe my mixed-method design and methodology will add to the existing and emerging literature on reaching out to and reconciling with the believing nonbelonger within the western United States.

Mission as Reconciliation

A renewed emphasis on the mission of the church has its genesis in the early 1960s with Leslie Newbigin. His research initiated the shift from congregations maintaining their ministries to congregations being missional about their ministries. He said, "We have lived for so many centuries in the *Christendom* situation that ministerial

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[11] Marva J. Dawn, *Truly the Community: Romans 12 and How to Be the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), xiii.

[12] Charles C. Kyker, "An Apostolic Leadership Model That Enables Pastors to Develop a Passion to Reach the Unchurched" (D.Min. thesis, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2004).

training is almost entirely conceived in terms of the pastoral care of existing congregations."[13] His call for biblical and theological revitalization and vision was among the first to define and describe the purpose of the church rooted in *missio Dei*.[14] The premise of his qualitative description of Church decline and the need for a return to participation in *missio Dei* was based on his understanding of the Holy Spirit leading the Church in a movement fundamental to the Trinity's work of redemption.

Likewise, David Bosch left a legacy with his description of "Christian faith as intrinsically missionary,"[15] reflecting that "the time of paradigm shift is a time of deep uncertainty."[16] It was his call (borrowing from Oscar Cullmann's theology of "already, but not yet")[17] that drew attention for Christians to look at an "eschatology mission, which was both future-directed and oriented to the here and now."[18] The conclusion of his work ties *missio Dei* and *missio ecclesia* as the ministry of reconciliation. The focus of *missio Dei* is "the cross, [which] stands for reconciliation between estranged individuals and groups, between oppressor and oppressed . . . not as a mere sentimental harmonizing of conflicting groups . . . but in very real ways it demands a commitment to a new life."[19] Such is the marriage between what God wills and what the Church does.

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[13] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 235.

[14] Lesslie Newbigin, "The Other Side of 1984: Questions for the Churches." (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1984, typewritten), 1

[15] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. American Society of Missiology Series; No. 16 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 8.

[16] Ibid., 349.

[17] Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, trans. Shirley C. Guthrie and Charles A. Hall (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1957).

[18] Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 508-09.

[19] Ibid., 514.

Following in Leslie Newbigin's lead and David Bosch's legacy, Darrell Guder provides extensive hermeneutical affirmations on the theme that mission is "the essential vocation of the church as God's called and sent people."[20] Another perspective is provided by Alan Roxburgh's extensive writings that provide detailed descriptions of the North American religious developments, history, and postmodern trends in mission. He states that Jesus' mission "was the formation, fulfillment, and empowerment of a new community, a new people created and sent by God."[21] His concept of missional leadership as a people being sent by God to reconcile with inactives moves away from the secular culture driven by consumerism toward the promise of a new covenant community identity. For Roxburgh, the renewed purpose of the Church is to "reach the unchurched and activate the inactives."[22] George Hunsberger calls for "a recovery of practical missional ecclesiology."[23] He diverges away from a theoretical study to recover an accountability practiced by a church's development of missional as disciplined steps toward measuring ministries that are missional. For him, missional congregations are contextual, emphasizing out reach and reconciliation which claim an "integral relationship between these three—cultural analysis, theological reflection, and

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[20] Darrell L. Guder, "From Sending to Being Sent," in *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell L. Guder, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 11.

[21] Alan J. Roxburgh, "Missional Leadership: Equipping God's People for Mission," in *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell L. Guder, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 185.

[22] Ibid., 200-01.

[23] George R. Hunsberger, "The Newbigin Gauntlet: Developing a Domestic Missiology for North America," in *The Church between Gospel and Culture*, ed. George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 14.

congregational mission—and responses to the current pressures felt at any one point cannot be adequately engaged apart from the others."[24]

These literary perceptions lay the primary foundation of *missio Dei* and *missio ecclesia* that emphasize out reach and reconciliation of the believing nonbelonger with the believing belonger. It is my theological opinion that calling, equipping, and commissioning only pastors and designated laity to do evangelism in the community is not the best application of our Lutheran understanding of baptism vocation. Rather *missio ecclesia* within *missio Dei* is better utilized and contextualized when the priesthood of all baptized believers are called, equipped and commissioned into a vocational to reconcile those of us who are active in the church with believing nonbelongers in the community.

Recognizing a need readiness for change from maintenance to mission within the church is not the only contextualization for ministry. George Hunsberger utilizes the phrase *religious economy*, coined by Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, in applying the changes occurring in the postmodern culture of the United States:

> In this religious economy, the invisible hand of the marketplace is no less unforgiving than it is in other areas of commerce. In a nation where those inside, as well as outside the churches have come to accept this idea of the church as a vendor of religious goods and services . . . is it any wonder that Americans in general have taken the form of religious shoppers and consumers in regard to their patterns of religious affiliation?[25]

What Hunsberger implies is that religion, spirituality, and the purpose of congregational participation in God's mission is not to eliminate secular culture within the United States but "rather religion is relocated in the social order; it is put into a new arrangement of

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[24] George R. Hunsberger, "Acquiring the Posture of a Missionary Church," in *The Church between Gospel and Culture*, ed. George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 290.

[25] George R. Hunsberger, "Birthing Missional Faithfulness: Accents in a North American Movement," *International Review of Mission* 92, no. 365 (2003): 146.

things."[26] In the same article, he states that the "church's crisis is a missional crisis . . . and the opportunity is to recover what it means for the church to be missional . . . to know ourselves to be formed by God as a sent community that bears the marks of the full biblical story of a cross as well as a resurrection."[27] His integration of God's mission with reconciliation is explicitly identified as "ecclesiology, and one renewed under new social conditions and with fresh recognition of the church's vocation . . . as the claim God makes on us to live in a covenant of radical trust and ultimate loyalty in service to God's coming reign!"[28]

Craig Van Gelder also offers an extensive contribution to the contemporary literature of mission emphasizing that "the emerging paradigm of mission to North America must be able to respond to postmodernism and its accompanying relativity." [29] Van Gelder uses the research of Steven Connor in his book *Postmodern Culture*, to review the history and progression of postmodern thinking that grew out of the Enlightenment Period. This progression, according to Van Gelder, explains how the postmodern North American culture has come to deconstruct the metanarratives of biblical authority and decenter absolute models of Church doctrine. [30] As such, I believe this understanding of history is an important perspective in approaching and listening to believing nonbelongers. No longer can church leaders and members afford the luxury of

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.: 147.

[28] Ibid.: 150.

[29] Craig Van Gelder, "Defining the Center-Finding Boundaries: The Challenge of Re-Visioning the Church in North America for the Twenty-First Century," in *The Church between Gospel and Culture*, ed. George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 32.

[30] Ibid.

assuming congregations can return to a pre-1960s status quo that assumed the teachings and traditions of the Church are what attract people. The integration of mission in the second millennium requires new ways of thinking and approaching the purpose of *missio Dei* as an outreach of reconciliation for all people by all Christians. This mission of the Church is the sending work of God, which takes this study from a reflection on theology and theory to a research of contextual reality.[31] Van Gelder 's stance for mission focuses on missional leadership as "an essential aspect of the attribute of the church's being apostolic (the sent one) . . . to take the message of God's redemptive reign to the ends of the earth."[32] Central to his theology and theory is a biblical model of God's mission as redemption to make all things new based on 2nd Corinthians 5:16-21. He states God's purpose is to "reflect creation's intent while looking forward to consummation. For those who are separated from God, this means being brought into right relationship with God and others."[33] His Reformed theology places both believing belongers and believing nonbelongers in a realm Lutherans call the kingdom on the left. This theological interpretation integrates a missional imagination that informs a theoretical perspective for reconciliation for the purpose of renewing the community of faith.

I do not believe that believing nonbelongers have intentionally removed God from their lives as much as they intentionally want to have little or nothing to do with the institutional Church emerging into postmodernity that has betrayed their trust. For many postmodern believing nonbelongers, believing in God and trusting those who lead and

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[31] Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 97.

[32] Ibid., 125.

[33] Ibid., 136.

belong to the Church are two distinct matters. However, Miroslav Volf presents an orthodox view, and enters this argument saying, "There can be no church without the reign of God; no reign of God without the Church."[34] Justification for this remark is revealed in his use of Joseph Ratzinger's explanation, "the object of faith itself is the triune God, and faith always actually means co-faith; indeed, communion with other Christians, not merely as an external circumstance of salvation, but virtually in metaphysical essence."[35] Volf's conclusion clarifies and summarizes the orthodox missional view that the believing belonger needs to reconcile with believing nonbelongers, since human sin and communion with God and others has been "perverted so that it exists only as individuals."[36] Orthodox missional theology claims that the existence of a Christian outside the Church is a delusion. Thus, individuals not assembled around Word and Sacrament worship where they are nurtured, strengthened, and sent back into the world to witnesses, are lost but don't know it.

Miroslav Volf would contend that a believing nonbelonger is not separated from God by sin any more or less than the believing belonger who does not reach out to the ones who are lost. "The Spirit is present in all Christians open to each and all others . . . to start them on the way to creative mutual giving and receiving."[37] For Volf, the theological subject of *missio Dei* cannot be separated from a theoretical perspective. The missional biblical reality of having been reconciled is the motivation to move to a

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[34] Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*. Sacra Doctrina (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), x.

[35] Ibid., 33.

[36] Ibid., 81.

[37] Ibid., 189.

contextual application of being sent by God to be reconciled with others. Volf calls this contextual application and movement a *perichoretic partnership* with the Triune God. The nature of God is to partner with believers in reconciling nonbelongers back into the Church. I agree with this orthodox perspective, *missio ecclesia* within *missio Dei* is the work of reconciliation, drawing believing nonbelongers into communion with Christ and community with other believers.

Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch expand the research of the GOCN's cultural twelve characteristics and trends of a missional church by adding three features: 1) "The missional church is incarnational, not attractional, in its ecclesiology . . . 2) messianic, not dualistic, in its spirituality, by seeing the world as holistic and integrated, and . . . 3) apostolic, rather than hierarchic, in its mode of leadership."[38] By adding these, Frost and Hirsch believe postmodern Christians can embrace their apostolic calling as "a classic task of the cross-cultural missionary: to engage culture without compromising the gospel."[39] They seems to be in contrast to many of the church growth writers who take an anthropocentric-practical-modern approach based on the great commission with a how-to method of strategic planning. This means they embrace a theocentric-theological-postmodern approach based on *missio Dei* with "narratives of God's purposes that happen by God's Spirit."[40] This kind of perspective fits the purpose of this study as an initiative that is more inclusive by drawing mentors, church leaders, and members to emphasize mission as a holistic focus for the twenty-first century.

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[38] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the Twenty-First Century Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 77.

[39] Ibid., 16.

[40] Gailyn Van Rheenen, "Contrasting Missional and Church Growth Perspectives," *Monthly Missional Reflection* (2006), http://missiology.org/mmr/mmr34.htm (accessed November 16, 2006).

The urgency to be in mission is overdue and necessary, according to Matthey, who calls for an immediate process and study by members of the WCC to emphasize the Christian witness of reconciliation in growing secularized contexts. Matthey states, "The gradual quantitative decrease of the social basis of mainline churches, due to the new configuration of religious practices, could in the future deeply affect the capacity of these churches to maintain their present institutional framework."[41] In another editorial, he asks, "is *Turangawaewae* (a Maori term for a place of belonging) part of the mission strategy of your congregation?" [42] Matthey quoted Alan Jamieson's research conclusion statement that "Most people who left their congregation continued their faith journey, but in 'churchless' surroundings."[43] In other words, Matthey makes a case for the term *believing without belonging*, because people choose to disassociate themselves from a congregation while they also choose to remain engaged within a culture and community that has spiritual dimensions. As a child of God, I find hope in his summation that the Church as a spiritual culture has opportunity in postmodernity to "rediscover the intimate and essential link between ecclesial and missional."[44]

Finke insists that to be missional religious organizations must sustain an incarnational development within a strategic plan. Here, teams of church leaders have opportunity to clarify their congregation's specific mission, vision, purpose, and core

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[41] Jacques Matthey, "Believing without Belonging? Reports from Groups to the Consultation," *International Review of Mission* 92, no. 364 (2003): 4.

[42] Jacques Matthey, "Mission in Secular and Postmodern Contexts," *International Review of Mission* 92, no. 365 (2003): 139-40.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.: 141.

teachings "for serving and adapting to their changing environment."[45] Strategic planning may seem to be a secular solution for the mission of the church however; there is biblical evidence that being missional includes the preservation of essential beliefs while practicing evangelism. Finke defends strategic planning as mission by saying, "when the core teachings are inimitable, these teachings increase the cost of defection; and when the core teachings provide individuals with religious capital that is inimitable, it will serve to retain members."[46] In concluding his argument he claims, "Despite the importance of sustaining core teachings, this does not secure organizational vitality. The downfall of many religious organizations is not that they fail to support core teachings, but rather they treat all aspects as core ideology that cannot be changed."[47] Finke would say that when congregations think changing programs and maintaining property are more important than reaching out to people, their lack of planning misses the mark of urgency in what God is doing and the priority that God wants them to do.

Rev. Mark Hanson, presiding bishop of the ELCA, also claims a sense of urgency for the Church to be missional in transforming its members for "equipping, witnessing, connecting, and changing."[48] Hanson's individual and corporate challenge for the mission of the church calls for the believing belongers to witness through attitudes and actions of reconciliation.

> Witnessing isn't based on a technique we learn. It belongs to the fabric of the Christ life. It begins in both our worship and in our homes, born out of prayer, as

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[45] Roger Finke, "Innovative Returns to Tradition: Using Core Teachings as the Foundation for Innovative Accommodation," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43, no. 1 (2004): 20.

[46] Ibid.: 21.

[47] Ibid.: 23.

[48] Mark S. Hanson, *Faithful yet Changing* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2002), 1-3.

> we talk about where we have experienced God's mercy and grace each day . . . now more than ever, the world needs our witness.[49]

Hanson's emphasis on witnessing is to "learn to be open to learning from others without diminishing our own devotion to Christ, our commitment to the Christian faith, our inviting people to hear the story of Jesus."[50] His encouragement and challenge to believers who are belongers in communion with Christ within the ELCA is an act of compensatory reconciliation through hospitality beyond worship and fellowship at church activities in response to the gospel. "It's been said that the average Lutheran invites someone to worship once every twenty-three years. If that's not bad enough, research shows that it takes three invitations before the people invited come."[51] The mission of the church in partnership in the mission of God is not an anticipation of guests coming to visit us or expecting a select few (pastors or the evangelism committee) to visit believing nonbelongers. Every Lutheran's baptismal response to God's grace is a calling to faithfully reach out to share and invite the believing nonbelonger back into communion with Christ and the Church. After several years of faithfully proclaiming this urgent call for change in the ELCA, the increased number of believing nonbelongers received back into the church within the past several years by some congregations has not overcome the numbers who drop out in most congregations, but there are glimpses of change.

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[49] Ibid., 8.

[50] Ibid., 12.

[51] Ibid., 43.

Reconciliation as the Vocation of Believers

Webster's dictionary provides an adequate theological definition for *vocation* as "a calling from God to live as a trustworthy steward of gifts."[52] This description closely parallels Martin Luther's use of the Latin term *vocatio.* Lutherans subscribe to a vocation that emphasizes every baptized person's calling to a life of faith in Jesus the Christ and to a relationship with others within both community and congregation. This emphasis on relationship with God and others by all the baptized implies the responsibility to reach out as both a gift and a response of the priesthood of all believers, and not just for the clergy. Luther's preaching and teaching regarding a Christian's vocation is clear and consistent; it is ". . . so that I can help and serve my neighbor . . . . When a Christian does not serve the other, God is not present; that is not Christian living."[53]

The Lutheran understanding that we are saved by grace through faith so we don't really have to do all that Jesus commands and commissions us to do is a "tricky notion."[54] It's one thing for Lutherans to read and listen to the words of Jesus calling all the baptized to a vocation of reaching out to the lost sheep in His name; but it becomes quite another to put our baptismal response to God into practice. Gaiser insists:

> Rightly understood, it [our vocation response] sets us free in Christ to give ourselves for the service of the neighbor to the glory of God. Wrongly understood, it enslaves us to the boss, who now has divine authority to press us to produce cleaner floors. God may indeed like good craftsmanship, but Christian

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[52] Merriam-Webster, *New World Dictionary,* 10th ed., vol. 2005 (New York, NY: Merriam-Webster Incorporated, 1998), 1494.

[53] Luther's sermon in the Castle at Weimar on the Saturday after the Eighteenth Sunday after the Trinity [October 25, 1522] in *LW* 51:101.

[54] Fred J. Gaiser, "What Luther Didn't Say About Vocation," *Word and World* 24, no. 4 (2005).

> vocation is not finally about production (though production will result), just as it is not ultimately about my own satisfaction (though it will surely satisfy).[55]

Richard Lischer of the Duke Divinity School offers a couple of perspectives in defining vocation that are helpful in this review. First, he adapted his description of vocation from Rowan William's sermon, *A Ray of Darkness*:

> The sequence of God's creation and Humanity's Fall is the origin of all vocations. By virtue of its creation, each creature has the obligation to answer the call "Where are you?" and each must respond in a way appropriate to its nature and distinctive gifts. Human beings are inscribed with the added longing for the lost partnership they once enjoyed with their creator. The ultimate goal of creation, then, is that all people would rediscover their vocation in the world and acknowledge its true source.[56]

Then Lischer used the Lima document on *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry,* commissioned and published by the World Council of Churches (WWC), as his theological foundation to describe vocation:

> The pastoral office is God's way of helping the church discover its true vocation in the world. It is God's gift to the church. The office of pastor was never meant to create a hierarchy of privileges in the body of Christ. It is not that sort of gift. The pastoral office brings with it the burdens of intimacy. Sometimes when pastors look tired it's because they know too much about their parishioners.[57]

Lischer utilized a survey from an unpublished report by *Pulpit and Pew,* to conclude that 70% of North American Reformed and Lutheran clergy seemed *satisfied* with their pastoral duties and yet they feel *great unease* about the central task of reaching out to others. It was no surprise to him then, when he interviewed clergy and asked what help they needed most. Pastor's reported, ". . . promoting the congregation's vision,

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[55] Ibid.

[56] Richard Lischer, "The Called Life: An Essay on the Pastoral Vocation," *Interpretation* 59, no. 2 (2005): 167.

[57] Ibid.: 172.

administering its work, and training."[58] This sense of mutual ministry as a baptismal response by both people and pastor is essential to the reformulation of an understanding for out reach to believing nonbelongers as a lifestyle of believing belongers according to Matthew 25:40 & 45.

So far, I have given much attention to the *missio Dei* that proclaims the gospel of reconciliation. Now I want to turn to the *missio ecclesia* that listens to the needs of those who are lost. Agatha Radoli, insists that the vocation of Christians isn't limited only to what they say during worship, but how they respond in their daily lives. She says:

> An important aspect of the Church's mission in the world today includes commitment to people's integral development and their liberation from the social structures that oppress them. Without this, evangelizing (reconciling) people will be meaningless. Those to be evangelized must be convinced that the Church is listening to them and speaking for them where they are unable to speak for themselves. Every Christian is, therefore, called to witness to God's love for him/her as an individual. Vocation is born of this profound love of God for each person. In response to this divine love, each one is challenged to share it with others in the circumstances of his/her vocation.[59]

Radioli's discernment of the Christian vocation includes the art of active listening as well as the joy of proclaiming good news to those are held captive, dominated, and oppressed. Joining Radoli's emphasis is Anne Wimberly who writes, "My position is that 21st century Christian faith communities are called to an imperative vocation of listening in face-to-face contexts as a necessary counterbalance to the social separation and the 'listening at a distance' that occurs in cyberspace."[60] Wimberly notes that her use of the word *call* did not refer to an individual, but rather to God's invitation and command for

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[58] Ibid.: 174.

[59] Agatha Radoli, "Editorial," *AFER* 39, no. 2 (1997): 65.

[60] Anne S. Wimberly, "Called to Listen: The Imperative Vocation of Listening in Twenty-First Century Faith Communities," *International Review of Mission* 87, no. 346 (1998): 331.

all Christian congregations to reveal the gospel to others in everyday, face-to-face listening. For her, the importance of hearing God's call is what psychologists and sociologists call *active listening.* Wimberly advocates a "readiness to hear the voice of God through the biblical narratives and the opportunities of meeting others (outside of the cyber chat room) where the entire context of the other can be received and developed in a genuine relationship of communal life."[61] Through my own experiences and in reading the personal narratives reported by participants to this study's questionnaire, Radoli's and Wimberly's emphasis on active listening by the believer is an important link to hearing God's call to go find the lost. Believing is not just a matter of belonging to a congregation or attending worship; the call to be a Christian is a response to hearing the gospel and then to reach out beyond the context of the congregation to reconcile with the nonbelonger in their host communities.

Postmodern Models of Readiness toward Reconciliation

In modernity, it was assumed that when people who left their church were ready to return to worship and become more fully active in the life and service of the church, they would. In postmodernity, people are more ready to leave than to return. William Shenk presented a paper which provides a framework for understanding social theory of modernity that is transitioning to postmodernity. He says, "Modernity and post modernity remain contested terms. We must reckon with both modern continuities and postmodern developments. Exactly how these are to be evaluated is a matter of continuing debate."[62]

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[61] Ibid.: 336-37.

[62] Wilbert R. Shenk, "Believing without Belonging: Reflections on the Consultation," *International Review of Mission* 92, no. 365 (2003): 232.

The readiness for people over age fifty to think like those under fifty is difficult to reconcile. Shenk describes major differences in four spiritual readiness characteristics from his generational studies. He summarizes: for Generation X, "institutions are suspect, experience is key, suffering has a religious dimension, and ambiguity is central to faith."[63] Even so, he says Generation X characteristics are partially the result of their Baby boomer parents, whose rate of divorce was the highest of any generation in American history. The implication of what Shenk says suggests that ELCA congregations with a majority of active members over the age of 50 will have difficulty in reaching out to inactives under 30 unless they are willing to listen to and appreciate the diversity of the other. It's more than preferences in types of music and styles of worship that separate the generations. Each of the six living generations within congregations thinks differently about many religious and spiritual things, including the reasons for belonging to a church.

How to close the generation gap of thinking about those within our institutions like the church and the readiness to reconcile ourselves to those who think and act differently than ourselves in changing times? Interestingly, Einstein offered insight to this question when he said, "The kind of thinking that will solve the world's problems will be of a different order to the kind of thinking that created those problems in the first place." Likewise, Michael Frost and Alan Hirsh proposed a much needed "paradigm-busting imagination for the emergence of the missional church of the twenty-first century in the West."[64] Their helpful research interpretations and perspectives suggest that being ready to listen to what believing belongers and believing nonbelongers had to say about each

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[63] Ibid.: 235.

[64] Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the Twenty-First Century Church*, 7.

other is the first step in being ready to reconcile in postmodernity. William Easum adds to this chorus of our need to reconcile readiness toward change:

> Churches wanting to break free from the quagmire of their dysfunctional systems and climb out of their downward death spiral must learn to think, and act differently than they do now. The times in which we live require us to change our Life Metaphors, something akin to rewriting the human brain.[65]

Add to this conversation of how to think and act about diversity in times of change is the use of language. The late Marshall McCluhan said, "We shape our tools and then they shape us."[66] McCluhan's idea coined the phrase, *the Medium is the Message.* His message was to encourage people to existentially examine the various tools and technologies used to shape our lives. In the mid 1960s, the basic *mediums* were primarily newspapers, radio, and television. In postmodernity we can add the personal computer and internet to tools that shape the people who create and use them. Even with technological changes, McCluhan's definition of a tool was not limited to a narrow definition of hardware, but all the instruments and languages that people are ready to use in order to communicate and network with others. He also redefined *message* as any medium, technology, or technique that changes the pace, place, and pattern of people to create new behaviors and responses. As such, this secular thinker offered a missional insight by saying, "The narcotic addiction of Christendom's love of philosophical rhetoric quoted from the Bible has become both the medium and the message."[67] McCluhan believed that institutions, including congregations, need a continuing

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[65] William M. Easum, *Leadership on the Otherside: No Rules, Just Clues* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 39.

[66] Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the Twenty-First Century Church*, 150.

[67] Ibid., 151.

reformation of their leadership and membership if they are to be ready for the coming changes. The implicit, if not explicit, implication of McCluhan's idea to be the Church, is that churches with diminishing membership and declining worship attendance will truly want to survive and thrive instead of literally die. To spiritually die to old ways of thinking and speaking about preserving and protecting traditions, places, and programs to do not edify God's people is one thing. It is quite another new thing to be open to seeking new ways of integrating confessional theology with a biblical praxis of participating in *missio Dei*. If the ELCA is not ready for this kind of change at today's rate of decline, it could soon look like European Lutheran churches that have become museums.

One of the discoveries made in my studies is McNeal's contribution that readiness as a postmodern approach is development through strategic planning. A key objective for McNeal is the readiness to de-convert "churchianity to Christianity." [68] He admits that his polemic approach to the subject is a qualitative reflection based on interviews with believing nonbelongers. Nevertheless, McNeal's interest laid a foundation for retooling active members who are ready to actively listen to what he calls a new reality. As with Agatha Radoli and Anne Wimberly, McNeal advocates active listening by believing belongers to what believing nonbelongers have to say about the mission of the Church and their faith in God. In McNeal's opinion, active listening is being overlooked by Church health and Church growth proponents. Growing postmodern literature such as *Effective Church Growth Strategies*,[69] *Natural Church Development*,[70] and *Revolution*,[71]

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[68] Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*, 1st ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 11.

[69] Gene A. Getz et al., *Effective Church Growth Strategies*. Swindoll Leadership Library (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 2000).

only cosmetically rearrange existing congregational structures from an internal perspective of looking and proclaiming inside out. McNeal would say that *missio ecclesia* need to also look and listen from outside in. Readiness to listen to the outsiders and the inactives is what he calls missional in contrast to maintenance. Belonging, McNeal asserts, includes the readiness to financially support the mission of the Church that is "on life-support and will run out when people aged fifty-five and older (three-fourths of the remaining institutional loyalists) die off." He maintains this is not the same as the total death of congregations in the United States, but he notes with a sense of urgency, the issue of being ready to change and participate in a postmodern approach to mission is necessary if we are going to avoid a probable collapse of the religious culture in the United States, as we know it.[72] The readiness of participating in God's mission isn't about reinforcing the existing dominator systems but centers on reforming partnerships and restoring relationships.

From McNeal's findings, there is an intentional and unintentional resistance for the members of churches to reconcile with those who are disappointed and disillusioned by their former church. This resistance, according to McNeal, needs to be eradicated. However, this resistance to reconcile with former members now unaffiliated is only symptomatic. The root of the challenge, according to McNeal, is the readiness and willingness to restore the mission of the church within *missio Dei* through the elimination

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[70] Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches*, 4th ed. (St. Charles, IL: Churchsmart Resources, 2000).

[71] George Barna, *Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005).

[72] McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*, 1.

of "missional amnesia."[73] McNeal's missional amnesia parallel's Scott Gustafson's "biblical amnesia."[74] McNeal believes missional amnesia can be eliminated with the preaching and teaching of missional stories from the Old Testament, especially the Exodus stories, the New Testament witnesses of Jesus' ministry, and concludes with the Acts of the Apostles. Many clergy and laity have forgotten the biblical and theological roots and the reason the Church and its congregations exist. By hearing again the biblical stories, McNeal proposes God's word as a type of coaching of believing belongers to form partnerships and relationships with nonbelongers outside the church building and programs.[75]

Marva Dawn, a Christian theologian with a strong background in liturgy and scripture, calls readiness to restore relationships within postmodern Christian worship and fellowship, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down.*[76] She claims that a postmodern understanding of the church's identity and purpose needs to come from a biblical perspective through instruction that connects our lives with stories from the First Covenant[77] and New Covenant communities of faith. From her perspective, orthodox teaching and worship in a postmodern context rediscovers the spirit of biblically based readiness and reasons for mission and ministry. Picking up on Dawn's companion book,

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[73] Ibid., 15.

[74] Scott W. Gustafson, *Biblical Amnesia: A Forgotten Story of Redemption, Resistance, and Renewal* (West Conshohocken, PA: Infinity Publishing Company, 2004), 19.

[75] McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*, 77-79.

[76] Marva J. Dawn, *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn-of-the-Century Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 10-13.

[77] Marva Dawn's terminology of "First Covenant" community for the pre-incarnation Hebrews and the "New Covenant" community for the post-resurrection Christians are an intentional reference to the theology that Jews are not an obsolete community of faith no longer considered as people of God, but that Christians have been included into a Covenant relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

A Royal Waste of Time, Thom Rainer adds, "The seeker-sensitive movement has been a needed wake-up call for a dead, inwardly focused church, but warns that seeker-sensitivity can become just another evangelistic methodology."[78] Dawn, as previously noted, is convinced that postmodern people "searching for genuine community" do find in the New Covenant disciplines, including in the gathering and celebrating Holy Communion with Christ, the revealed and realized incarnational gift of God's love for the world.[79] Roger Finke provided quantitative research with surveys of former church members to validate Dawn's call for a return to orthodox teaching of biblical New Covenant disciplines, as a foundation for accommodating the American spiritual seeker.[80]

Reconciliation in Theoretical Stages and Contextualization Spectrums

I have found no theoretical literature that specifically identifies a readiness model for congregations to reach out to and reconcile with nonbelongers. I did find the Transtheoretical Model, more commonly called, Stages of Change, designed by James Prochaska, developed within the psychological field of personal-behavioral health (addictions) that addresses readiness to change. His behavior theory has similarities to family and congregational health systems theory used in the church growth and church

[78] Thom S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 43.

[79] Marva J. Dawn, *A Royal Waste of Time: The Splendor of Worshiping God and Being Church for the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 54-55.

[80] Finke, "Innovative Returns to Tradition: Using Core Teachings as the Foundation for Innovative Accommodation," 20.

renewal movements by clergy like Peter Steinke.[81] Prochaska's six Stages of Change are: 1) Pre-contemplation, 2) Contemplation, 3) Preparation, 4) Action, 5) Maintenance, and 6) Termination.[82]

These six stages of theoretical change and readiness to change are terms I have adopted to describe steps toward reconciliation. The first step is Pre-contemplation. It can describe the denial of both the believing belonger and the believing nonbelonger to recognize the need to reconcile and form a relationship with each other. Contemplation, the second step, would be when an individual is not yet ready for change or move toward the third step, but is thinking about some form of preparation. Preparation is the third step toward change, wherein a plan of action is discerned and a sense of urgency if felt to do something within a specified time. Within this step the believing belonger decides whether or not to enter into conversation with a believing nonbelonger's spirituality and commitment to belong to a community of faith with specific names of those to be contacted. Likewise, within the preparation step, the believing nonbelonger considers what reaction might be given if approached by a believing belonger. Action, reaching out or making contact, is the fourth step toward change in the process of reconciliation. What Prochaska calls the fifth stage, maintenance, is for the purpose of this study what I describe as the fifth step; the act of sustaining a missional approach with repeated out reach. Research shows it usually takes a minimum of three invitations before a believing nonbelonger begins to respond to reconciliation. Prochaska also recognized that an

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[81] Peter L. Steinke, *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1996).

[82] James O. Prochaska and Wayne F. Velicer, "The Transtheoretical Model of Health Behavior Change," *American Journal of Health Promotion* 12, no. 1 (1997): 38-48.

occasional relapse back to a previous stage is normal. This shows that reverting to previous behavioral patterns (indifference or disillusionment) is easier than moving forward toward reconciling other relations or sustaining newly formed relationships. The sixth stage, Termination, is Prochaska's sixth stage, to describe the complete elimination of the addictive behavior. According to Prochaska, those who reach this theoretical stage are a very small minority, and this too is accepted as normal in psychological circles. Theologically, the sixth step of reconciliation within *missio Dei* is reached when the kingdom of God comes and is complete with full participation in a committed relationship sustained by all parties. In the missional model, the sixth step is the commencement of the perichoretical partnership of God and believers in Jesus Christ.

In addition to Prochaska's model for measuring a believing belongers' readiness to reconcile a relationship with believing nonbelongers, Phil Parshall's *Spectrum of Contextualization* gives a theological Christ-centered framework within a non-Christian host community.[83] Parshall's spectrum is not just theory; he has used contextualized process of evangelism with Muslims in Southeast Asia where Christians are in the minority. His approach is most useful in explaining how to measure a range of responses within the three theological perspectives mentioned earlier in the section of the mission of God and framed by Michael Frost and Alan Hirsh (Communion with Christ, Community with others, and Commitment to Christ and Community).[84] Parshall builds on John Travis' categories of contextualizing churches and offers four levels that I

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[83] Phil Parshall, *Muslim Evangelism: Contemporary Approaches to Contextualization*, revised ed. (Waynesboro, GA: Gabriel Publishers, 2003), 11-18.

[84] Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the Twenty-First Century Church*, 77.

believe can be adapted and applied to this study.[85] The first level of contextualization can be identified when a *traditional church* uses language and customs, signs and symbols unfamiliar to believing nonbelonger. The second level of contextualization can be recognized when a *traditional church* does not change its uses of language and customs, signs and symbols within worship, but uses the language and customs, signs and symbols of the believing nonbelonger in other ways to attract outsiders into the church as guests. The third level of contextualization can be identified when a *Christ-centered church* incorporates neutral language and common customs, signs and symbols familiar to both the believing belonger and believing non-belonger, especially borrowing from ethnic and cultural forms of art and music used by both groups. The fourth level of contextualization can be recognized when a *Christ-centered church* reaches out beyond its place of identity to become guests within the believing non-belonger's community and culture, manifesting language and customs and adapting signs and symbols familiar to both. The fifth level of contextualization can be acknowledged when a *small-group Christ-centered church* offers non-traditional expressions of public worship within the host community instead of in the congregation's traditional place. I perceive these four levels of contextualization to be a parallel of postmodern mission to what the Apostle Paul's used as his post-resurrection approach with believing nonbelongers in Athens (Acts 17:15-32).

Reconciling the Culture of Believing Nonbelongers

While the subject of this study focuses on the believing belongers and their readiness to participate in the mission of God by way of their willingness to reconcile, I

[85] John Travis, "The Last Great Frontier," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (October 1998): 411-15.

present here a short review of literature on the object of this research, namely the believing nonbelonger. To understand some of the reasons why believing nonbelongers disengage from participation within the church, William Hendricks used a qualitative method approach to interview two dozen church dropouts in the United States. One of the frequent responses Hendricks heard from those who left the church was that more hurt and pain had been inflicted by Christian believing belongers than by unbelievers of Christ.[86] From this perception it is understandable that their readiness to reconcile with congregations will require a long-term process of rebuilding trust with clergy and laity. There is no quick fix here. These people, "are not saying that they want to leave the Christian faith; they are not saying that they want to leave the Church; they are not saying that the church is full of hypocrites; and they are not saying that all clergy are dishonest."[87] On the positive side, nonbelievers in their exit interviews have told Hendricks, that most disillusionments and disagreements could either have been prevented or be reconciled. The major frustration of the *back-door believer* was clearly heard in each individual's uniquely different story with a common theme. Those disappointed and disillusioned in their relationship with God said, "For better or worse . . . my frustration rests between biblical ideals I've heard and my experience of living in the church's reality."[88]

Hendricks' approach to *back-door believers* agrees with Reggie McNeal, Agatha Radoli, and Anne Wimberly in writing, "If the church is a body, then we owe it to those

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[86] William Hendricks, *Exit Interviews* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1993), 73.

[87] Ibid., 258-59.

[88] Ibid., 262-70.

disillusioned members to be with them . . . . Disillusionment involves a grief process that, if ignored or abandoned, violates the explicit teaching of the New Testament."[89] After summarizing these two dozen interviews, Hendricks said, "Their [*back-door believers*] perceptions and emotional reactions are just as real, just as true, as the external facts that give rise to their perceptions and reactions."[90] He admits that his journalistic research method is an approach "not to be to be construed as definitive."[91] Nevertheless, his conclusion to his interviews disclosed that a growing number of lifelong members still inside the church "have lost the energy and enthusiasm they once had for programs of spiritual development, such as worship, Bible study, and so on."[92] Hendricks says this is "not widely reported or carefully studied, and back-door believers tend to nurture a relationship with God apart from the traditional means of [participation within] congregations."[93] Sadly and surprisingly, I found several responses in my study similar to those heard by Hendricks. Here is one specific statement that captures remarks made by several of this study's respondents: "Visiting inactives isn't worth the time or effort compared to reaching out to the more receptive unchurched."

Thom Rainer conducted an extensive qualitative documentation on the unchurched and inactives. His way to understand and reach them is to understand that this adults "are not some alien creatures with whom we have nothing in common . . . most of them are your neighbors, your coworkers, and even your family members . . .

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[89] Ibid., 20.

[90] Ibid., 49.

[91] Ibid., 22.

[92] Ibid., 17.

[93] Ibid.

that's why we call them 'the unchurched next door.'"[94] Rainer is a proponent of reaching the lost sheep Christians through a process that recognizes the different stages in their journeys of faith and that people take different paths and time tables in reaching each stage. His findings recommend an intentional response and receptivity to genuine outreach, rather than a quick-fix of some church growth method.[95] In conducting exit interviews with dropouts and inactives Rainer discovered that many Americans are just a conversation or a relationship away from being introduced to Jesus Christ, but that most Christians haven't broken the silence to invite anyone to meet the Lord.[96] Similar responses have been documented in personal narratives by participants of this research and can be summarized as, "When I stopped coming to church, no one, not even the pastor, contacted me to ask how I was or tell me that I was missed. The longer I was away the easier it was not to return."

I found Thom Rainer's research to have also included the most extensive study about membership transfers. For nearly two years, with the help of a research team, his qualitative method included interviews of 353 people he calls the *formerly unchurched*, and compared their responses with those of more than 100 pastors from, *effective evangelical type churches* and 350 Christians he calls the *transfer churched*.[97] Rainer's research followed the criteria for qualitative design and approach based on the intent of

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[94] Thom S. Rainer, *The Unchurched Next Door: Understanding Faith Stages as Keys to Sharing Your Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 15.

[95] Henry Klopp, *The Ministry Playbook: Strategic Planning for Effective Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 38-43.

[96] Rainer, *The Unchurched Next Door: Understanding Faith Stages as Keys to Sharing Your Faith*, 233.

[97]Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them*, 15.

the interpretation and outcome of the projects using research guidelines by Bogdan and S.K. Biklen,[98] as well as Marshall and Rossman.[99] Many of the questions used in Rainer's interviews were condensed and utilized in my questionnaire to provide a variety of binomial and multinomial categorical, independent and intervening variables so see if there are any correlations between Rainer's responses from evangelical type churches and my sample of ELCA congregations and respondents. H.M. Blalock, a social scientist with McGraw-Hill, offers this comment about the methodology of Rainer's research and study:

> The data collected from this type of study (qualitative only) can only be interpreted with descriptive statistical analysis. Some researchers feel only inferential analyses are worth pursuing; contrary to that position, these descriptive results are rich with meaning and interpretive findings. These research assumptions can only be approached with the explanations rendered in this study. The foci of findings are accurately and thoroughly presented. The amount of material is exhaustive and this researcher has selected the results and presented those that most directly related to the reading audience. However, several additional paths of explanation remain to be explored from the data. The main purpose of the analyses is to reduce the whole collection of data to simple and more understandable terms without distorting or losing too much of the valuable information collected.[100]

Based on Rainer's interviews, stories told by transfers and the unchurched explain his theory of various stages of faith for returning to participation in a congregation. While Rainer provides no quantitative method to support his findings, intuitively I believe his research method of study opens up an unexplored question about recently received adults who were formerly inactive or unchurched. Namely, what might analyzed quantitative

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[98] Robert Bogdan and Sari Knopp Biklen, *Qualitative Research in Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods*, 4th ed. (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2003).

[99] Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1989).

[100] Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them*, 272.

data reveal about the stages of faith in relationship to stages of readiness to change emphasis and commitment by believing belongers on reaching out into the community? For this purpose, I selected and incorporated several of Rainer's interview questions into my study's questionnaire.

This thesis has an intentional focus limited to regions of the western United States. Nevertheless, I include here a contribution by Jyoti Sahi, an ordained clergy in India whose theology of *missio Dei* shows a correlation to this study. Like the United States, India is multi-cultural, pluralistic, and has a growing number of believing nonbelongers.[101]

> Part of the problem posed by postmodernity is to recognize multiple layers of 'belongingness.' As individuals, we do not belong in a two-dimensional way to this or that group, but to a whole set of coordinates. Therefore, we need to recognize that in any one person there exists a whole range of identities, and these have to be integrated into that lived identity which we call a faith.[102]

Sahi makes an important point that transcends cultures and continents—there is no clear-cut *them* and *us*. She would contend that believing nonbelongers in the United States are not all that different from those among East Indians who do not sustain a commitment or continued relationship with their former congregations. Just because a believer stops belonging does not necessarily mean they stop believing Jesus is God or completely stop believing the gospel. They are simply drawn deeper into the secular culture of commercialism, consumerism, and individualism that disengages them from their spiritual roots of shared worship, fellowship, and stewardship. To this insightful understanding, I concur.

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[101] India ranks behind China as the second largest country in the world with an unChristian population.

[102] Jyoti Sahi, "Believing without Belonging? Some Reflections," *International Review of Mission* 92, no. 365 (2003): 228-29.

John Savage made the following point by his understatement in a short article about former members from four churches all of whom reactivated: “Simply talking to inactive members is difficult . . . many pastors and most parishioners admit they don’t know what to say.”[103] However, “listening to inactive people is like opening the spigot on a water tower full of grievances both real and imagined.”[104] Reflective insights from interviews highlight the fact that, “we've got our work cut out for us in drawing these people back into active fellowship through intentional outreach and rebuilding trust.”[105] Furthermore, following his consultations with pastors, congregations, and inactive members, he noted, “Most inactive people/families will respond to efforts to reach them. That’s where reconciliation must enter. If we are willing to bear some pain with the inactive person/family, reconciliation will often occur.”[106] Many participants from missional and maintenance congregations who responded with a personal narrative agree with Savage’s thesis, “Ultimately, we have to remember we can not get people to come back to church . . . . If they come back as a result of our ministering to their pain, that is good. But if they don’t, we have still reached out to them in the name of Jesus Christ.”[107]

Kenneth C. Haugk wrote thirty-three reasons why believing nonbelongers left their congregations and correlated ways how believing belongers can reach them. He made no theoretical attempt to strategize outreach by the church, but suggested a

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[103] John S. Savage, "Ministry to Missing Members: How to Respond When People Drop Out of Church," *Leadership* 17, no. Fall (1996): 117.

[104] Ibid.: 118.

[105] Ibid.: 117.

[106] Ibid.: 121.

[107] Ibid.

theological posture of unconditional love rather than postulating strategies for reconciling relationships.[108] A colleague of Haugk, Russell Hale, learned from his own interviews with believing nonbelongers that they were no longer able to discern the difference between "secularism within the Church and spirituality in American culture."[109] The implications of Hale's findings mean that even the language used in interviews or self-administered questionnaires by researchers do not have the same meaning for the interviewee as for the researcher. Again, Marshall McCluhan's idea, *the medium is the message*, has direct implication for research in this thesis by offering respondents an opportunity to present their own words to my study. In my questionnaire, I offered two open-ended statements to allow respondents to provide narrative stories in their own words as it applied to them being a former believing nonbelonger and/or contacting an inactive member.

I refer again to the mixed-method study by Philip Richter and Leslie Francis that used a two-phased design. In the first phase (qualitative) they interviewed 27 Anglicans of the Church of England between 1995 and 1997, and in the second phase (quantitative) administered a postal questionnaire in 1996 to gather data from the general British population.[110] Their conclusions suggest that "churches are most likely to retain their members and encourage leaders to return when they meet and respect people where they are culturally [outside the church], help people grow in their faith, offer people a gospel

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[108] Kenneth C. Haugk, *The Quest for Quality Caring: Improve Your Ability to Relate to Others* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 124-25.

[109] Hale, *The Unchurched: Who They Are and Why They Stay Away*, 4-7.

[110] Richter and Francis, *Gone but Not Forgotten: Church Leaving and Returning*, 169.

worth investing in . . . [and] offer people a sense of true community."[111] While the United Kingdom context and culture are different from that of the United States, I believe the essence of the conclusions directly correlate with identified changes needed in the ELCA.

Another significant quantitative study that projected trends, presented by the Barna Research Group and the Gallop Poll, sampled the 77 million American adults who claim to be church affiliated. The analysis from these observations projects that by 2025, "30%-35% of Americans will express their faith through a local congregation (compared to 70% in 2000); 30%-35% will express their faith in alternative communities (compared to 5% in 2000); and 30%-35% will use cultural media or art forms to express their faith (compared to 20% in 2000)."[112] A conclusion from this projection and added to other generational studies suggests that American adult believing nonbelongers will continue to exit mainline denominational congregations such as the ELCA. I would like to think that such a trend can be reversed if more ELCA congregations are ready, willing, and inspired to participate in *missio Dei* expressed through *missio ecclesia* to include reaching out to and reconciling with believing nonbelongers. However, changing individual attitudes, congregational praxis, and leadership practices does not happen easily in mainline protestant congregations, like those affiliated with the ELCA, unless the membership and leadership recognize they have little or no choice but to change or eventually close.

Charles Kyker, in his Doctor of Ministry thesis, used an exploratory qualitative study with a semi-structured interview design and methodology to study outreach to inactive church members. He studied thirteen United Methodist pastors and designed an

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[111] Ibid., 165.

[112]Barna, *Revolution*, 48-49.

Apostolic Leadership Model over a two-year period "hoping to increase their passion for Christ-centered outreach to others."[113] In my opinion, Kyker's findings are consistent with Rainer's conclusions in as much as a Bible study does increase faith and commitment for participants but does not necessarily change the culture of a congregation toward readiness to reconcile with believing non-belongers.[114] Here is where my currently-nested, mixed-method study provides a wider view, using perceptions of attitudes and actions, of both clergy and laity toward reconciling with inactives and unchurched.

In my introduction, I question whether ELCA clergy have a clear and concise definition of membership to discern the difference between active and inactive members. Guder offers an extensive historical description of *Gospel reductionism* that in answer to this question has led congregations in the United States away from "an incarnational understanding of membership."[115] His description and perceptive analysis says "the challenge of nominal membership in the established traditions," explains how congregations have fallen victim to this reduction history with regard to sustaining members.[116] He goes on to say, "As a result, most mainline churches maintain what is, interestingly, called a 'low threshold' to church membership."[117] Guder's observations have been true in my own experience with various non-religious not-for-profit

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[113]Kyker, "An Apostolic Leadership Model That Enables Pastors to Develop a Passion to Reach the Unchurched", i.

[114]Ibid.

[115] Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*. The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 170.

[116] Ibid., 171.

[117] Ibid., 172.

organizations within the communities I have lived and served. Requirements for joining and expectations for sustaining memberships in these are stricter, therein becoming and remaining a member of an ELCA congregation is less stringent. Guder cites two theologians, Karl Barth and Patrick Keifert, [118] to support his argument's conclusion: "As we respond to the gospel, we become its messengers to the world into which God is sending us. Our continuing conversion is essential to our sending."[119]

Finally, in a study from the Office of Evaluation and Research, Kenneth Inskeep and Jeffery Drake reported:

> It is not enough to simply engage in an evangelism campaign or other evangelistic activities; that is, it is not the activity itself which is of primary importance, but the context within which the activity–in this case an evangelism campaign–takes place."[120]

Of the 832 ELCA congregations Inskeep and Drake surveyed in 2000 regarding intentional evangelical activity, only 34% of the congregations said participating in an evangelism activity or campaign made a significant difference, while 38% said having an evangelism program made no significant difference. What I interpret this report suggests is: Without a change in levels of readiness and motivation of both individuals and congregations to reach out to inactives and the unchurched, no amount of door-knocking campaigns or public media advertising is going to attract people to church; not until believing belongers are willing to meet and befriend believing nonbelongers where they live, work, and play within the community.

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[118] Ibid., 173.

[119] Ibid., 180.

[120] Kenneth W. Inskeep and Jeffrey L. Drake, *Worship Attendance in the ELCA*, ed Department of Research and Evaluation (Chicago, IL: ELCA, 2000), 5-6, http://www.elca.org/re/reports/ccspwrsp1.PDF (accessed December 17, 2005).

Summary

To summarize this review, I found no existing literature which presented a mixed-method design measuring and analyzing the readiness of reconciliation between believing belongers with believing nonbelongers. The vast collection of qualitative literature available provided meaningful theological foundations and insight or imagination to integrate *missio Dei* with *missio ecclesia*. What is not in the collection of literature is quantitative, descriptive, and exploratory research to provide a postmodern perspective that shows the study of relationships between members of congregations and inactives/the unchurched. The literature offered a diversity of designs, methodologies, and strategies that showed no conclusive evidence for a single solution to creating a readiness for reconciliation between the believing belonger and believing nonbelonger. However, most mainline Church leaders agree that an urgent need exists for congregations within the United States to contextualize the basic biblical message of God's mission for all Christians to reconcile with believing nonbelongers.

CHAPTER 3

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR RECONCILIATION

> The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more. (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

God's First Covenant Approach to Reconciliation

The genesis of God's mission to reconcile the lost sheep of the houses of Israel does not begin with Jesus and the New Covenant community. The Triune God's mission begins in the reconciliation of the First Covenant community. The First Covenant community's stories of reconciliation with God are often perceived through the lens of the Exodus story. This meta-narrative of the Exodus, first proposed by Raine Eisler[1] and later used extensively by Scott Gustafson,[2] describes God's mission as reconciling humanity back into God's desired relationship. Hiebert uses the Exodus as his example to describe the diachronic worldview of the Hebrew cultural and their understanding of faith

[1] Riane T. Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*, 1st ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harper & Row, 1987), 4.

[2] Scott W. Gustafson, *Biblical Amnesia: A Forgotten Story of Redemption, Resistance, and Renewal* (West Conshohocken, PA: Infinity Publishing Company, 2004), 19.

as connected to their historical stories.[3] These three perceptions are helpful when comparing ancient biblical cultures with emerging postmodern culture in the United States. The primary characteristics biblical and postmodern cultures seem to have in common are: pluralism, the desire for personable relationships, acceptance of paradox, and an emphasis on health. The primary differences (beside the technology) between these two cultures are: the culture of biblical times was mostly communal in identity instead of individual, and less existential and synchronical. With these similarities and differences I am able to compare and connect the various biblical exodus stories as the mission of God re-establishing and restoring the covenant community within today's congregations.

God has approached reconciliation of the First Covenant community ever since original sin spread throughout creation. One of the most hopeful stories is the Genesis 50 account of God's spirit in a perichoritical partnership with Joseph to manifest reconciliation:

> Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?" So they approached Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this instruction before he died, 'Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.' Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, "We are here as your slaves." But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones" (Genesis 50: 15-20).

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[3] Paul G. Hiebert, "The Gospel in Our Culture: Methods of Social and Cultural Analysis," in *The Church between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in America*, ed. George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 142-43.

This First Covenant story makes a point that a right relationship with God includes believing and belonging with others. God's partnership with Joseph, despite Joseph's own imperfections or his brothers' hurtful acts, began with sending him to Egypt and was consummated by sending the rest of the family to be reconciled. Human community was founded in God's creative act and continued through God's re-creative acts. The story took a lifetime to unfold and, for a few generations afterwards, furthered God's mission of releasing those held captive by a chaos of fear between brothers to a community of joy. This characteristic of how "missional communities are called to represent the compassion, justice, and peace of the reign of God . . . identified and motivated . . . not solely by human intentions and efforts, individual or collective, but instead by God's empowering presence."[4] There have been an untold number of times, when a member of the same family or congregation was intentionally criticized or ignored and the unreconciled differences continued until someone close to both parties died and the occasion of the funeral brought them together. Must we wait so long to respond to God's opportunities to see the good of God's love for us in one another and reach out as partners with God?

The Exodus account is the most explicit First Covenant biblical account of God's mission to reconcile a whole nation. This story the Israelites exodus from Egyptian slavery resulted in the resumption of Abraham's Covenant promises. The story explains in dramatic detail, God sending believing belongers (Moses, his brother Aaron, and his sister Miriam) to lead other believers (the Hebrew people) out of a system of domination

[4] Inagrace T. Dietterich, "Missional Community: Cultivating Communities of the Holy Spirit," in *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell L. Guder, *The Gospel and Our Culture Series* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 142.

and oppression from unbelievers (Egyptian rule and worship). Like the Genesis 50 story about Joseph, a theme from chaos back toward a reconciled community is repeated. However, in the Exodus, God was ready to reconcile Israel, but we hear and see the resumption of a covenant community delayed by the people's cultural unwillingness to recognize and proceed with God's mission of reconciliation.

> The whole congregation of the Israelites set out . . . and came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger (Exodus 16:1-3).

The Israelites wandered in the wilderness for forty years after they came out of Egypt because they were unwilling to enter into a perichoritical partnership with God and unable to trust the people God sent to lead them. They longed instead to return to their previous captivity and culture. This story illustrates that even people who are reconciled with God can still be attracted to the sin and systems of domination that once held them captive. This is one of the ironies of ideology: people tend to romanticize the past they can never return to even when economic-political-social culture has changed.[5]

> Religion is never merely metaphysics. For all peoples the forms, vehicles, and objects of worship are suffused with an aura of deep moral seriousness. The holy bears within it everywhere a sense of intrinsic obligation: it not only encourages devotion, it demands it; it not only induces intellectual assent, if enforces emotional commitment.[6]

This cultural ethos is revealed in the story of the Jews returning from their Babylonian captivity to rebuild Jerusalem and resume temple worship. Again, the First

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[5] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 194.

[6] Ibid., 126.

Covenant community recalls God's readiness to covenant with people unwilling to be in perichoritical partnerships because the believing belongers (Jews) who were held captive in Babylon resisted reconciliation with the believing nonbelongers not taken into exile.

> When the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the returned exiles were building a temple to the Lord, the God of Israel, they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of families and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we worship your God as you do, and we have been sacrificing to him ever since the days of King Esar-haddon of Assyria who brought us here." But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the rest of the heads of families in Israel said to them, "You shall have no part with us in building a house to our God; but we alone will build to the LORD, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus of Persia has commanded us." Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah, and made them afraid to build, and they bribed officials to frustrate their plan throughout the reign of King Cyrus of Persia and until the reign of King Darius of Persia (Ezra 4:1-5).

This story reminds us the more trust encourages commitment; fear can destroy trust within relationships. Fear was the primary reason the families of Judah and Benjamin resisted help from their adversary to rebuild the temple and recreate a segregated covenant community. Time and again, people who believe God is reconciled with them have demonstrated resistance to reconcile with their neighbors. In this accounting, fear may have been the presenting explanation by the biblical writer for resisting reconciliation; however, it is worth noting that the biblical witness also uses the words discouragement and frustration to describe reasons the First Covenant people were not ready to be reconciled. Using today's human psychology, I would concur: people are unable to restore broken relationships until they are ready to release themselves from the imprisonment and captivity of imagined or real anxiety, phobia, and suspicion.

The readiness of individuals and congregations to release themselves, with God's help, from the domination of fear and frustration takes time. Just as it takes time to learn prejudice and hate, reconciliation to community and partnership also takes time. We get glimpses of the fullness of God's abounding and steadfast love when believing belongers

reconcile with believing nonbelongers. Unfortunately, like Israel in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, many congregations today will remain captive by their opposition to partner with God. This lack of readiness by the culture within the assembly to reconcile with those outside illustrates what happens when congregations assume they can attract members with techniques and technologies, never reaching the readiness potential to reconcile with others.

God's mission is not about preserving the status quo of believing belongers to be friendly only among themselves. In the First Covenant stories, it would seem that while God is always ready to approach humanity with opportunities of reconciliation, believing belongers are often reluctant and even resistant. Such is the witness of Jonah.

> When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it. But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. He prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing (Jonah 3:10-42).

This timeless story about a believing belonger (a Jew) sent to convert nonbelievers and nonbelongers (the Gentiles of Nineveh) demonstrates a paradigm shift regarding readiness. Jonah did not appreciate being sent by God to reconcile with people he considered his enemies. Yet amazingly, this metaphoric story shows that nonbelievers and nonbelongers can, and do, change despite the one being sent is not ready to accept *missio Dei*. Had God not sent Jonah, the people of Nineveh would not have heard the message to discard their sin and evil ways. Jonah's message from God to the Ninevites was that they, too, belonged to God. God's sent Jonah out of his comfort zone into a community of his enemies. God's mission and message, then and now, is reconciliation

with the other, the stranger, even the enemy. This appears to be God's way to find and return the lost, leading them into a relationship originally created within Eden.

If Jonah was not motivated to convert the Ninevites, then the question that begs to be asked is: what motivated the Ninevites to believe and belong to the God of Israel? An answer is suggested by Geertz. In this German anthropologist's summary, he contrasts between the polarity of *traditional* and *rationalized* religion. Traditional religious concepts, like those of the Jews, establish rigid stereotypical social practices of ritual acts to deal with the problems or celebrations of life. Rationalized religious concepts like those of the Ninevites, tended to be more abstract and logically coherent. He concludes, "when religious ideals are abstract, they become universally conceptualized rather then humanly contextualized."[7] Thus, Geertz claims that when adversity cannot be logically explained or avoided, a conversion to a religion that uses mystery is embraced.

From my review of literature, a theological shift from unwillingness to readiness, even if reluctant like Jonah's, emerges. Likewise, some believing nonbelongers within mainline congregations who once were not ready to be reconciled are now among the most ready to be sent by God to other nonbelongers. The reasons for reluctance and resistance seemed to stem from the original sin of being self-centered and self-serving. In the context of a postmodern context the seduction of commercial consumption has become privatized individualism. However, the inspiration and motivation to be renewed and transformed is what happens when believing belongers readily embrace a living and sustaining relationship with God and others, and then seek to find and serve the lost.

[7] Ibid., 170-75.

God's Approach to Reconciliation by Sending Jesus Christ

> Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:35-38).

In approaching the subject of lost sheep, to return them to a New Covenant relationship with God within the communion and the fellowship of a community of faith, it is helpful to examine how Jesus responds to *missio Dei*. The Son of God is not preoccupied with an agenda or programs whose success is measured by numbers. The readiness of Jesus to reconcile with the world is not a concept that God can do ministry of evangelism and out reach better alone. *Missio Dei* according to the New Testament writers is God's love manifested to the world as perichoretic partnerships. This mission is proclaimed as an intentional strategic plan of the Father, sending the Son, who in turn sends his followers to restore relationships. This last step of sending followers of Jesus is the consummation of the biblical stories from the beginning to the present time.

The process of being sent in partnership with Jesus on a journey to reconcile relationships is God's mission. It is the on-going story God began and is yet to be completed—to make all things new. What I find theologically important is that Jesus roots the mission of God in prayer to include all people, those who believe and belong, those who do not believe and do not belong, and those who will eventually believe and belong:

> As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth. I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one . . ." (John 17:1-25).

The power in *missio Dei* is the readiness and response to his sending. Readiness isn't just a state of intellectual knowledge of what needs to be done. Readiness begins with the heart willing to receive the love of God and motivated to respond to that love and share it with others. This motivation then moves from the human heart to empower the mind, which enables believers to reconcile with acts of love relationships separated from participation in the kingdom of God.

Jesus is emphatic about his believing belongers following his example of reaching out to others who do not belong. Using the metaphoric reference of *lost sheep* to connect his listening believers to a perichoretic relationship with the nonbelongers:

> Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, "The kingdom of heaven has come near." Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. . . . As you enter the house, greet it. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town (Matthew 10:5-15).

This rational for discipleship as an apprenticeship for the first believers in Jesus before he gives the Great Commission according to Matthew 28. This learn-by-doing journey of faith teaches apostles of Jesus how to love others by entering into an on-going relationship. While the conditions and situations are far from perfect, Jesus manifests *missio Dei* by sending his believers to deliver the message: the kingdom God to include more people than he is humanly capable of reaching has come. Jesus also demonstrates God's capacity to work through human sinful conditions and situations to carry hospitality and hope to those who are held captive by demons, disease, and distrust. Teaching these ordinary, imperfect followers how to lead others into a covenant relationship with God through the formation of caring communities, Jesus models partnership, priority, and persistence. The joy of being loved (fed, forgiven, healed,

invited, included, and raised from the dead) by Jesus becomes the inspiration and motivation for his followers to do for all people who once were lost what he has done for them. With this company of biblical outcasts and strangers once marginalized, today's New Covenant community of baptized believers are called and sent to be companions and partners in *missio Dei*. Nevertheless, today's Lutherans are still hesitant to reach out to inactives and believing nonbelongers are still reluctant to return to the church. Marva Dawn captures the basic challenge of the readiness of people to participate in the faith community by saying, "Some cannot take the risk of belonging to a community because they feel that they have nothing to offer . . . probably most of us suffer from some sense of inadequacy and consequent fear of belonging."[8]

In the gospel according to Matthew, after Jesus sent his disciples to the Jews rather than among the Gentiles and Samaritans, he finds himself with different kinds of believing nonbelongers:

> Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." . . . He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." (Matthew 15:21-28).

Using metaphoric language, Jesus openly states that the target audience and focus of God's mission, and therefore his mission, is precisely to *the lost sheep of the house of Israel.* Yet as the story unfolds, *missio Dei* also includes this lost woman, who was considered to be outside the covenant community.

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[8] Marva J. Dawn, *Truly the Community: Romans 12 and How to Be the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 88.

References to the mission of finding the lost sheep of God are not found exclusive to Matthew and John. Luke's account offers a reference to lost sheep in the form of this parable:

> Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance (Luke 15:3-7).

As we have seen, biblical stories that quote Jesus, including his parables, are explicitly and implicitly connected to the readiness of *missio Dei* to reconcile with others. Using metaphors then and now are useful because they don't limit the medium, message, or means for individual and communal healing, feeding, sharing, serving, and belonging. The following story identifies a tax collector who was separated from his community and from God because of his cheating ways:

> Jesus looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost" (Luke 19:3-10).

Like Matthew, Luke ties the image of saving the lost to the act of reconciling broken relationships. In the Zacchaeus' story salvation is restoration an individual back into the covenant community. Jesus is the model for his disciples' transformation to become apostles, those sent in faithful response to God's powerful, life-changing word.

Examination of literature using biblical and theological studies on *missio Dei* and its connection with *missio ecclesia* reveal that nearly all authors cite or mention the Great

Commission of the Church according to Matthew 28. However, most studies note that the majority of Christians in the United States do not formally or informally connect Matthew 28 to their personal vocation. These same studies show a pervasive American assumption that being religious or spiritual is an individual and private matter in postmodernity. This baggage from Christendom's quest for specialized ministries is probably what has set clergy apart to fill the religious role of the apostle. When Christendom recognized that not every neighbor was a follower of Jesus, the myth became: everyone God intended to be Christian must already be a Christian. However, this assumption and myth do not comply with or respond to the biblical message that all followers of Christ are sent to all people. This postmodern study draws more on biblical language and imagery Jesus used while equipping disciples to be apostles in a public world than traditional Christendom language and Lutheran traditions, especially in seeking lost sheep. Strange as it may seem, biblical language and imagery resonates with most postmodern believers seeking literal and symbolic spiritual connections with God.

Jesus' post-resurrection instruction to "Go therefore, to all nations . . ." was explicit and not metaphorical. His pre-resurrection instructions used the metaphoric language of the *lost.* Jesus' language is both inclusive and imperative language of *all nations*. However, much of the existing literature extensively interprets Jesus' Great Commission as evangelism to nonbelievers. I found no biblical mention how Christians are to apply the Great Commission as outreach to other believer who understood they belonged to God and reconciliation with believing nonbelongers. The biblical message proclaimed by Jesus does not seem to reflect what is happening to most mainline congregations in the United States, and ELCA congregations are no exception. The

majority of growth in adult membership is not with the reconciliation of the growing population of believing nonbelongers or the conversion of nonbelievers, but mostly with the transferring of existing believing belongers from one congregation to another.

Inactive Christians interviewed by Dr. John Savage disclosed that when no one from their congregation came to listen to them, they eventually left the church. One inactive admitted, "I have not been active in my church for ten years, and no one has ever asked me why."[9] His study, along with studies conducted by William Hendricks, Thom Rainer, and Lee Strobel, revealed that Christians first fall away from regularly communing with Christ, then later, drop out of any participation in congregational activities, and then end their financial support. Those interviewed said they did not return because they perceived the believing belongers had a *good riddance* attitude. In the research of responses received in my study, these finds were echoed by a summary of former inactives who said, "Until a member of the church reached out and invited me and my family to see the joy and feel the love of Jesus in their congregation, I didn't think I needed the church."

This study has previously mentioned that some ELCA congregations have a contextual theology that makes them ready to demonstrate their faith and love of God by approaching their own disillusioned or dissatisfied members. Such a progression from biblical foundations to contextual theological praxis is what Richard Bliese characterized as "innovative initiative" instead of "reactive reform."[10] The overall response of most

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[9] John S. Savage, *The Apathetic and Bored Church Member: Psychological and Theological Implications* (Pittsford, NY: LEADS Consultants, 1976), 79.

[10] Richard H. Bliese, "Lutheran Missiology: Struggling to Move from Reactive Reform to Innovative Initiative," Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 2003.

ELCA congregations to their vocation to only be followers rather than leaders sent to others to point to what Jesus has done seems to be typical of individual responses observed by sociologists, namely to *wait and see* before considering, strategizing, and implementing entrepreneurial missional methods. This begs the question: how do church leaders encourage and motivate believing belongers respond to *missio Dei*? Jesus offers the best model I know in inspiring a response to reach and reconcile lost sheep. Seek them and befriend them with acts of love.

The reclamation of communion with God and the creation of a new human community are manifested by the incarnation of the Lord who calls ordinary and imperfect people and transforms them as apostles to commence the mission of God. This is recounted when after the trial and crucifixion Peter thrice denied Jesus. This is when Peter broken off his perichoretic partnership, separating himself from his Lord and from other disciples and those who needed him. Still *missio Dei* continued:

> Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17).

God's Approach to Reconciliation by Sending Peter, Paul, and Philip

The mission of God to use imperfect but forgiven people to reconcile with others persisted. Jesus' readiness to reconcile with the one who denied him transformed the denied perichoretic partnership with Peter. When Jesus said, "Tend my sheep," Peter's assumption was that salvation was only for the House of Israel. Jesus' mission of reconciliation with the lost sheep was not limited to Jewish believing belongers, but

extended to the whole world. The Spirit of God then sent Peter to the Gentile household of Cornelius.

> On Peter's arrival . . . he said to them, "You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean. . . . Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him." While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 10:25ff).

Ironically, Peter reformed by what Jesus had done for him, is ready to be sent by the Spirit of the risen Christ in defense of reaching out to Gentiles. Following his mission to Cornelius, Peter goes to Jerusalem to give witness to those believers not yet ready to accept Gentiles as believers and equals. Luke's account of the church council meeting shows how God uses reconciliation to deliver all people from chaos to community:

> Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him saying, "Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?" Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying, ". . . as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?" When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, "Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life" (Acts 11:1ff).

Peter could have used his new vision of God's mission to dominate the other apostles. However, he remembers how he was reconciled from the chaos of his denial and resistance into a renewed partnership with Jesus. *Missio Dei* to reconcile the lost is furthered when Peter listens to Paul and Barnabas and then turns to proclaim this reconciliation to the other apostles:

> After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "My brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of the good news and become believers. And God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us; and in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us. . . . We believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will" (Acts 15:2ff).

This story tells us that God's mission is reconciliation with the world and that the kingdom of God is a mission in process within the faith families we call congregations. The community isn't simply the context of the congregation or host population; the community is the consummation of the kingdom of God through the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the believers. On another occasion, the Apostle Paul said to believing belongers:

> From now on . . . regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (2^{nd} Corinthians 5: 16-21).

Some believing nonbelongers God approaches for reconciliation are marginalized for reasons of circumstance or situation. In the case of the apostle Philip, the believing nonbelonger was not a Hellenist, like himself, or a Hebrew like his companions Peter, James, and John; he was an Ethiopian eunuch.

> Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it." So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. . . . Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him (Acts 8:26-38).

The pluralistic culture of Jerusalem after Pentecost often names the marginalized from the First Covenant Community as unclean Jews, Samaritans, Greeks, women, and children, but little is said about others for whom God's mission of reconciliation belongs. In our postmodern culture, marginalized believing nonbelongers may be marked by tattoos, body piercing, drugs, or alcohol abuse.

In a personal experience, over a period of four years, I encouraged an inactive, single parent living out of state, to turn his life around, to stop living the lies and reaffirm his faith in Jesus. His teenage children had requested baptism. Having squandered much of the family money on addictions, his surviving mother and siblings had all but given up on this lost son. Nevertheless, his brother, sister-in-law, and I continued to pray for him. We knew God was his only hope to change from a life of crime and neglect to reconciliation with God. Recently he unexpectedly came to worship with his children. Moved by the spirit following the reading of scripture and proclaiming the sermon, during the sharing of the Peace of God, this dad said it was time to baptize his children. Following the offering of our gifts and in the company of his mother and brother, we spontaneously celebrated the Sacrament of Holy Baptism for this son and daughter. Having been reconciled with God we reconciled with one another in Holy Communion at the Lord's Table. In God's time, the lost was ready to be approached.

My personal experience in the above story suggests that the spirit of the risen Lord continues *missio Dei* as a serendipitous God thing in a perichoretic partnership with believing belongers. As with the early apostles of Jesus, today's apostles are sent to the lost within their own households, families, and neighborhoods. Opportunities abound, if only life-long Lutherans would see and hear the voices of those who believe and want to

belong to Jesus as did the gentile, Cornelius, and Ethiopian eunuch. More than believe in God, they wanted to belong and commune with God in the company of other believers.

God's Approach to Reconciliation by Sending Lutherans

Believing in and belonging to God as followers of Jesus Christ may mean many things to ELCA members. Perhaps the diversity of biblical images and metaphors used by Jesus and the Apostles add to the plurality of interpretations and praxis as members of an ELCA congregation. Lutherans of the ELCA confess the Bible is the living word of God and is authoritative for our lives. Nevertheless, many of us as believing belongers are not comfortable with or ready to learn and respond to God's call to reach out to others, especially the lost. It seems that we have, for better or worse, inherited a Christendom mentality of membership; everyone who is to be a Lutheran and member of our church by baptism and confirmation are entitled to privileges and services that require no responsibilities. As one ecumenical project team pointed out, "becoming a citizen of the reign of God does not come naturally. . . . It demands that we acquire the new habits of a new culture."[11]

Jesus' original disciples imitated what the Lord did. They listened not only to what the Lord said and watched what he did, but to whom he spoke; learning what he did and for whom. From my research most ELCA clergy and laity said they know the biblical mission of God includes reaching out to others, just as Jesus did when Christ walked the earth. At the same time, the nominal responses and personal narratives given by 98% of the respondents in my research reveal clergy and laity had little or no training and even

[11] Darrell L. Guder and Lois Barrett, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*. The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 137.

less experience or sense of urgency in reconciling with others. When asked how often each month did participants of my study intentionally contacted other members, inactives, and the unchurched, the response was an alarming: Group One ELCA respondents' findings showed 66.7% had contacted other members, 44.7% contacted inactives and 45.5% contacted the unchurched. Group Two ELCA respondents' findings showed 53.3% contacted other members, 32.2% contacted inactives, and 31.6% contacted the unchurched.

Responses by this studies systematically sampled population seems to show that ELCA members are more prone to consuming the core ministries of worship, education, fellowship, and stewardship than being inspired by what Christ has done by dying and rising, calling and sending us to reach out to others. The levels of congregational readiness in both Groups One and Two seem to be more active than contemplative in reaching out to existing members, but levels of readiness to prepare for and actively participate in *missio Dei* to inactives and the unchurched seem to be mostly contemplative. While our ELCA name incorporates the word *evangelical*, clergy and laity alike seem less threatened by talking about outreach to members and afraid of putting into practice the faith of reaching out to nonmembers.

Our Lutheran praxis of adult baptisms and reaffirmation of faith seems to lack a sense of passion and urgency in response to *missio Dei*. Perhaps without recognizing or understanding the baptismal response of the Christian's vocation, many if not most life-long Lutherans have fallen into the theological trap of believing life is lived only living in the kingdom on the right, when experience tells us, we also still live in the kingdom on the left. In other words, most ELCA members don't connect their baptismal vocation

with *missio Dei*. Most life-long and many newly baptized and reaffirmed adult Lutherans don't have a clue what it means to be a member of a congregations and the responsibility that come with membership. In most of the congregation's I surveyed, there is no praxis for teaching out reach and no urgency for actively reaching out to inactives. If life-long and newly received Lutherans truly believe the old has passed and Christ has made us all new, as members of Christ, then leaders and members need to be encouraged and motivated to apprentice our biblical discipline of forgiveness and mercy toward believing nonbelongers. Lutheran pastors and people in the pew need to believe God is with us and has inspired us with the Holy Spirit, so a faithful response can readied to persist in the practice of reconciliation for Jesus' sake, not just for church growth and success. Until then, there is an undocumented correlation of growing evidence that biblical illiteracy and missional complacency is alive and well among declining Lutheran congregations in our postmodern culture.

Questions remains: why do some Lutheran congregations actively reconcile with lost believing nonbelongers in response to *missio Dei* and others, never seem ready? Do ELCA laity perceive reaching out to believing nonbelongers as only the duty of the clergy and not their own baptismal responsibility? Do ELCA clergy observe an urgency to speak about and partner with baptized and confirming laity to reach out to believing nonbelongers as their response and responsibility? Do ELCA congregations honestly inventory their membership levels of spiritual gifts that respond to *missio Dei*?

Lutherans confessionally subscribe to the living word of God, yet I believe there is a need to again listen to Jesus' basic theological response to *missio Dei*, included within the model constitution of all ELCA congregations—Matthew 18. Within this

biblical text, the theological issue isn't about membership—it's about relationship: *Who is my neighbor*? In Matthew's account, Jesus' followers are explicitly sent to the *lost*, to those separated from the community of faith that offers sacrifice and service to God. The lost suffer from the oppression of sickness, poverty, and death. They endure the domination of sin: arrogance, envy, greed, and prejudice. But the lost are not without hope when they receive from others an invitation to partner with God. Lutherans often use Scripture to interpret Scripture, and in another petition Jesus prayed: "I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice so there will be one flock, one shepherd." Jesus' words according to Matthew 18 give an inclusive perspective to our response to God's mission:

> So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost. "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. . . . Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive, as many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times (Matthew 18:14-22).

Matthew 18 within ELCA constitutions offers opportunity for a new perichoretic partnership in *missio Dei* as *missio ecclesia* reconciliation and restoration. What has traditionally been perceived as a guideline for discipline, a natural human reaction to use God's Law, has another interpretation—an initiation into God's grace, an opportunity to reach out and reconcile with the believing nonbelonger. What would happen, if the ELCA subscribed to living Jesus' words and no longer perceived each other from this human point of view? Would disciplinary action, once resulting in members being

dropped from church roles, become instead a missional response to reconcile? I would like to share what Luther Seminary New Testament professor James Boyce said:

> This is important community talk. Its crucial character is evident in the specific steps instructing the community in its faithfulness to that responsibility. The steps may seem most appropriate to a small community or to a house church, but the particulars are hardly meant to be binding. Imagining three stages perhaps, simply suggests the exhausting of all options to prevent a little one's loss. Should all efforts fail and such a one "be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector" (Matthew 18:17), even then the community needs to recall that just such outcasts and sinners are the focus of God's love and call.[12]

This Lutheran theological interpretation of Matthew 18 clearly states that believing belongers need to consider ways to reconcile with the believing nonbelongers. Too often believing belongers perceive inactives and drop-outs as the offenders, ones who have betrayed or abandoned the church. In truth, those who remain within the congregation may have betrayed or abandoned the mission of God. The paradox is that God, not pastors or members, creates community. Community is not manufactured, learned, or even practiced; it is our inheritance; received through faith with thanksgiving. Bonhoeffer reaffirms this by saying, "God has already laid the only foundation of our fellowship . . . bound us together in one body with other Christians in Jesus Christ, long before we entered into common life with them . . . not as demanders but as thankful recipients."[13]

What will it take for ELCA clergy and laity living in a postmodern United States culture to reverse generations of hesitation and reluctance to approach those who have left the church? Such a question might assume that our ELCA congregations have either become unwilling to name theological reasons for this hesitation and reluctance to reach

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[12] Dr. James L. Boyce, "Transformed for Disciple Community: Matthew in Pentecost," Word and World 13, no. 3 (1993): 313.

[13] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York, NY: Harper, 1954), 28.

out to others or we have abdicated these problems to the healing arts of the psychological and sociological sciences. What is insightful for Lutheran believing belongers to hear is what believing nonbelongers have reported in various surveys and interviews. When asked, those who have left the church almost unanimously say their hurt and pain was not caused by God's abandonment or punishment. They say, "Leaving the church has been the result of their disillusionment and dissatisfaction inflicted by believing belongers."[14] Having heard similar responses written in received narratives concurrently-nested with my questionnaire; I offer another biblical perspective of *missio Dei* to help reflect a Lutheran response.

> There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. . . . So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' (Luke 15:11-24).

Imagine the younger son represents the lost believing nonbelonger and the older son the lifelong Lutheran believing belonger. God approaches both sons (congregations and individual members), because both need to be reconciled with God, but furthermore, God knows both need to be reconciled with each other. Both sons are at different stages of readiness to reconciliation with God and with each other, whether or not that is self evident. Both need to believe that God's invitation includes them before they rejoin

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[14] William Hendricks, *Exit Interviews* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1993), 262.

God's celebration of perichoretical partnership. To this kind of contextualization George Barna writes, "the hesitation to move from theological contemplation . . . to a theoretical preparation . . . and onto practical implementation . . . is a level of commitment that is perceived differently between clergy and laity of mainline reformation and revolutionary type churches."[15]

Understanding the difference between belonging and not belonging forces Lutherans to reexamine their motivation for being Christian and reconsider a response as believers who belong to Christ. Belonging to a congregation is only part of the holistic approach of God to living in the kingdom. Calling on believers to reconcile within the life of a congregation and actively reach out to others who are inactive is also part of *missio Dei* and *missio ecclesia*. It is also important for Lutherans to understand and remember, the practice of believing and belonging does not only take place in a congregation, nor does it just happen as congregational worship and fellowship. According to Bonhoeffer, believing and belonging needs to transcend all relationships.

> A marriage, a family, a friendship is quite conscious of the limitations of its community-building power; such relationships know very well, it they are sound, where the human element stops the spiritual begins. . . . When a community of a purely spiritual kind is established, it encounters the danger that everything human will be carried into and intermixed with this fellowship. A purely spiritual relationship is not only dangerous but also altogether abnormal thing.[16]

Lutherans are familiar with the practice of confessing sins during worship, but then what? I believe Lutherans would do well to reexamine our motivation to be members of the Body of Christ, our intentions for belonging to our congregations, and our readiness to respond to the Gospel of Jesus Christ by reaching out to others. Marva Dawn writes, "We

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[15] George Barna, *Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005), 50-59.

[16] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 38.

can't associate with humble folk without first purging from ourselves any sort of sense of superiority."[17] The author contends that our congregations need a revitalized missional understanding and praxis for existence in belonging to Christ. God's mission to reconcile with us who believe and belong isn't about sustaining or even increasing our worship attendance, or the size of our congregational and denominational memberships, God's mission is to send us to reconcile with the lost outside our congregations and denomination. God's mission to include ELCA members in the kingdom of God is consummated by being sent into our communities to lead believing nonbelongers back into communion with Christ.

Summary

> The biggest anguish for most people in our culture is the question, 'What is the meaning of my life?' or 'Why do I exist?' or, put more spiritually, 'How do I discern God's will for me life?' Usually, we ask these questions by ourselves, or, if we ask them of others, we eventually try to figure it out on our own with a little bit of input form others. We decide that it's our own personal job to decide who we are and how to life.
>
> Perhaps we could learn from our forebears and from other cultures throughout space and time to ask first instead, 'To whom do I belong?' and then, 'How could I find meaning for my life because I am part of such a people and have such a God?' These questions would move us away from the anguish and unanswerability of existential questions to the security and recognizability of our identity as persons enfolded in the love of others, especially the love of God.[18]

Through time and over geography, God has approached the mission to reconcile lost sheep witnessed by stories of love in scripture and contemporary testimonies of care. I have referenced glimpses of these biblical and theological foundations, as well as a

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[17] Dawn, *Truly the Community: Romans 12 and How to Be the Church*, 249.

[18] Marva J. Dawn, *Joy in Divine Wisdom: Practices of Discernment from Other Cultures and Christian Traditions* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), xv-xvi.

personal experience in this chapter so that God use of believing belongers to reach out to and receive believing nonbelongers might be tasted.

The missional ways God approaches lost sheep is through a real presence revealing the means of grace. In the First Testament, I have cited God's deliverance of his people out of bondage in the Exodus and the primary biblical and theological foundation of a desire to be in a covenant and communion with people who are in fellowship and community with one another. In the Second Testament, I have cited God's advent to his people as anointed apostles, Peter, Phillip, and Paul, fulfill the First Covenant promises. Primary biblical texts make specific reference to Jesus' claim that he was sent to the lost sheep and that he is also sending those who believe in him, and belong in communion with him, to do the same. In addition, I have offered biblical and theological references to Peter, Philip, and Paul as three followers of Jesus who are transformed in their vocation to be apostles, seeing the mission of God to make all things in creation a new communion and community not from a former human perception but from God's divine perspective.

In the last section, I presented a perspective involving Lutherans, specifically the ELCA, to approach the lost sheep. Citing Matthew 18, I presented a paradigm change of understanding an ELCA congregational constitutional reference to Matthew 18 from a matter of discipline as a transformative message of mission is stressed by Jesus' parable of the prodigal son. This paradigm change from reacting to congregational anxiety and hostility, to an out reach of congregational hospitality to reform and renew communion with Christ and community with other believers who are unaffiliated and nonbelongers is necessary. Changing the imaginations and responses to God's approach to seek the lost

manifested by Jesus is essential. If Lutherans are to confess faith in the Triune God, and claim to belong in community with others, others who are not perfect people, but forgiven people, then I assert the communion of saints needs to also to be in relationship with those who are lost. Therefore, like Joseph approaching his brothers, or Jesus approaching Zacchaeus, or Peter approaching Cornelius, I believe having a biblical and theological foundation in ones heart and mind is the inspiration of *missio Dei* that will lead Lutheran believing belongers with an offering of reconciliation to the lost believing nonbelongers. These contemporary, contextual, opportunities to be in communion in the presence of the risen Spirit of Jesus with others beyond Sunday, dine on a feast of hospitality, and remember that these are ways Lutheran can respond to the gospel and participate in unending story of *missio Dei*.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As stated in chapter 1, the purpose of my thesis is to study the readiness of ELCA congregations in reaching out to and reconciling with believing nonbelongers. To examine this readiness, my research implemented a two-phased *concurrent-nested, mixed-method design* with criteria that offered a "postpositivist lens based on careful . . . measurement of the objective reality that exists *out there* in the world . . . [and] relied as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied."[1] The selection process, described later in detail, began with a systematic sampling of 400 ELCA congregations in the western United States to identify perceptions and behaviors of readiness to reach and receive believing nonbelongers.

In my research I surveyed two categorical groups of systematically sampled ELCA congregations. Each group included congregations some specific criteria. Each group of congregations included: 1) churches from Regions One, Two, Three, Four, and Five (West Coast and Midwest), 2) churches with a range of worship attendance, 3) churches with a range of membership, 4) churches from rural and urban populations, and 5) churches from predecessor ELCA church bodies (i.e. ALC, AELC, and LCA). In addition, Group One congregations received at least twenty or more adults by adult baptism and reaffirmation of faith (in some cases reaffirmation of faith may have been

[1]John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed-Method Approaches*, 2d ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), 7-8.

reported in congregational parochial reports as statistical adjustments) than by all means of transfer. Group Two congregations received at least twenty or more adults by all means of transfer than by adult baptism and reaffirmation of faith. These two groups became this study's dependent variable with all the other data as independent variables and responses to the study's questionnaire intervening variables. These were used to find and identify correlations that have a significant effect on the readiness of congregations.

Near the end of my process and reflection of analyzing the statistical findings, it became apparent that I needed to also analyze the independent variables of the original 400 systematically sampled ELCA congregations provided by the Office of Research and Evaluation. So I went back and ran that same test and regression used with the data categorical variables from these 400 congregations as I had done with the 284 respondents and their linked 139 congregations. This enabled me to have a baseline of congregational and host community statistical findings for the sake of comparison. By comparing statistical levels of significance generated by the data from the original 400 ELCA congregational parochial reports between 2001 and 2005 with the 284 respondents from this systematic sample, I was able to validate my findings reported in chapter 5.

My design of methodology did not attempt to define the specific postmodernity missional praxis of ELCA congregations or explain their cultural diversity region by region within the western United States. Therefore, the focus of my research examines only some of the independent and intervening variables of readiness by respondents who belong to congregations that receive more adults by baptism and reaffirmation of faith than by transfer from the data provided by the Office of Research and Evaluation and date from the respondents to questions adapted from Thom Rainer's questionnaire.

The Null-Hypothesis

The null hypothesis is that there is no significant difference in readiness between the ELCA congregations and their respondents that receive more adults (believing nonbelongers) by baptism and reaffirmation of faith than by transfer, and ELCA congregations and their respondents that primarily receive adults by transfer than by baptism and reaffirmation of faith. If the null hypothesis is rejected, then the alternative hypothesis is to be accepted, namely, that there is a significant difference between the two groups of congregations and their respondents. If the null hypothesis fails to be rejected, then it will be true, there is no significant difference between the two groups of congregations and their respondents. The null hypothesis dependent variable is Group One (congregations that received at least 20 or more adults by baptism and reaffirmation of faith than by transfer between 2001 and 2005); and Group Two (congregations that received at least 20 or more adults by transfer than by baptism and reaffirmation of faith between 2001 and 2005), [2] The specific independent and intervening binomial and multinomial categorical variables will be named and listed below.

Selecting the Sample of 400 ELCA Congregations

According to Fowler, "When there is no adequate list of the individuals in a population and no way to get at the population directly, multistage sampling provides a useful approach."[3] From the ELCA Office of Research and Evaluation, I requested and

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[2] The ELCA parochial reports define "reaffirmation of faith" as adults received but were unable to provide a letter of transfer from a Lutheran congregation; or were removed from the membership roll; and were reinstated by action of the Congregational Council. Baptized adults from non-Lutheran congregations who may have been received by "affirmation of faith," are to be reported on the annual parochial report as statistical adjustments.

[3] Floyd J. Fowler, *Survey Research Methods*, 3rd ed. Applied Social Research Methods Series (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002).

received the names and addresses of 400 systematically selected ELCA congregations in the western United States, plus congregational and host community demographic data.[4] Based on the criteria mentioned above for each congregational category, I intentionally eliminated from the systematic selected sample any congregation that reported receiving less than 20 adults by baptism and reaffirmation of faith more than by all means of transfer. Likewise, I intentionally eliminated from the systematic selected sample any congregation that reported receiving less than 20 adults by all means of transfer more than by baptism and reaffirmation of faith. In addition, I did not select congregational membership based on infants and children received by baptism or transfer since this study focused on the reconciliation of adults. Advice from staff in the Office of Research and Evaluation suggested these criteria would allow the study to perhaps find greater contrast and levels of significance.

The systematic selection process to obtain 400 congregations (200 congregations in Group One and 200 congregations in Group Two) was generated from the ELCA database of congregational demographics and statistics controlled by the Office of Research and Evaluation. The first phase began with a query of ELCA congregational parochial reports for the five years (2001-2005) by postal zip code west of the Mississippi River. In the first step, Group One queried 367 congregations that received greater than 20 adults more by baptism and reaffirmation of faith than by transfer, and Group Two queried 1,006 congregations that received at least 20 adults more by transfer than by adult baptism and reaffirmation of faith. In the second step, congregations were

[4] For the purpose of focusing this study on the western United States, the ELCA Office of Research and Evaluation systematically selected at my request, only those congregations with zip codes west of the Mississippi River.

systematically selected to assure a representation of predecessor church bodies (AELC, ALC, and LCA). In the third step, congregations were systematically selected to assure a representation in each of the five ELCA regions. In the forth and final step, host community demographic population sizes and trends were systematically selected to assure the sample given to this study had fair representation (actual proportionate representation of ELCA congregations from predecessor church bodies and from rural and urban populations was impossible based on the previous selection of adults received). From this four step process the Office of Research and Analysis was able to provide me with 200 congregational names and addresses in Group One and 200 congregations in Group Two. The selection process was consistent with mixed-method studies that use a quantitative approach as the primary research method.[5]

The Office for Research and Analysis also provided congregational and host community demographic data that was used to determine the study's independent variables. Table 4.1 shows the congregational and congregational host community demographic categories I use as independent variables: congregational age, annual worship attendance (2005), annual worship attendance trend (2001-2005), adult membership trend (2001-2005), congregational host population (i.e. cities greater than or equal to 10,000 and less than 10,000); [6] and congregational host community population trend (2000 & 2005).[7]

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[5] Fowler, *Survey Research Methods*.

[6] Host community population was based on U.S. Census data for the zip code of the congregational address.

[7] Host community population trend was based on 2000 U.S. Census data and 2005 U.S. Census estimates for the zip code of the congregational address.

TABLE 4.1

Descriptive Frequencies of Congregations in Group One and Two

Characteristics	Group One (N)	Group One Percent	Group Two (N)	Group Two Percent
Congregational				
Age of congregation				
<50 years old	98	49.0	51	25.5
≥50 years old	102	51.0	149	74.5
Congregational AWA size				
<Large	157	78.5	157	78.5
≥Large	43	21.5	43	21.5
Five Year AWA trend				
Decrease	147	73.5	113	56.5
Increase	53	26.5	87	43.5
Membership 5 year trend				
Decrease	89	44.5	81	40.5
Increase	111	55.5	119	59.5
ELCA Regions				
One & Two (West Coast)	113	56.5	15	15.5
Three, Four, and Five (Midwest)	87	43.5	169	84.5
Host Community				
Population Size				
Population < 10,000	36	18.0	104	52.0
Population ≥ 10,000	164	82.0	96	48.0
Population Trend				
Decrease	49	24.5	84	42.0
Increase	151	75.5	116	58.0
Total Group One	200	100.0		
Total Group Two			200	100.0
Total Group One & Two	400	100.0		

Table 4.1 shows the frequency distribution of the systematically sampled dichotomous ELCA congregations in groups one and two that were sent questionnaires. The frequency distributions reported in table 4.1 show this study's systematically sampled 400 ELCA congregations do not proportionately represent ELCA Churchwide frequency distributions for any categories. The systematic sample selected 49.0% in Group One as congregations less than 50 years old; and 25.5% in Group Two. Conversely, the systematic sample selected 51.0% in Group One as congregations greater than or equal to 50 years old; and 74.5% in Group Two.

The systematic sample selected 78.5% in Group One and two as congregations with less than 350 annual (2005) average worship attendance; compared to 93.1% churchwide ELCA congregations. Conversely, the systematic sample selected 21.5% in Group One and Two as congregations with greater than or equal to 350 annual (2005) average worship attendance; compared to 6.9% churchwide ELCA congregations.

The systematic sample selected 73.5% in Group One as congregations with decrease in annual (2001-2005) average worship attendance and 56.5% in Group Two; compared to 76.1% churchwide ELCA congregations. Conversely, the systematic sample selected 26.5% in Group One as congregations with increasing annual (2001-2005) average worship attendance and 43.5% in Group Two; compared to 23.9% Churchwide ELCA congregations.

The systematic sample selected 44.5% in Group One as congregations with decrease in adult membership (2001-2005) and 40.5% in Group Two. Conversely, the systematic sample selected 55.5% in Group One as congregations with an increase in adult membership (2001-2005); and 59.5% in Group Two.

The systematic sample selected 56.5% in Group One as congregations located in ELCA Regions One and Two (West Coast); and 15.5% in Group Two. Conversely, the systematic sample selected 43.5% in Group One as congregations located in ELCA Regions Three, Four, and Five; and 84.5% in Group Two.

The systematic sample selected 18.0% in Group One as congregations located within host communities with populations less than 10,000; and 52.0% in Group Two. Conversely, the systematic sample selected 82.0% in Group One as congregations with populations less than or equal to 10,000; and 48.0% in Group Two.

Finally, the systematic sample selected 24.5% in Group One as congregations located within host communities with decreasing populations; and 42.0% in Group Two. Conversely, the systematic sample selected 75.5% in Group One as congregations with increasing populations; and 58.0% in Group Two.

As shown by the frequency distribution of the ELCA congregations in groups one and two, this systematically selected sample does not reflect ELCA Churchwide frequency distributions for any of the congregational or host community demographic data. Nevertheless, the frequency distribution in table 4.1 does explain some of the skewed significant levels reported in the respondents' frequency distributions later in this chapter and other statistical findings in the next chapter.

The Methodology for Obtaining Survey Responses

Each of the 400 sampled congregations was sent a packet by postal mail containing three questionnaires. From Group One, I requested a designated questionnaire be given to: a member received by baptism or affirmation of faith within the past twelve years; a long-time member who had belonged for more than twelve years; and a pastor.

They were each given self-addressed, stamped envelopes to return the questionnaire. From Group Two I requested a response from a new member received by transfer received within the past twelve years; a long-time member who had belonged for more than twelve years; and a pastor.

I designed, pre-tested, and implemented the self-administered questionnaire (see Appendix B). Each packet of questionnaires included a letter of introduction about the Doctor of Ministry in Congregational Mission and Leadership program and about my specific research topic (see Appendix A). The instructions requested each questionnaire be filled out independently and assured recipients of complete confidentiality regarding their responses. The self-administered questionnaire provided instructions for each of the three sections. Two weeks after mailing out the packets, postcards were mailed to each congregation thanking them for their cooperation and asking that those who had not yet returned their questionnaire and to please return them by the due date of June 30, 2006. As the questionnaires were returned they were entered into SPSS® and filed in a secure place. The data entered in the software is controlled and secured. Only the results and findings of the SPSS® analysis have been collectively shared in this study.

The concurrent-nested, mixed-method design is incorporated into the three parts of the questionnaire. Part One requests respondent's demographic information; Part Two requests respondent's answers to questionnaire statements regarding readiness to reach out to and receive believing nonbelongers, and three requests two descriptive narratives that qualified the quantitative responses. The second part of the questionnaire includes questions modified from Rainer's survey[8] that quantify opinions and perceptions of the

[8] Thom S. Rainer, *The Unchurched Next Door: Understanding Faith Stages as Keys to Sharing Your Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003).

respondent about their congregation, pastor, and own behavior. The respondent could answer in the first twelve questions either: *no, yes, or I don't know*. The respondent's answers in the last twenty-four questions were on a Likert scale of: *strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree, or I don't know*. Part Three offered the opportunity for the responded to candidly answer to two open-ended statements: "describe your experience as inactive or unchurched; describe your experience of reconciling with an inactive or unchurched." Within third part, I hoped respondents would share their personal stories to explain their responses in the questionnaire, which may or may not correlate with many of the interviews conducted by Hendricks, Rainier, Richter, and Francis.[9] Part Three invited each participant to request a summary of my thesis findings and conclusions when all research has been completed.

Opinions and perceptions by respondents to the statements of this study may have bias. Research conducted by Hadaway and Marler on the subject of worship attendance in the United States reported:

> Face-to-face interview methods do tend to reduce estimates of church participation, but the fact remains that all surveys are self-reports and behavioral self-reports do not describe behavior accurately and objectively. People tend to report what like to think they usually do, and what they used to do, rather than give an objective report of their actual behavior. Inflation is to be expected . . . .[10]

Taking this caveat into consideration will help evaluate the reliability of the respondents' data regarding participation in worship, education and out reach, and the data of their

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[9] All respondent's names and specific information associated with their narrative stories remain confidential.

[10] Kirk Hadaway and Penny Long Marler, "How Many Americans Attend Worship Each Week? An Alternative Approach to Measurement," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 44, no. 3 (2005): 308.

perception of their congregation's involvement in outreach.[11] I believe it is safe to assume similar levels of exaggeration and interpretations projected by Kirk Hadaway and Penny Marler will be incorporated into this study. Nevertheless, I believe my study's design to invite responses from both clergy and laity, newly received and life-long members, from the same congregation also gives credibility and validation to the methodology to mitigate exaggerations to acceptable levels as noted in the next section.

Variables and Testing

As mentioned earlier, the dependent variable is Group One congregations and respondents belonging to Group One congregations (congregations that received greater than or equal to 20 adults more by baptism and reaffirmation of faith than by transfer) and Group Two congregations and respondents belonging to Group Two congregations (congregations that received greater than or equal to 20 adults more by transfer than by baptism and reaffirmation of faith). The independent variables are respondent demographics, congregational demographics, and congregational host community demographics. The intervening variables are the respondents' answers to the previously mentioned thirty-six categorical statements are treated the same as independent variables. The respondents' written narratives to the two open-ended statements are qualitative data and are not used in the quantitative analyses.

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[11] Ibid., 319. Hadaway and Marler go on to argue in a footnote "This is not to imply that all social survey data are so flawed as to be useless. One the contrary, social survey questions about attitudes, beliefs, values, preferences, etc. are quite valuable. These questions ask the respondent to interpret where he or she stands on a variety of issues, to give objective answers to subjective questions. The problem arises when we also ask objectivity, factual questions to respondents and expect them to report as impartial observers of their own behavior and characteristics--in other words, refrain from injecting meaning into the questions and their answers. Humans have a hard time refraining from injecting meaning and thus "objective questions" are answered with something less than objectivity. Some questions, like age, are less prone to reinterpretation by the respondent. But others, like questions about weight, income, and particularly behavioral frequency, are quite prone to reinterpretation and thus to "inaccurate" reporting.

All independent and intervening variables are analyzed with SPSS® using a *diagnostic frequency test, Chi-square tests, correlation test,* and *simple logistic regression.* A diagnostic frequency is used to discern if all data was entered and recoded into SPSS® correctly and to examine a general description of the data's distribution. The Chi-square test is used to discern independence between two categorical variables. The correlation test is used to discern that all independent and intervening variables are acceptable within coefficient tolerances according to criteria written by Andy Field.[12] If any correlations were outside the range of -.06 to 0.06, they were further investigated. Coefficients with tolerance levels below 0.2 were investigated. Individual coefficients with a variation inflation factor (VIF) of 10 or above were investigated. Models in which the VIF values for the coefficients average substantially more than 1.0 were investigated. The simple logistic regression (SLR) is used to discern if all independent and intervening categorical variables have significant effects in the model, holding all other independent and intervening categorical variables in the model constant.

Distribution Frequencies of Respondents' Questionnaires

Of the 600 questionnaires mailed to Group One; 132 (22.0%) were returned, and of the 600 questionnaires mailed to Group Two; 153 (25.3%) were returned. In Group One, respondents came from 67 (33.5%) of the 200 congregations compared to Group Two where the respondents came from 75 (37.5%) of the 200 congregations. The study identified and linked respondents to congregations in order to ascertain congregational and congregational host community demographics reported in Table 4.2.

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[12] Andy Field, *Discovering Statistics Using SPSS* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), 259-60.

TABLE 4.2

Descriptive Frequencies of Respondents in Group One and Two

Characteristic	Group One (N)	Group One Percent	Group Two (N)	Group Two Percent
Respondent demographics:				
Age				
< 50 years	25	18.9	44	28.9
≥ 50 years	107	81.1	108	71.1
Length of Membership				
< 12 years	85	64.4	93	61.2
≥ 12 years	47	35.6	59	38.8
Gender				
Female	63	47.7	82	53.9
Male	69	52.3	70	46.1
Education				
Less than 4 years of college	35	26.5	46	30.3
Bachelor's degree or higher	97	73.5	106	69.7
Marital Status				
Single/Separated/Widowed	26	19.7	30	19.7
Married/Remarried	106	80.3	122	80.3
Race				
White	128	97.0	147	96.7
Non-white	4	3.0	5	3.3
Relationship to the Church				
Clergy	51	38.6	59	38.8
Laity	81	61.4	93	61.2
Baptismal Age				
Infant/child <12	117	88.6	136	89.5
Child ≥12/adult	15	11.4	16	10.5
Faith of Origin				
Lutheran	94	71.2	127	83.6
Non-Lutheran	38	28.8	25	16.5

TABLE 4.2, continued

Characteristic	Group One (N)	Group One Percent	Group Two (N)	Group Two Percent
Congregational demographics:				
Age of Congregation				
< 50 years old	69	52.3	44	29.9
≥ 50 years old	63	47.7	108	71.1
Congregational AWA Size				
Small & Mid-sized	110	83.3	115	75.7
Large & Mega sized	22	16.7	37	24.3
Five Year AWA Trend				
Decreasing	90	68.2	86	56.6
Increasing	42	31.8	66	43.4
Five Year Membership Trend				
Decreasing	64	48.5	65	42.8
Increasing	68	51.5	87	57.2
ELCA Regions				
One & Two (West Coast)	82	62.1	20	13.2
Three, Four, and Five (Midwest)	50	37.9	132	86.8
Host Community demographics				
Community Size				
Population ≥ 10,000	31	23.5	75	49.3
Population < 10,000	101	76.5	77	50.7
Community Trend				
Decreasing	26	19.7	63	41.4
Increasing	106	80.3	89	58.6
Total Group One	132	46.5		
Total Group Two			152	53.5
Total Group One & Two	284	100.0		

In examining the frequency distribution of respondents in Table 4.2, of the 132 respondents in Group One, 18.9% were <50 years old and 81.1% were greater than or equal to 50 years old compared to the 152 respondents from Group Two, where 28.9% were less than 50 years old and 71.1% were greater than or equal to 50 years old. In Group One, 64.4% of the respondents belonged to their current ELCA congregation less than 12 years and 35.6% belonged greater than or equal to 12 years compared to Group Two with 61.2% of respondents who belonged to their current ELCA congregation less than 12 years and 38.8% who belonged greater than or equal to 12 years.

In Group One, 47.7% of the total respondents are female and 52.3% are male compared to Group Two with 53.9% female and 46.1% male. In Group One, 26.5% of the respondents have less than 4 years of college and 73.5% have greater than or equal to 4 years of college compared to Group Two with 30.3% less than 4 years of college and 69.7% have greater than or equal to 4 years of college. In Group One, 19.7% are single, separated, or widowed and 80.3% are married or remarried compared to Group Two with 19.7% single, separated, or widowed and 80.3% married or remarried. In Group One, 97.0% of the respondents were white and 3.0% were persons of color compared to Group Two with 96.7% white and 3.3% percent are persons of color. The frequencies in the category of race were insufficient to use in an analysis of crosstabulation cells because the count in Group One is less than 5. Therefore, the category of race will not be used in any further statistical analysis.

In Group One, of the 132 respondents 38.6% are clergy and 61.4% are laity compared to Group Two where 152 respondents are 38.8% clergy and 61.2% laity. In Group One, 88.6% of the respondents are baptized before the age of sixteen as infants or children and 11.4% are baptized as adults after the age of sixteen; compared to Group Two, when 89.5% are baptized as infants or children and 10.5% percent are baptized as adults. Finally, in Group One, 71.2% reported their origin of faith (at the time of baptism) as Lutheran, 28.8% reported their origin of faith as non-Lutheran compared to Group Two, where 83.6% reported their origin of faith as Lutheran and 16.5% reported their origin of faith as non-Lutheran.

Included in the frequency distribution of table 4.2 are congregational demographics linked to the respondents belonging to those congregations. These show

that in Group One, 52.3% of the respondents belonged to congregations organized less than 50 years ago and 47.7% belonged to congregations organized greater than or equal to 50 years ago compared to Group Two, where 29.9% of the respondents belonged to congregations organized less than 50 years ago and 71.1% belonged to congregations organized greater than or equal to 50 years ago. Table 4.2 also shows 83.3% of the 132 respondents in group belong to congregations with an annual Average Worship Attendance (AWA) less than 350 in the year 2005, and 16.7% belonging to a congregation with greater than or equal to 350 AWA in the year 2005, compared to Group Two as having 75.7% of the 152 respondents belonging to a congregation less than 350 AWA in the year 2005, and 24.3% belonging to a congregation with greater than or equal to 350 AWA in the year 2005. In addition, table 4.2 shows that 68.2% of the respondents in Group One were linked to congregations with a decrease in their five year (2001-2005) AWA trend and 31.8% of the respondents were linked to congregations with an increase compared to 56.6% of the respondents in Group Two linked to congregations with a decrease in their five year (2001-2005) AWA trend and 43.4% of the respondents were linked to congregations with an increase. Furthermore, the data linking respondents belonging to congregations used in the table 4.2 shows that 62.1% of the respondents belonged to congregations located in ELCA Regions One (WA, OR, ID, MT) and Region Two (CA, HI, NV, CO, WY) recoded as West Coast, and 37.9% belonged to congregations located in ELCA Regions Three (MN), Four (ND, SD, NE, KS, MO, OK, TX), and Five (IA) compared to 13.2% belong to congregations on the West Coast and 86.8% belong to congregations in the Midwest.

Finally, included in the frequency distribution of table 4.2 are respondents linked to community demographics where the congregations are located. These show in Group One, 23.5% of the respondents belonged to congregations located in host communities with populations less than 10,000 and 76.5% belonged to congregations located in host communities with populations greater than or equal to 10,000 compared to Group Two, where 41.9% of the respondents belonged to congregations located in host communities with populations less than 10,000 and 71.1% of the respondents belonged to congregations located in communities with populations greater than or equal to 10,000. The study used U. S. census demographics reported in 2000 and estimated in 2004 to calculated community population growth trends linked to respondents. Furthermore, table 4.2 shows 19.7% of the respondents in Group One belonged to congregations in host communities with declining populations and 80.3% belonged to congregations in host communities with an increasing population. Table 4.2 shows 41.4% of the respondents in Group Two belonged to congregations in host communities with a declining population and 58.6% belonged to congregations in host communities with an increasing population.

Summary

This two-phased *concurrent-nested, mixed-method approach* was designed to systematically select two groups of ELCA congregations within the western United States. Group One included 200 congregations that received at least 20 or more adults by baptism, affirmation of faith, and statistical adjustment than by all means of transfer between 2001 and 2005; and Group Two included 200 congregations that received at least 20 or more adults by all means of transfer greater than by baptism and reaffirmation of faith during the same period of time. Each group of congregations received the same

instructions, questionnaire, and a self addressed, stamped return envelope requesting a response from three adults in each selected congregation: a pastor, a newly received member (within the past 12 years) and a life-long member (belonging 12 years or more). In Group One, 132 (20.8%) of the questionnaires were returned and analyzed, and in Group Two, 152 (22.7%) were returned and analyzed. These two groups were used as the dependant variable in the statistical analysis with all other independent and intervening variables. The respondents' variables included: the participant's age, gender, educational level, marital status, race (was eliminated from the variables since the non-Caucasians in both Group One and Two had counts less than 5), relationship to the congregation, age of at the time of baptism, faith of origin at the time of baptism, years of membership (in current congregation). Each respondent's individual data was linked to the congregations' demographic date, which they belonged. The congregational variables included: age of the organization, the AWA size, the congregation's five year (2001-2005) AWA growth trend, the congregation's five year (2001-2005) membership growth trend, and the congregation's affiliation with an ELCA Region. In addition, each respondent's congregation was linked to the host community's zip code population demographics. The host community demographics included: population size (according to the 2000 U. S. census report and the 2004 and U. S. census estimation), and the host community's five year (2000 – 2004) population growth trend. The intervening variables include the questionnaire's thirty-six binominal and multinomial questions in Part Two. All of the multinomial independent and intervening variables were recoded into binomial categorical data. In Part Three the survey included two open-ended statements for respondents to submit personal narratives as they applied. These narratives were later

analyzed and quoted to support the quantitative analysis on readiness to reach-out to others, but were not used to accept or reject the null-hypothesis.

The 200 ELCA congregations systematically selected for Group One and 200 ELCA congregations systematically selected for Group Two do not represent the same proportion ratios of ELCA Churchwide in the areas of age, AWA, and population size. Nevertheless, Group One and Two have congregations and respondents represented in each group.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH ANALYSIS OF READINESS FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter is to statistically analyze the data collected from this study's concurrently-nested, mixed-method design to find significant levels of readiness to receive believing nonbelongers between two categories of ELCA congregations in the western United States. This chapter presents several statistical tests and analyses in order of their complexity, beginning with the most simple.

A preliminary step taken was to recode each independent continuous variable into binomial categorical variables. The recoding was calculated using SPSS®. Recoding was applied to all continuous demographic data received for the 400 systematically selected congregations and their host community populations provided by the ELCA Office for Research and Evaluation. In addition, recoding was applied to all twenty-four questions in Part Two of the questionnaire received from the 284 respondents. These recoded binomial categorical variables were then used for both crosstabulation Chi-square tests and simple logistic regression analyses.

This chapter has six sections: the first section, crosstabulation Chi-square tests, used SPSS® with the quantitative categorical data received from the ELCA Office for Research and Evaluation; the second section, simple logistical regression analysis, used SPSS® with the same categorical variables; the third section, crosstabulation Chi-square tests, used SPSS® with the categorical data received from the respondents and ELCA data linked to the respondents' personal demographic information, including the

respondents' answers to the thirty-six statements; the fourth section, simple logistical regression analysis, used SPSS® with the same categorical variables used in the third section; the fifth section, Centering Resonance Analysis (CRA), used Crawdad© to processes respondents' narratives to the two open-ended statements (the hand-written responses were transferred into simple word text); and the sixth section is a summary, of my findings in the first four sections.

Results from the frequency distribution (see Table 4.1 and Table 4.2) were checked to ensure all demographic data and questionnaire responses were entered correctly. In addition, correlation tests for collinearity among the independent binomial variables were run prior to the two regression analyses to discern if the levels were acceptable according to Field.[1] The size of the two matrixes produced by SPSS® correlation prohibits their display within this thesis. Nevertheless, all independent variables were correlated and no correlations were found outside the range of -0.60 to 0.60. Likewise, no coefficients with tolerance levels below .20 were found. I found no individual coefficients with variance inflation factor (VIF) values of 10 or more.

The dependent variable in the statistical analyses was Group One and Two. Group One congregations or Group One respondents belonging to Group One congregations are those that received at least 20 more adults by baptism and reaffirmation of faith than by transfer between 2001and 2005. Group Two congregations or Group Two respondents belonging to Group Two congregations are those that received at least 20 more adults by transfer than by baptism and reaffirmation of faith between 2001 and 2005.

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[1] Andrew Field, *Discovering Statistics Using SPSS* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), 175, 96.

Analyses of ELCA Data with Chi-square Tests

Table 5.1 summarizes seven individual Chi-square test crosstabulations to test for independence between all independent variable categories with the dependent variable category of 400 congregations in Group One and Two. All congregational and host community data was systematically selected and provided by the ELCA Office of Research and Evaluation prior to respondents participation.

TABLE 5.1

Chi-Square Summary of Congregational Readiness between the Dependent Variable and Independent-Intervening Variables

Variables	(N)	X^2 value	df
Congregation Demographics			
Age	400	23.626***	1
Worship size	400	0.000	1
AWA trend	400	12.703***	1
Membership trend	400	0.655	1
ELCA Regions	400	72.960***	1
Community Demographics			
Population size	400	50.813***	1
Population trend	400	13.799***	1

* - Significant at the .05 level
** - Significant at the .01 level
*** - Significant at the .001 level

Table 5.1 summarizes the results of the crosstabulation Chi-square tests for the dependent variable within groups one and two and all congregational and host community categorical independent variables to discern if the effects of the variables are independent of each other. The effects of the dependent variable and those marked with at least one asterisk show these categorical variables are contingent on each other at a significant level. These congregational Chi-square test summaries are used in comparison

with respondent Chi-square tests below in section three of this chapter to validate respondent findings.

In the category of congregational demographics, the variables of organizational age, average worship attendance trend, and location within a region of the ELCA each show significant effects on the readiness in reaching out to receive believing nonbelongers. The category of congregational age shows a significant effect on readiness, X^2 (1) = 23.626, p<.001. The category of average worship attendance trend shows a significant effect on readiness, X^2 (1) = 12.703, p<.001. The category of ELCA Regional location of a congregation shows a significant effect on readiness, X^2 (1) = 72.960, p<.001. The categories of annual average worship attendance size and membership trend are found to have no statistically significant effects.

In the category of congregational host community demographics, the variables of population type and population trend show a significant effect on the respondent's readiness in reaching out to receive believing nonbelongers. The category of population size of the host community of a congregation show a significant effect on readiness, X^2 (1) = 50.813, p<.001; as did the population trend of the host community, X^2 (1) = 13.799, p<.001.

Analyses of ELCA Data with Simple Logistic Regression

In this second section, Table 5.2 displays the analyses of categorical variables with simple logistic regression (SLR). The SLR analyzes similar categorical variables used in the Chi-square summary against the dependent binomial variable. Group Two is the reference so that the modeling effects measured belong to Group One. The purpose of

the SLR is to find if independent variables have significant effects in the regression model, holding all other effects of independent variables constant.

TABLE 5.2

SLR for a model of Congregations Receiving More Adults by Baptism and Reaffirmation

Categories (modeled value)	Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	Odds Ratio
Intercept	-0.546	0.384	
Congregation Demographics			
Age (≥50 years old)	-0.534	0.258	0.586
Worship size (≥large)	-0.201	0.291	0.818
AWA trend (increased)	-0.695**	0.251	0.499
Membership trend (increased)	0.209	0.248	1.232
ELCA Regions (West Coast)	1.420***	0.277	4.135
Community Demographics			
Population size (≥10,000)	0.946***	0.281	2.574
Population trend (increase)	0.017	0.268	1.018

N = 400 (included in analysis)
-2 log likelihood = 449.946
Pseudo $R^2 = 0.811$
Cox & Snell $R^2 = 0.230$
Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.307$
$X^2(7) = 104.572$***

* - Significant at the .05 level
** - Significant at the .01 level
*** - Significant at the .001 level

The regression model in table 5.2 shows $X^2(7) = 104.572$, $p<0.001$. This suggests that the model as a whole, with the dichotomous categorical dependent variable, has significance for those congregations that received more adults by means of baptism and reaffirmation of faith. Three of the seven independent categorical variables in the model had a significant effect on the dependent variable. The following are detailed explanations of categorical variables with a significant probability ($p<0.05$).

The first variable to show significance in the regression model is the systematically selected ELCA congregations' annual average worship attendance trend over a five year period (2001-2005). This variable is measured such that effects of congregations that had an increase trend in worship attendance are modeled in the regression and those congregations that had a decrease in worship attendance are the reference group. The results of the regression analysis shows that congregations that had a five year annual average worship attendance increase are only 0.499 times as likely to be a member of Group One congregations who received more adults by baptism and reaffirmation of faith than are congregations who had a five year annual average worship attendance decrease. This is significant at the 0.05 level.

The second variable to show significance in the regression model is the systematically selected ELCA congregations' regional location. This regional variable is measured such that effects of the congregations that are located on the West Coast region are modeled in the regression and the congregations that are located in the Midwest region are the reference group. The results of the regression analysis show that ELCA congregations on the West Coast region are 4.135 times more likely to be a member of Group One congregations who received more adults by baptism and reaffirmation of faith than are respondents who were in the Midwest region. This is significant at the 0.001 level.

The third variable to show significance in the regression model is the systematically selected ELCA congregations' host community population size. This variable is measured such that effects of the congregations in a host community with a population greater than or equal to 10,000 are modeled in the regression and

congregations in a host community with a population less than 10,000 are the reference group. The results of the regression analysis show that the systematically selected ELCA congregations located in a host community with a population greater than or equal to 10,000 are 2.574 times more likely to be a member of Group One than are systematically selected ELCA congregations located in a host community with a population decrease. This is significant at the 0.001 level.

Analyses of Respondents' Data with Chi-square Tests

In this third section, table 5.3 shows a summary of the forty-nine individual Chi-square tests for independence between the dependent variable and all independent and intervening categorical variables. The effects on the respondent's readiness are reported with the dependent variable category of respondents belonging to groups one and two. A lack of independence is noted when the probability level is significant ($p<0.05$).

TABLE 5.3

Chi-Square Summary of Respondent Readiness Using the Dependent Variable with Independent-Intervening Variables

Variables	(N)	X^2 value	df
Respondent Demographics			
Age	284	3.847*	1
Years a member	284	0.311	1
Gender	284	1.094	1
Education level	284	0.487	1
Marital status	284	0.000	1
Role in congregation	284	0.001	1
Age of Baptism	284	0.051	1
Origin of faith	284	6.233*	1

TABLE 5.3, continued

Variables	(N)	X^2 value	df
Congregation Demographics			
Age	284	16.044***	1
Worship size	284	2.529	1
AWA trend	284	4.036*	1
Membership trend	284	0.933	1
ELCA Regions	284	73.588***	1
Community Demographics			
Population size	284	20.192***	1
Population trend	284	15.478***	1
Questions 1-12			
Members know mission	256	3.615	1
Members have training	250	6.145*	1
Member actively reach out	243	7.289**	1
Pastor emphasizes mission	262	8.079**	1
Pastor preaches reaching out	267	0.570	1
Pastor coaches with outreach	243	2.243	1
Facilities for outreach	272	1.173	1
Programs for outreach	260	2.090	1
Staff for outreach	260	3.316	1
Self committed to outreach	281	1.847	1
Self received outreach training	282	5.485*	1
Self makes outreach contacts	284	7.800**	1
Questions 13-24			
Members prefer tradition	276	0.776	1
Members readily welcome others	276	8.468**	1
Members befriend others	241	15.288***	1
Pastor speaks urgently about outreach	263	0.283	1
Pastor partners with members	245	5.627*	1
Pastor spends time w/nonmembers	209	9.658**	1
Worship emphasizes welcome	274	11.659***	1
Worship times accommodating	277	0.050	1
Education emphasizes outreach	272	0.510	1

TABLE 5.3, continued

Variables	(N)	X^2 value	df
Questions 13-24, continued			
Education times accommodating	274	3.847*	1
Stewardship emphasizes outreach	272	7.460**	1
Church offers social services	259	8.862**	1
Question 25-36			
Members open to change w/vision	267	8.598**	1
Members seek out nonbelongers	265	8.200**	1
Members known in community	252	7.977**	1
Pastor open to change	276	3.637	1
Pastor equips members for outreach	266	3.017	1
Pastor known as civic leader	262	0.125	1
Facilities (outside) attractive	279	0.180	1
Facilities (inside) attractive	283	0.940	1
Facilities handicapped accessible	283	0.198	1
All staff trained to welcome	272	5.434*	1
Members support participant's outreach	253	9.461**	1
Community describes church as caring	238	1.175	1

* - Significant at the .05 level
** - Significant at the .01 level
*** - Significant at the .001 level

Table 5.3 summarizes the results of the crosstab Chi-square tests for the dependent variable within Group One and Two and all categorical independent and intervening variables to discern if the effects of the variables are independent of each other. The effects of the dependent variable and those marked with at least one asterisk show these categorical variables are contingent on each other at a significant level.

In the category of respondent demographics, variables of respondent's age and origin of faith have significant effects on the respondent belonging to a given group of congregations. The category of respondents' age has a significant effect on congregation

group membership, X^2 (1) = 3.847, p<.05. The category of respondent's origin of faith of show a significant effect on congregation group membership, X^2 (1) = 6.233, p<.05. No other respondent demographic categories were found to have statistically significant effects.

In the category of respondents' congregational demographics, the variables of organizational age, average worship attendance trend, and location within a region of the ELCA show significant effects on the group of congregations the respondent is a member of. The category of congregational age show a significance effect on congregation group membership, X^2 (1) = 16.044, p<.001. The category of average worship attendance trend show a significant effect on congregation group membership, X^2 (1) = 4.036, p<.05. The category of ELCA Regional location of a congregation has a significant effect on congregation group membership, X^2 (1) = 73.588, p<.001. No other respondents' congregational demographic categories were found to have statistically significant effects.

In the category of respondents' congregational host community demographics, the variable of population type and population trend shows significant effects on the group of congregations the respondent is a member. The category of population size of the host community of a congregation shows a significant effect on congregation group membership, X^2 (1) = 20.192, p<.001; as does the population trend of the host community, X^2 (1) = 15.478, p<.001.

Questions one through twelve, respondents' perceptions of congregational attitudes of mission and ministry, shows significant effects on the group of congregations the respondent is a member. The Chi-squared test shows five of the twelve questions to

be significantly related. To question two: "Our members have intentional training on how to reach inactives and the unchurched," the summary shows a significant effect, X^2 (1) = 6.145, p<.05. To question three: "Our members actively to reach out to inactives and unchurched in our community," the summary shows a significant effect, X^2 (1) = 7.289, p<.01. To question four: "The pastor emphasizes missional outreach to our community," the summary shows a significant effect, X^2 (1) = 8.079, p<.01. To question eleven: "I have received intentional training in evangelism," the summary shows a significant effect, X^2 (1) = 5.485, p<.05. To question twelve: "I have been actively contacting and reaching out to inactives and the unchurched," the summary shows a significant effect, X^2 (1) = 7.800, p<.01.

Questions thirteen through twenty-four, respondents' observations of readiness for outreach by their congregation, shows significant effects on the group of congregations the respondent is a member. The Chi-squared test shows eight of the second set of twelve questions to be significantly related. To question fourteen: "Our members intentionally and readily reach out to welcome quests attending church activities," the summary shows a significant effect, X^2 (1) = 8.468, p<.01. To question fifteen: "Our members intentionally and regularly befriend people who do not attend or belong to any church," the summary shows a significant effect, X^2 (1) = 15.288, p<.001. To question seventeen: "Our pastor has a willingness to partner with members to reach out to the unchurched," the summary shows a significant effect, X^2 (1) = 5.627, p<.05. To question eighteen: "Our pastor spends as much time meeting the unchurched as with our members," the summary shows a significant effect, X^2 (1) = 9.658, p<.01. To question nineteen: "Our worship emphasizes welcoming the stranger," the summary shows a

significant effect, X^2 (1) = 11.659, p<.001. To question twenty-two: "We offer education times to accommodate those who cannot attend on Sunday morning," the summary shows a significant effect, X^2 (1) = 3.847, p<.05. To question twenty-three: "Our stewardship emphasizes helping nonmembers both within our community and beyond," the summary shows a significant effect, X^2 (1) = 7,460, p<.01. To question twenty-four: "We offer counseling and social services or referrals to accommodate those in need of help," the summary shows a significant effect, X^2 (1) = 8.862, p<.01.

Questions twenty-five through thirty-six, respondents' perspective of congregational attitudes and activities of readiness for outreach by their congregation, shows significant effects on the group of congregations the respondent is a member. The Chi-squared test shows five of the third set of twelve questions to be significantly related. To question twenty-five, "Our members are visionary and open to the changes necessary for mission," the summary shows a significant effect, X^2 (1) = 8.598, p<.01. To question twenty-six, "Our members are willing to participate in ways to seek those who are searching for God," the summary shows a significant effect, X^2 (1) = 8.200, p<.01. To question twenty-seven, "Our members are known in the community as people making a difference in Christ's name," the summary shows a significant effect, X^2 (1) = 7.977, p<.01. To question thirty-four, "Our non-paid and paid staff is trained to welcome and help members and guests," the summary shows a significant effect, X^2 (1) = 5.434, p<.05. To question thirty-five, "I feel other members support the work I do to reach inactives and unchurched," the summary shows a significant effect, X^2 (1) = 9.461, p<.01.

Analyses of Respondents' Data with Simple Logistic Regression

In this fourth section, table 5.4 displays the analyses of categorical variables (respondent demographics, respondent's congregational demographics, respondent's congregational host community demographics, and responses to questions one through thirty-six) with simple logistic regression (SLR), a more complex statistical analysis. The SLR analyzes all the same categorical and continuous variables used in the Chi-square summary against the dependent binomial variable. Group Two is used as the reference so that the modeling effects measured belong to Group One. The purpose of the SLR is to find if independent and intervening variables have significant effects in the model, holding all other independent variables constant.

TABLE 5.4

SLR for a Model of Congregations Receiving More Adults by Baptism and Reaffirmation

Categories	Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	Odds Ratio
Intercept	1.946	1.939	
Respondent Demographics			
Age (≥50 years old)	-0.384	0.460	0.681
Years a member (≥12 yrs)	0.398	0.408	1.490
Gender (female/male)	-0.018	0.429	0.982
Education level (≥BS degree)	-0.511	0.463	0.600
Marital status (married)	0.675	0.632	1.846
Role in congregation (laity)	-0.412	0.541	0.662
Age of Baptism (adult)	-0.613	0.539	0.557
Origin of Faith (non-Lutheran)	-1.259*	0.517	0.284

TABLE 5.4, continued

Categories	Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	Odds Ratio
Congregation Demographics			
Age (≥50 years old)	0.419	0.426	1.521
Worship size (≥large)	0.771	0.494	2.162
AWA trend (increased)	0.272	0.394	1.312
Membership trend (increased)	0.046	0.397	1.048
ELCA Regions (West Coast)	2.601***	0.478	13.593
Community Demographics			
Population size (≥10,000)	-0.377	0.446	0.686
Population trend (increase)	-0.949*	0.432	0.387
Questions 1-12 (yes)			
Members know mission	-0.194	0.126	0.824
Members have training	0.080	0.111	1.083
Member actively reach out	0.043	0.096	1.044
Pastor emphasizes mission	-0.099	0.142	0.906
Pastor preaches reaching out	-0.148	0.107	0.863
Pastor coaches with outreach	0.264*	0.081	1.302
Facilities for outreach	-0.155	0.196	0.857
Programs for outreach	0.564**	0.189	1.758
Staff for outreach	0.168	0.124	1.183
Self committed to outreach	0.220	0.353	1.246
Self received outreach training	-0.151	0.228	0.860
Self make outreach contacts	-0.259	0.455	0.772
Questions 13-24 (agree)			
Members prefer tradition	0.221	0.175	1.248
Members readily welcome others	-0.052	0.205	0.950
Members befriend others	-0.174	0.134	0.840
Pastor speaks urgently of outreach	-0.207	0.162	0.813
Pastor partners with members	0.171	0.158	1.187
Pastor spends time w/ nonmembers	0.063	0.098	1.065
Worship emphasizes welcome	0.033	0.190	1.033
Worship times accommodating	-0.205	0.138	0.814
Education emphasizes outreach	0.132	0.166	1.142

TABLE 5.4, continued

Categories	Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	Odds Ratio
Questions 13-24, continued (agree)			
Education times accommodating	0.097	0.145	1.101
Stewardship emphasizes outreach	-0.054	0.159	0.947
Church offers social services	-0.231	0.133	0.794
Questions 25-36 (agree)			
Members open to change w/vision	-0.197	0.188	0.821
Members seek out nonbelongers	-0.188	0.181	0.828
Members known in community	0.212	0.241	1.286
Pastor open to change	0.252	0.241	1.286
Pastor equips members for outreach	-0.187	0.171	0.756
Pastor known as civic leader	-0.114	0.138	0.892
Facilities (outside) attractive	0.185	0.220	1.203
Facilities (inside) attractive	-0.280	0.243	1.052
Facilities handicapped accessible	0.142	0.230	1.153
All staff trained to welcome	-0.275	0.170	0.760
Members support participant's outreach	0.050	0.160	1.051
Community describes church as caring	-0.078	0.132	0.925

N = 284 (included in analysis)
-2 log likelihood = 233.466
Pseudo $R^2 = 0.405$
Cox & Snell $R^2 = 0.428$
Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.572$
$X^2(51) = 158.832$***

* - Significant at the .05 level
** - Significant at the .01 level
*** - Significant at the .001 level

The regression model shows $X^2(3) = 25.914$, $p<0.001$. This suggests that the model as a whole, with the two congregational groups as the categorical dependent variable, has significance for those respondents in congregations that receive more adults by means of baptism and reaffirmation of faith. Five of the forty-nine independent categorical variables in the respondents' regression model show a significant effect on the

dependent variable. The following are detailed explanations of categorical variables with a significant probability ($p<0.05$).

The first variable to show significance in the regression model is the respondents' origin of faith. This variable measures such that effects of respondents of non-Lutheran faith origins are modeled in the regression and the respondents of Lutheran faith origin are the reference group. The results of the regression analysis shows that respondents whose faith of origin is non-Lutheran are only 0.284 times as likely to be a member of Group One congregations who received more adults by baptism and reaffirmation of faith than are respondents who are Lutheran in their faith of origin. This is significant at the 0.05 level.

The second variable to show significance in the regression model is the respondents' congregational regional location. This variable measures such that effects of respondents located from congregations on the West Coast region are modeled in the regression and the respondents located from congregations in the Midwest region are the reference group. The results of the regression analysis show that respondents from the West Coast region are 13.593 times more likely to be a member of Group One congregations who received more adults by baptism and reaffirmation of faith than are respondents who were from the Midwest region. This is significant at the 0.001 level.

The third variable to show significance in the regression model is the respondents' congregation's host community population trend. This variable measures such that effects of respondents belonging to a congregation in a host community with a population increase are modeled in the regression and the respondents belonging to a congregation in a host community with a population decrease are the reference group. The results of the

regression analysis show that respondents living in a congregational host community with a population increase are only 0.387 times as likely to be a member of Group One congregations as are respondents who belong to a congregation in a host community with a population decrease. This is significant at the 0.05 level.

The fourth variable to show significance in the regression model is the respondents' answer to statement six, "Our pastor is like a coach with our members to reach inactives and the unchurched." This variable measures such that effects of respondents who answered *yes* to statement six are modeled in the regression and the respondents who answered *no* to statement six are the reference group. The results of the regression analysis show that respondents who answered *yes* to statement six are 1.302 times more likely to be a member of a Group One congregation than are respondents who answered *no* to statement six. This is significant at the 0.05 level.

The fifth and final variable to show significance in the regression model is the respondents' answer to statement eight, "The church programs have been changed to reach and receive potential members." This variable measures such that effects of respondents who answered *yes* to statement eight are modeled in the regression and the respondents who answered *no* to statement eight are the reference group. The results of the regression analysis show that respondents who answered *yes* to statement eight are 1.758 times more likely to be a member of Group One congregations than are respondents who answered *no* to statement eight. This is significant at the 0.01 level.

Analyses of the Respondents' Narratives

In this fifth section I analyze narrative stories nested by the respondents within the quantitative questionnaire. Recent developments in Qualitative Analysis software by

Crawdad© makes narrative (written or verbal) comparisons diagnostically possible from the network of sets and subsets of influential words within a document or interview.[1] Crawdad© takes text based on a patent-pending technology using Centering Recourse Analysis© (CRA) and generates frequency graphs and tables based on the influential and important words in the text correlated with linguistic theory and creative coherence in communication. CRA uses natural language processing to create a network model of text value calculated on the structural position of a word within a narrative text.

The respondents' narrative stories were collectively transcribed into simple word text on a personal computer then entered into and processed in CRA software. A quantitative analysis of qualitative data compared the frequency response ratios of words and phrases used by Group One and Two describing: experiences as a believing nonbelonger, and/or experiences contacting a believing nonbelonger. Unlike the second section where my design of the questionnaire defined the categorical data, CRA creates its own categorical patterns generated by the frequency ratio of vocabulary and writing style of the participants. These participant narrative stories provide further explanation of the respondents' quantitative data found in section two as a source for conclusions presented in the final chapter. All participant quotes will remain anonymous.

The findings from the following qualitative analyses of the respondents' narrative stories to the two open-ended statements do not determine if the null hypothesis is rejected or fails to be rejected. The analyses do provide informative insight about and commentary on the perceptions and observations of the previous quantitative data. Respondent quotations representative of various themes will be referenced in chapter 6.

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[1] Crawdad Text Analysis System Ver. 1.2, Crawdad Technologies LLC, Chandler, AZ.

Every participant was provided an opportunity to qualify their first thirty-six responses by sharing personal stories to the two guided open-ended questions. From Group One, 38.4% of the 125 respondents offer their storied narrative description of their experience as a former believing nonbelonger. From Group One, 82.4% wrote storied description of their experiences in contacting a believing nonbelonger. In Group Two, 23.5% of the 136 respondents provide storied narrative description of their experience as a former believing nonbelonger and 58.8% wrote a storied description of their experience in contacting a believing nonbelonger. I combined all the respondents' narrative stores for each statement by Group One or Two. From these combined narrative stories I measure similarities and differences based on the CRA frequencies processing a combination of words. I measure only the frequency (CRA ratio) of key words which appeared more than five times. The greater the frequency (CRA ratio) of words and phrases the higher the ratio shows in Table 5.5 and 5.6. Thus, I identify themes based on the CRA networked analysis of the influential ratios of words and phrases written by the respondents rather than my subjective interpretation.

Table 5.5 examines the respondent stories to the first open-ended statement, "Please provide a brief description of your experience as an inactive or as someone unchurched." The open-ended statement assumes that the spirit of God is at the heart of the interaction between each person and their readiness for reconciliation.

TABLE 5.5

CRA Ratios from Respondents' Narratives as Former Inactives

Themes of Words & Phrases	Group One	Group Two
Time became inactive		
Inactive as a child	0.011	0.013
Inactive during college	0.014	0.041*
Inactive as an adult	0.090*	0.028
Length of inactivity		
Childhood to adult	0.073*	0.000
College only	0.029	0.013
College to married with children	0.017	0.028*
After children left home	0.016	0.009
Reasons for non-activity		
Busy (in general)	0.008	0.028
College	0.041	0.062
Employment	0.008	0.013
Family unsupportive	0.078*	0.038
Congregation unsupportive	0.032	0.014
In search of faith	0.050	0.076*
Reasons for returning		
Church Friendly	0.033	0.011
Church worship	0.016	0.010
ELCA/Lutheran affiliation	0.032	0.050*
Pastor outreach	0.058*	0.016
Sunday school for children	0.022	0.021
Person of influence		
Family member	0.070	0.058*
Spouse	0.028	0.034
Friend	0.016	0.022
Pastor	0.080*	0.019
Church member	0.021	0.044

* Highest ratio

The first identified theme generated by CRA from the first statement is the *time when the participant became inactive*. The greatest ratio of words/phrases reported by Group One was *after college*, at a ratio of 0.090. Group Two's highest ratio of

words/phrases reported was *during college*, at a ratio of 0.041. Group One's ratio of words/phrases *after college* was slightly higher by a ratio difference of 0.049.

The second identified theme, *length of inactivity* for Group One respondents is highest *from childhood to adult*, at a ratio of 0.073. Group Two's highest length of inactivity is from *college to married with children,* at a ratio of 0.028. The difference of Group One's ratio of words/phrases *from childhood to adult* was slightly higher by a ratio difference of 0.045.

The third identified theme is *reason for non-activity within the church*. The most frequently stated reason given by Group One respondents was the *lack of family support*, at a ratio of 0.078. Group Two's most frequently stated reason is a *search for an alternative spirituality*, at a ratio of 0.076. The difference of Group One's ratio of words/phrases *family unsupportive* was slightly higher by a ratio difference of 0.002.

The fourth identified theme is the primary *reason for returning to active church participation*. For Group One, the words/phrases *pastor's outreach* is at a ratio of 0.058. Group Two's primary reason for returning to active participation was *finding an ELCA church*, at a ratio of 0.050. The difference of Group One's ratio of primary words/phrases *pastor's outreach* is slightly higher by a ratio difference of 0.008.

The final theme identified by CRA for this first open-ended statement is *the person who most significantly influenced their return*. For Group One, the words/phrase *the pastor* is at a ratio of 0.080. Group Two's words/phrase *a family member* is at a ratio of 0.058. The difference of Group One's ratio *the pastor* was slightly higher by a difference of 0.022.

Table 5.6 correlates the same criteria as in Table 5.5 processed to generate themes and ratios of connected words/phrases used by respondents. The second statement respondents provided narrative stories in response to: “Please provide a brief description of your experience contacting an inactive or someone unchurched.”

TABLE 5.6

CRA Ratios from Respondents’ Narratives Contacting Inactives

Themes of Words & Phrases	Group One	Group Two
Inactive/unchurched contacted		
Inactive member	0.073*	0.012
Family	0.058	0.030
Friend	0.043	0.031*
Co-worker	0.021	0.012
Worship guest	0.019	0.012
Unchurched in community	0.044	0.026
Place or manner of contact		
Inactive/unchurched home	0.017	0.001
Hospital/nursing home	0.019	0.017*
Church activity	0.034	0.016
Community activity	0.082*	0.016
Place of employment	0.002	0.009
Social activity	0.017	0.011
Motivation for contact		
Christian thing to do	0.085*	0.045
Church program (Sun. school, VBS)	0.036	0.031
Evangelism/visitation team	0.023	0.050*
Pastor’s call	0.000	0.012
Social services/help	0.017	0.015
Response of contact		
Friendly	0.062	0.019
Visited church services	0.079*	0.053*
Joined church	0.032	0.012
Not interested	0.029	0.023

* Highest ratio

The first identified theme generated by the CRA process of the second statement is *the person intentionally contacted* by the participant. The greatest ratio of words/phrases reported by Group One was a *former inactive member,* at a ratio of 0.073. Group Two's highest ratio of words/phrases reported was to *inactive friends,* at a ratio of 0.031. Group One's ratio of words/phrases *a former inactive member* was slightly higher by a ratio difference of 0.042.

The second identified theme, *the place or manner participants intentionally contacted,* for Group One participants is *during community activities* (clubs, organizations, sports events), at a ratio of 0.082. Group Two's most frequent place of contact was *at hospitals or nursing homes*, at a ratio of 0.017. The difference of Group One's ratio of words/phrases during community activities was slightly higher by a ratio difference of 0.017.

The third identified theme by the CRA process is *the motivating factor.* The primary reason given by Group One participants was their understanding that *it's what Christians do,* at a ratio of 0.085. Group Two's primary motivating factor was *serving on an evangelism committee* at a ratio of 0.050. The difference of Group One's ratio of words/phrases, *it's what Christians do,* was slightly higher by a ratio difference of 0.035.

The final identified theme generated by the CRA process for this open-ended statement is *the response* by those contacted. For Group One, the words/phrase *a visit to church services*, at a ratio of 0.079. Group Two's words/phrase is also, *a visit to church services*, at a ratio of 0.053.This is the only theme where the words/phrases are the same. Even so, the difference of Group One's ratio is slightly higher by a difference of 0.026. Also worth noting is the words/phrase *not interested,* given by both Group One and Two.

Group One's ratio is 0.029, a ratio difference of 0.050 when compared to the words/phrase *visited church services*; Group Two's ratio is 0.023, a ratio difference of 0.022 when compared to the words/phrases *visited church services*. This shows that in both groups a person not affiliated with a church is more likely to be a guest at worship than to refuse that invitation.

Summary

This chapter presents the quantitative and qualitative statistical analyses obtained from my *concurrent-nested, mixed-method design.* The statistical analysis describes levels of significance found between two categories of ELCA congregations in the western United States. These statistical levels of significance can used to explain the readiness of congregations and respondents participating in this study and respondents who reach out, reconcile with, and receive believing nonbelongers with no church affiliation. The statistical testing methods used on the quantitative data include a summary of Chi-square tests (X^2), and simple logistic regression (SLR). The statistical testing method used on the qualitative data (participant responses to two open-ended questions) is Centering Resonance Analysis© (CRA). Quotes from the respondents with CRA thematic words/phrases with high ratios are integrated in the interpretation of the findings in the next chapter.

Table 5.7 summarizes the findings of significance in tables 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, and 5.4, identifying those Chi-square summaries of binomial variables with significant levels ($p<0.05$) and categorical variables in the SLR with significant levels ($p<0.05$). Table 5.7 indicates three categorical variables in the ELCA, SLR congregation analysis and five categorical variables in the respondent, SLR analysis that show levels of significance.

TABLE 5.7

Summary of Chi-squared Tests and SLR Analyses with Levels of Significance

Categories (SLR modeled value)	Table 5.1 X^2 value	Table 5.3 X^2 value	Table 5.2 SLR Odds Ratio	Table 5.4 SLR Odds Ratio
Participant Demographics				
Age (≥50 years old)		3.847*		
Years a member (≥12 yrs)				
Gender (male)				
Education level (≥BS)				
Marital status (married)				
Role in congregation (laity)				
Baptism (adult)				
→ Faith of origin (non-Lutheran)		6.233*		0.284**
Congregation Demographics				
Age (≥50 years old)	23.626***	16.044***		
Worship size (≥large)				
→ AWA trend (increase)	12.703***	4.036*	0.499**	
Membership trend (increase)				
→ ELCA Regions (West Coast)	72.960***	73.588***	4.135***	13.593***
Community Demographics				
→ Population size (≥10,000)	50.813***	20.192***	2.574***	
→ Population trend (increase)	13.799***	15.478***		0.387*
Questions 1-12 (yes)				
Members know mission				
Members have training		6.145*		
Member involved in mission		7.289**		
Pastor emphasizes mission		8.079**		
Pastor preaches reaching out				
→ Pastor coaches with outreach				1.302*
Facilities for outreach				
→ Programs for outreach				1.758**
Staff for outreach				
Self committed to outreach				
Self received outreach training		5.485*		
Self makes outreach contacts		7.800**		

TABLE 5.7, continued

Categories	Table 5.1 X^2 value	Table 5.3 X^2 value	Table 5.2 SLR Odds Ratio	Table 5.4 SLR Odds Ratio
Questions 13-24 (agree)				
Members prefer tradition				
Members readily welcome others		8.468**		
Members befriend others		15.288***		
Pastor speaks urgently of outreach				
Pastor partners with members		5.627*		
Pastor spends time w/ nonmembers		9.658**		
Worship emphasizes welcome		11.659***		
Worship times accommodating				
Education emphasizes outreach				
Education times accommodating		3.847*		
Stewardship stresses outreach		7.460**		
Church offers social services		8.862**		
Questions 25-36 (agree)				
Members open to change w/vision		8.598**		
Members seek out nonbelongers		8.200**		
Members known in community		7.977**		
Pastor open to change				
Pastor trains us to reach out				
Pastor known as civic leader				
Facilities (outside) attractive				
Facilities (outside) have signs				
Facilities are accessible				
All staff trained to welcome		5.434*		
Members support my outreach		9.461**		
Community describes us as caring				

* - Significant at the .05 level
** - Significant at the .01 level
*** - Significant at the .001 level

Table 5.7 shows the significant levels found in the Chi-square test summaries from tables 5.1 and 5.3, and the significant levels found in the SLR analysis from tables 5.2 and 5.4 with levels of significance of at least <.05. Since SLR analysis is the more complex of the two statistical analyses by the fact that it measures the significant effects of all the independent and intervening variables have on the dependent variable, this summary places emphasis on the SLR analyses and the seven categorical areas that show levels of significant rather than the Chi-square tests. The Chi-square tests are included to show that in some cases the Chi-square effects are supported by the SLR analyses, while in other cases, the Chi-square effect are not support by the SLR analyses.

The primary categorical variable to explain levels of significance in the regression model analysis for both the systematically selected ELCA congregations and this study's respondents is the *regional location* of congregations in ELCA Regions. The results of the regression analysis for the ELCA demographics show that congregations whose locations are on the West Coast (ELCA Regions One and Two) are 4.135 times more likely to be a member of Group One congregations and who received more adults by baptism and reaffirmation of faith than are congregations located in the Midwest. The results of the regression analysis including respondents' demographics are 13.593 times more likely to belong to a Group One congregation who received more adults by baptism and reaffirmation of faith than are congregations located in the Midwest. Both regression models show that regional location on the West Coast has significance on the readiness of congregations and respondents who belong to congregations in Group One to reach out and receive believing nonbelongers.

The second variable to show levels of significance in the ELCA regression model, but not the respondents' regression model, is the annual average worship attendance size. The results of the regression analysis for the ELCA demographics show that congregations whose average worship attendance over five years (2001-2005) increased are only 0.499 times as likely to belong to a Group One congregation than are congregations whose average worship attendance decreased.

The third variable to show levels of significance in the ELCA regression model, but not the respondents' regression model, is the population size of the host community. The results of the regression analysis for the ELCA demographics show that congregations whose host population is equal to or greater than 10,000 are 2.574 times more likely to belong to a Group One congregation than are congregations whose community population size is less than 10,000.

The forth variable to show significance in the respondents' regression model, but not in the ELCA regression model, is the category of the respondents' origin of faith. The results of the regression analysis show that Group One respondents whose faith of origin is non-Lutheran are only 0.284 times as likely to be members of Group One congregations who received more adults by baptism and reaffirmation of faith than are respondents who are Lutheran in their faith of origin.

The fifth variable to show significance in the respondents' regression model, but not in the ELCA regression model, is the category of the respondents' congregational host community population trend. The results of the regression analysis show that respondents belonging to a congregation in a host community with a population increase are only 0.387 times as likely to be members of a Group One congregation as are

respondents who belong to a congregation in a host community with a population decrease.

The sixth variable to show significance in the respondents' regression model is the respondents' answer to statement six, "Our pastor is like a coach with our members to reach inactives and the unchurched." The results of the regression analysis show that respondents who answered *yes* to statement six are 1.302 times more likely to be a member of Group One congregations as are respondents who answered *no* to statement six.

The seventh and final variable to show significance in the respondents' regression model was the respondents' answer to statement eight, "The church programs have been changed to reach and receive potential members." The results of the regression analysis show that respondents who answered *yes* to statement eight are 1.758 times more likely to be a member of Group One congregations as are respondents who answered *no* to statement eight.

These eight statistical findings with levels of significance are the foundation for the interpretation used to explain the readiness between two categories of ELCA congregations in the western United States presented in the next chapter. These eight quantitative findings also incorporate the qualitative findings described in section five with tables 5.5 and 5.6 to present, in the conclusions and reflections in the last chapter.

CHAPTER 6

INTERPRETATIONS AND REFLECTIONS ON THE FINDINGS

This chapter concludes with the reflections and interpretations on the readiness of the dichotomous groups of systematically sampled ELCA congregations to reach out and to receive believing nonbelongers. These conclusions, based on the findings of chapter 5, are primarily my own except where other authors citations re-engage the theology and theory that earlier was identified as the foundation and framework for this research. In addition, I insert anonymous respondents' quotations to illuminate the quantitative findings, taking opportunity to listen to those who were former believing nonbelongers or who have reached out to the unchurched.

Rejection of the Null Hypothesis

Table 5.7 shows seven categorical areas with levels of significance found by the two simple logistic regression analyses. One of the categorical areas, *ELCA Regions*, is found in both the 400 systematically selected ELCA dichotomous congregations regression model, and the 284 respondents that belong to Groups One and Two. Two of the categorical areas, five year (2001-2005) *annual average worship attendance trend* (increase) and *host community population size* (greater than or equal to 10,000) are found only in the 400 systematically selected ELCA dichotomous congregations regression model. Four of the categorical areas: 1) *faith of origin, 2) host community population trend* (2000-2004), 3) *question 6* ("Our pastor is like a coach with our members to reach

inactives and the unchurched."), and 4) *question 8* ("The church programs have been changed to reach and receive potential members.") are found only in the 284 respondent regression model. These seven findings demonstrate the null hypothesis: There is no significant difference of readiness between the ELCA congregations that primarily reach, reconcile, and receive believing nonbelongers and ELCA congregations that receive more adults by transfer than by baptism and reaffirmation, is to be rejected. Therefore, the alternate hypothesis: there *is* a significant difference of readiness between the ELCA congregations who receive adults by means of baptism and reaffirmation than by means of transfer, is to be accepted.

In accepting the alternate hypothesis, I want to clearly reemphasize that this study does not offer a quick fix or generalized solutions for change toward "readiness to reach out to, reconcile with, and receive" believing nonbelongers. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the issue of readiness of ELCA congregations and believing belongers to participate in *missio Dei* by way of theological interpretation and theoretical reflection.

Caution is employed in generalizing the seven categorical areas of significance. E.g., to say that "ELCA congregations on the West Coast are the only ELCA congregations that are actively and contextually reaching out to and receiving believing nonbelongers" is to misinterpret the findings of this study and misunderstand the existing and emerging literature. To state that "ELCA congregations and adults, who belong to the types of congregations that receive more adults by baptism and reaffirmation of faith than by transfer, are churches and communities that have increased average worship attendance trends and increased population trends" is to misread the evidence presented in this research. To conclude that "ELCA congregations that empower their recently-

received members, whose faith of origin is non-Lutheran, for evangelism," or that "pastors who are actively coaching members in outreach," or that "churches that have changed their programs to emphasize inviting and including believing nonbelongers are the only ones to receive the unaffiliated" is to overlook the obvious. These generalized statements show glimpses of and perceptions by congregations and respondents that were more likely to have changed and are ready to reach out to the unaffiliated; but they are not definitively the only perspectives. Congregations systematically selected, and respondents who belonged to one of these congregations used in this study that received more adults by transfer, may have also received believing nonbelongers. But I discerned, via the differences that reaching out to unaffiliated adults was their intended focus and certainly not their primary means of receiving new members.

In previous chapters, I introduced two theoretical models helpful in interpreting statistical analysis with narrative descriptions for congregational readiness, Prochaska's *Stages of Change*, and Parshall's *Spectrum of Contextualization*. Prochaska's *Stages of Change* is a behavioral model that identifies responses in increments that begin with *pre-contemplative* and progress toward *contemplative, preparatory, active, and sustaining.* Originally, these five stages were used in my questionnaire in a Likert scale, but later transformed and summarized into binomial categories (*contemplative* and *active*). In a similar way, I transformed and summarized Parshall's Spectrum of Contextualization into binomial categories, *traditionally-centered congregations* (sustained programs and members) and *Christ-centered congregations* (contacts made beyond facilities, programs, and members). Therefore, I equate congregations that are *contemplative* in their readiness with those congregations that are *traditionally-centered;* and congregations that are *active*

in their readiness with those congregations that are *Christ-centered*. I will apply these theoretical labels to my interpretation of the four significant categorical areas.

These seven categorical areas are re-interpreted in detail in the following four sections: readiness to seek out inactives goes beyond believing; readiness to reach out to those unaffiliated goes beyond belonging; readiness to reconcile with believing nonbelongers goes beyond contemplation; and readiness to receive the lost goes beyond Sunday. Following these four sections, I offer key questions that suggest future research or ways this study might commence the "elephant in the room" such that congregations will readily, actively, and contextually reach out to believing nonbelongers.

Readiness to Seek Out Inactives Goes Beyond Contemplation

The myth is: "if you build it they will come." This statement assumes that if congregations build a new facility, relocate the campus, expand programs, or increase the number of staff to attract youth and families, people will come. In the postmodern age, with the advent of the mega-size church, it appears that the myth is reality. Upon closer examination of the truth, one has to wonder if the majority of adults attracted to the mega church aren't comprised of transfers from smaller congregations that have inadequate facilities, programs, and staff for a growing number of Americans living in a consumer driven society. Congregations that receive more adults by transfer from other congregations are merely exchanging members and are not addressing the issue of those members leaving 'out the back door' of the church and becoming disillusioned or unaffiliated and therefore joining the growing number of believing nonbelongers in their community.

Another dimension of this myth has to do with believing that "families with children draw other families with children" or that "mature adults with no children cannot reach out to and receive families unaffiliated with any church." The evidence from this study does not support this assumption about attraction. The only categorical variable regarding membership demographics that showed a level of significance was in the respondent's regression model regarding the faith of origin (non-Lutheran). In addition, the only categorical variable regarding "changes in readiness" to receive believing nonbelongers was in the respondents' regression model where belonging to a congregation is likely to have programs emphasizing out reach. Nowhere in the data did I find that adding or changing facilities or staff changed the readiness of congregations to seek and receive believing nonbelongers. Therefore, based on the findings in the regression models, I find no evidence to support this myth of attraction as a way to receive believing nonbelongers.

I was surprised to find the respondents' categorical characteristic shows that "non-Lutheran faith of origin" is only 0.284 times as likely to members of a congregation that received more adults by baptism and reaffirmation of faith. My interpretation of this statistical analysis suggests that congregations with a primary mission to build relationships, not remodel facilities, add staff or expand programs, is the primary result of a congregation's readiness to receive those with no church affiliation. Respondents who belong to ELCA congregations that are more ready to seek out the unaffiliated seem to be more ready to change their Christendom tradition from assuming "others know where and what we offer" to knowing "we need to invite and include others in what we offer." My analysis demonstrates that congregations and respondents who reach out to and receive

those unaffiliated with any church believe the Lutheran name, its history and heritage is insufficient in attracting believing nonbelongers. Instead, ELCA congregations and respondents who actively emphasize and contextualize *missio Dei* in contrast to a Lutheran tradition or pre-Christendom assumption that the Church has an attraction, seem to embody the biblical story of Jesus instructing and sending his followers: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons . . . ." (Matthew 10:5-8). A narrative from a respondent supports this readiness to contextualize this biblical story with these words: "As genuine care was shown to me and my spouse when we first came to this church, we in turn have been able to show the same kind of care toward other visitors, because we know this is what Jesus wants us to do."

The challenge and opportunity within this finding is one of evangelism, restoration, and member care. The ELCA is not the majority denomination affiliation within any of the geographic regions within the western United States. If the trend presented by the ELCA Office of Analysis and Research, and other groups that survey the population of these regions, is accurate (and I have no reason to believe it isn't,) the proportion of ELCA adults in every region is decreasing. With the lack of significant levels in other categories, if the readiness of a congregation to seek believing nonbelongers isn't based on membership demographics such as age, gender, marital status, or educational level, the believing nonbelonger in every community and region, every congregation in the United States, has many opportunities to find and receive inactives and unchurched within their community.

My interpretation of the data suggests that ELCA believing belongers need to change from contemplation of the biblical message to *missio Dei,* an active contextualization. The necessity for this change is demonstrated by Prochaska who would say: revitalization is the stage of behavioral change that goes beyond believing "we're too old," or "we're too small," or "too tired," thoughts of contemplation. He would say, "If you want your congregation to live, not die, change your behavior; reach out—not in." Such was the method of Jesus, practicing what he preached and prayed; "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:37-38).

Applying Parshall's experience and wisdom to the readiness to reach out and receive others, is not about how long one has been an active believing belonger (newly received or long time member) or what role (clergy/laity) one has in the congregation. Readiness to live out the Christian faith is about believing humans belong to Christ and must share their joy with others where they are. *Christ-centered* congregations in this study demonstrate Jesus' mission to "seek the lost" in many and various ways. This is reflected by one narrative response that summaries what other participants said, in general: "I was too busy, too tired, and too distracted to attend church when I was younger and had kids at home. But a new family reached out to me and invited me to the church they recently joined, and after a year of learning the members really cared that I was there, I joined too."

My findings parallel the conclusions of Rainer[1] and Hendricks[2] in their interviews with former believing nonbelongers who longed for a genuine caring community that actually reached out to others. Frost and Hirsh also identified the theology and praxis of missional incarnation by noting the contacts of newly-received members reaching out to other inactives to form small group communities within congregations rather than expecting long-time members to reach out to them.[3] It would seem that empowering those whose faith origin is non-Lutheran to tell their story of faith to others who are yet unaffiliated with any church is a better stewardship of resources than relocating, remodeling, or adding staff.

Readiness to Reach Out is Contextualization

In choosing a church, active life-long Lutherans may tend to seek out congregations for different reasons than do inactives and the unchurched. Lutherans who are believing belongers, and who have actively attended worship and participate in the life and service of a church but are in some kind of a transition, don't wait to be invited; they tend to seek congregations based on denomination affiliation, worship familiarity, congregational hospitality, or pastoral presence. In urban settings, Christians seem to be willing to drive some distance to belong to a church that satisfies their specifications of a church. In rural settings they tend to think nothing of driving long distances to belong to a church that meets their expectations of a church. Those unaffiliated with a church, and

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[1] Thom S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 121.

[2] William Hendricks, *Exit Interviews* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1993), 260.

[3] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the Twenty-First Century Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 37-43.

seeking spiritual services in times of change or crisis, tend to choose a congregation based on location, appearance, or convenience. These tendencies feed a myth that says "only newer or remodeled churches located in communities with growing and changing populations might increase their membership, worship attendance, and contributions."

What this study found as evidence only partially supports this myth. My regression analyses of systematically selected ELCA congregations and respondents belonging to these congregations showed that those with increased annual average worship attendance and those independently located in communities with increased populations are less than 1 time more likely to increase adult membership through baptism and reaffirmation of faith. However, congregations located in communities with a population ≥10,000 are 2.6 times more likely to be congregations that received adults through baptism and reaffirmation of faith. Again, using the SLR category of "a congregation and a respondent belonging to congregations located on the West Coast" these congregations were 3 to 4 times more likely to be congregations that received more adults by baptism and reaffirmation of faith than by transfer.

The high regression ratio related to the independent category of regional location might simply be explained by the fact that communities in Region One have the highest proportion of population unaffiliated (with a church) in the United States, at 62.8%,[4] followed by Region Two, at 47.3%;[5] whereas the unaffiliated in the Midwest are at

[4] Patricia O'Connell Killen and Mark Silk, eds., *Religion and Public Life in the Pacific Northwest: The None Zone*, Religion by Region (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004), 22.

[5] Wade Clark Roof and Mark Silk, eds., *Religion and Public Life in the Pacific Region: Fluid Identities*, Religion by Region (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2005), 22.

41.0%.[6] This means there are proportionately more believing nonbelongers on the West Coast than in the Midwest. These proportions also show the Midwest has a significant and growing number of people unaffiliated with any church. As mentioned in chapter one, there are also cultural differences on the West Coast. However, my interpretation of regional location effecting readiness to reach out goes beyond the bonds of blood and marriage to family or long-time membership in organized groups such as the American Legion or Veterans of Foreign Wars. Analysis of data in congregations within my study concur with Barlow and Silk regarding congregations in the Midwest,[7] and Killen and Silk who describe congregations in the Pacific Northwest[8] (Region One) and the Pacific[9] (Region Two) as those recognizing persons wanting to belong to a caring group or community.

From the work of Prochaska's behavioral theory of change I have seen that people who have similar backgrounds have a social propensity to seek and find others like themselves who form community or small groups. Those who have a social proclivity to remain connected by long time relationships are less likely to reach out and form new relationships. With this understanding of regional location and culture, I am able to apply Prochaska's behavioral theory and further interpret why West Coast congregations are more likely to be ready to change. Some changes occur in linear progression in the short term only to revert to the starting place. An example of this would be a congregation

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[6] Philip L. Barlow and Mark Silk, eds., *Religion and Public Life in the Midwest: America's Common Denominator?*, Religion by Region (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004), 18.

[7] Ibid., 14-27.

[8] Killen and Silk, eds., *Religion and Public Life in the Pacific Northwest: The None Zone*, 9-18.

[9] Roof and Silk, eds., *Religion and Public Life in the Pacific Region: Fluid Identities*, 11-17.

contemplating reaching out to those unaffiliated with any church, then making preparations to invite and include them, even implementing their plans, only to regress to contemplating why the unaffiliated didn't respond or return. Other changes move in cyclic progression: moving from contemplation to preparation, then reverting back to contemplation without actually acting on the change due to fear or resistance.

An entire congregation's culture can control the readiness to change as can a small group or single leader. If those with power to effect change are replaced frequently, at the time of replacement congregational changes made tend to revert to their previous stage, thus sustaining the status quo. If those with power are supported by the majority, the change will progress to the next stage. The respondents' regression analysis related to survey question six, regarding the pastor's coaching of the congregation in outreach, does not specify how this happens, only that it does. Such pastoral leadership accepted and acted upon by the majority does effect in the change of progressing from contemplation toward being readily active in outreach and the reception of believing nonbelongers. This helps explain the readiness for the social constructs created by ELCA congregations and respondents living and belonging to congregations on the West Coast who seem to be more likely to welcome the stranger, as prayed by Jesus:

> As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth. I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me (John 17:1-25).

I judge that congregations located on the West Coast who receive adults more by baptism and reaffirmation (using Parshall's own words) "are *contextualized Christ-centered churches.*" These *Christ-centered* congregations have learned to take their

mission to those who have no attraction to *traditionally-centered* churches. Their readiness to reach out to and receive inactives or the unchurched is similar to Jesus' inclusive ministry to the women in the district of Tyre and Sidon:

> He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she [a Canaanite woman] came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly" (Matthew 15:24-28).

According to Barna and others researches like him, the day is coming when the proportion of believing nonbelongers in the Midwest will resemble the growing numbers on the West Coast. When that day comes, Midwest congregations that recognize believing nonbelongers as their mission field might look to sister congregations on the West Coast as mentors and models. Experience teaches us that those congregations who have learned to reach out and receive adults by baptism and reaffirmation of faith have incorporated the lost, which Paul said are worth pursuing

> From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:16-20).

I am not suggesting that the majority of ELCA congregations in the Midwest can't or won't change their attitudes and actions regarding outreach to the inactive or unchurched. However, the research here suggests that more congregations in the Midwest than on the West Coast remain contemplative and that change can not happen until they recognize they need believing nonbelongers as much as believing nonbelongers need

them. Discovering that need is the next stage in preparing for and actively responding to the gospel as Jesus demonstrated in befriending Zacchaeus and becoming his companion in his house at dinner (Luke 19:3-10), or as Peter acted in befriending Cornelius and becoming his companion in his house at dinner (Acts 10:25-48).

Readiness to Reconcile Is an Active Response

I believe the most important reason for rejecting the null hypothesis is the significant readiness of ELCA congregations whose clergy coach with members to make contact with nonmembers and become companions with those unaffiliated with a church. The one categorical variable with levels of significance in the SLR analyses clearly explains Group One's reception of believing nonbelongers. If this pastoral leadership of coaching is coupled with the independence of Group One's regression to change the emphasis of congregational programs to invite and include those unaffiliated with a church, then a perspective of readiness to reconcile, as an active response to biblical stories of Jesus' words that point to *missio Dei* clearly focuses the congregation on the mission of the church to reach out to believing nonbelongers. Interpreting the statistical analyses and data in the existing and emerging literature, as well as the implication, means congregational leadership from the pastor is paramount to changing the traditional understanding about praxis of the vocation of members and duties of the pastor in order to seek and receive the lost. This seems to be the similar, necessary paradigm change Paul argued for before the Jerusalem councils. "So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, saying, 'Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?' Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step . . ." (Acts 11:2-4). I interpret readiness to reach out as an intentional response of faith by those active in

missio Dei. If the ELCA is to participate in, and not simply contemplate, in *missio Dei*, they must go beyond imagining those who are lost; their mission is to identify *with* the lost and reconcile their relationships, as did Peter and Paul before the Jerusalem council:

> After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "My brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of the good news and become believers" . . . . The whole assembly kept silence, and listened to Barnabas and Paul as they told of all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles. After they finished speaking, James replied, "My brothers, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first looked favorably on the Gentiles, to take from among them a people for his name . . ." (Acts 15:7-14).

It is a sad commentary that a number of participants wrote responses to the open-ended question, "Describe your experience contacting an inactive member or someone unchurched," by saying, e.g., "When I stopped going to church, no one contacted me. It was as if I didn't exist, although I had served over ten years on education, worship, and youth committees. Then the new pastor, and later a member, contacted me, listen (sic), and rekindled a desire to return to church." Another participant said, "When my pastor did not visit me, I began to look for another congregation that was friendlier, more inviting, and more accepting of me and my family . . . it seemed my congregation never cared I was gone." By the fewer number of responses to the same question from Group Two, it would seem that many congregations are conditioned to accept/attract transfers and assume that inactives and the unchurched will be unreceptive. Furthermore, whole congregations are conditioned to avoiding outreach. A participant from Group Two remarked, "Visiting inactives isn't worth the investment of time and energy for the return or the rejection." Remarks such as these are exactly what Hendricks heard in preparation for his book of exit interview with those who left the church,[10] and are significantly

[10] Hendricks, *Exit Interviews*, 20.

different than the reported attitudes and actions from congregations that readily make contacts, and who are not willing to wait and hope for inactives to wander back.

In Chapter One, I referred congregations as *missional* or *maintenance*. With the emerging literature and categorical, significant data relating to missional readiness to receive the lost by making contacts, I now have evidence to support my choice of this distinction. In my opinion, Prochaska's labels, *contemplation* and *activation* can be interchanged with *maintenance* and *missional*. Missional congregations have gone beyond believing and gone beyond belonging, they are what Kotter calls ". . . an effective team, built on trust and a common goal."[11] Congregations that have learned to contextualize the biblical stories of the New Testament Church are, indeed, embracing Jesus' words (John 21:15-17).

Readiness to Receive the Lost Goes Beyond the Sunday Setting

Prior to my study, I assumed that congregational core ministries like worship, education, hospitality, and evangelism, were more effective means of contacting believing nonbelongers. This study validates what the ELCA office of Research and Evaluation found in their 2000 study on evangelism—outreach programs do not necessarily make a significant difference in receiving adult members. In my study, Group One reported that 62.4 percent of the participants (including clergy) had no formal training in evangelism to reach out to inactives and unchurched and 75.7 percent of Group Two reported the same finding. A fourth categorical variable that significantly differentiated the groups was the congregations' programs that have been changed to reach and receive potential members. Those congregations who have changed the

[11] John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1996), 61-65.

emphasis of their programmatic ministries to reach out to those unaffiliated are 1.758 times more actively reaching and receiving believing nonbelongers. This seems to suggest that those ELCA congregation that have paid attention to the 2000 ELCA report have indeed changed their emphasis of mission to do more than sustain the Lutheran name, heritage, and tradition. These congregations have changed the praxis of mission and vocation. I am convinced by this SLR analysis and the Chi-square tests (from questions 2, 3, and 4 that show members are receiving more training in evangelism, members are involved more in mission, and pastors are emphasizing mission as outreach to the unaffiliated) do have greater levels of significance on the readiness of congregations to receive believing nonbelongers.

In the literature review, I briefly noted a comparison of Church Growth with Missional thinking made by Van Rheenen. Her conceptual framework helps to explain the interpretation of this finding here. Upon reflection on the evidence presented by Group One congregations, I perceive their transformation by the Spirit of God as a postmodern-theocentric/theological-way of participating in *missio Dei* through faith-based social services. While this transformation was not expected at the onset of my study, I have come to embrace this theological interpretation.

Integrating theology with elements of Prochaska's theory, Group One congregations have "gone beyond Sunday" to recognize and reach out to the lost. One participant shared, "I grew up in the Catholic Church and became inactive after college. It took a family crisis to move me closer to God, but it was the Lutherans who showed they cared by inviting and including me in church activities when I needed help and friends." This was one of several narrative threads identified that mentioned a show of care, being

invited and included, as the primary reason for joining the church. Congregations who have contextualized Jesus' ministry by responding to the community's unaffiliated have found ways to transcend traditional Sunday icons, language, and symbols, through incarnational ways of inviting and including others in the lives of members. Parshall calls this social contextualized ministry a *Christ-centered church* in the community, as "going to" those who need to live (Matthew 18:14-22).

Limitations of Findings on Readiness for Reconciliation

Having discussed the five categorical variables: faith of origin (of members), population decreasing growth trend (of host community), regional location of the congregation, 1) pastoral partnership (with members) as outreach to the unaffiliated and 2) a change in programmatic ministries to emphasize outreach to inactives and the unchurched, each can stand alone, or be prioritized, as the first step toward change. Earlier I stated that my study does not identify easy solutions, quick fixes, or even a model for strategic planning for a congregation to follow. The parameters of this study are smaller than the larger issue of church growth. This is a study from a missional perspective of the central work of receiving the lost. I believe missional readiness depends on the hearts and minds of the whole congregation—pastoral leadership, membership participation, and openness to seek, befriend, and sustain relationships with those with no church affiliation. Readiness for change cannot be planned or scripted; readiness is a missional, perichoretic relationship, when led by the Triune God. Change can be taught; however, through a relational process I call *learning by doing*. Diagnosing where a congregation is in its stage of readiness (pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, sustaining) helps provide a perspective for vision in mission and

strategic planning. To say that all congregations start at the same place and progress at the same rate in their readiness to reconcile would be a serious generalization.

A second limitation of this study was the necessity to narrow the subject by scope and form due to limited financial resources and available time for follow up by means of a second questionnaire regarding the length of time it takes for change to occur. Prochaska's work in behavioral-social sciences documents that the readiness for change not only happens very slowly, but that no two cases for change happen at the same rate of time through the various stages of readiness. Due to a design flaw in the first twelve questions, the opportunity to analyze the span of years involved in each category had to be disregarded because of participant misinterpretation. As I mentioned in the thesis introduction, participants had opportunity and tendency to exaggerate by reporting what they thought the author wanted to hear. I believe a better way to receive the information regarding the timeline of stages in readiness for change would be to follow up the initial questionnaire with face to face or phone interviews. "How much time?" and "how many contacts are needed to develop and sustain reconciliation?" are still unanswered questions to be explored and examined. Answers to these questions would not be necessary to discern here the effects of the previous categories mentioned, but the element of time would provide further insight into developing a relational planning process for congregations who want to change their readiness for outreach.

A final limitation of this research is the dependence upon three secular theoretical tools whose original application was not designed for a development of a mixed-method study informed by a theological foundation and theoretical framework. The first tool used was Rainer's survey used originally to interview people who were unchurched. Rainer's

theological foundation only had a qualitative design from which I summarized his fifty questions into an quantitative inventory of readiness with thirty-six questions clustered in areas that related to congregation, pastor, staff, self, programs, and facilities. By quantifying his qualitative tool I could have no way of correlating his results with these findings. The second tool, Prochaska's behavioral Stages of Change theory was originally used in a study of the readiness of people to overcome smoking additions and was not previously designed for a theological and congregational study of this type. The first limitation of Prochaska's theory was that his studies were primarily of *individuals* not large groups like congregations. The second limitation using this Prochaska's theory was that while Prochaska was his own constant observer of his subjects, I depended upon the perceptions and truth of observations of participants to measure the various categorical levels of readiness. This limitation of participant perceptions may also be an affect of a third theoretical tool used, namely Parshall's contextualization spectrum for congregations. This tool was originally applied to *Christians* evangelizing Asian *Muslims*, not American Christians reconciling with believing inactives or the unchurched in the United States. The over-all limitation of these three tools (Rainer's questionnaire, Prochaska theory, and Parshall's spectrum) restricted the verification and reliability of the participant responses. In as much as I found no better theoretical tools to use in a mixed-method approach to my subject, these limitations do not stand in the way of formulating conclusions or the further research by others.

A Key Question for Possible Future Research

In addition to the issue of time related to readiness to find, reach out to, and receive believing nonbelongers, I believe a key question for future research to be "What

biblical stories form foundational inspiration for congregations and baptized believers to respond to the gospel?" I presented a biblical and theological foundation and theoretical imagination in framing the study of readiness in this research. However, my research did not investigate the biblical accounts (if any) of the congregations and respondents within their ministries and pastoral leadership as they contextualized believing and belonging to Christ and the Church. I believe a study of this magnitude might help discern existing, emerging, and missing biblical/theological perspectives that effect contextualizing congregational mission within *missio Dei*. Such a study would hopefully change the perspective from what believers expect from the Church to what Jesus Christ expects from those who confess to believe in and belong to him.

Summary

The rejection of the null-hypothesis and acceptance of the alternate hypothesis: There is a significant difference of readiness between the ELCA congregations who receive adults more by means of baptism and reaffirmation than by means of transfer, is the statistical evidence that there is an emerging *missio ecclesia* among some ELCA congregation actively and contextually involved in *missio Dei*. This study's specific findings of seven categorical areas with levels of significance show that location (which cannot be changed, but attitudes of hospitality beyond the congregational context can be changed), pastoral leadership to act as a coach with members in outreach (can be changed), lay participation to make contacts with inactives and unchurched (can be changed), and emphasis of core ministries to focus on inviting and including others in the lives of members beyond Sunday as well as within the congregations' programs (can be changed) do have effects on readiness among the ELCA congregations.

The *elephant in the room* (the continued departure of members becoming believing nonbelongers) can no longer be a conversation that has a response of contemplation. Believing and belonging members of the ELCA need to have a more urgent sense of change. This change is essential ELCA congregations want to survive the cultural changes of declining church affiliation and membership within the United States and thrive. Congregations actively and contextually involved in *missio Dei* based on this study's evidence are those that involve pastors and members in outreach to their inactive and unaffiliated neighbors in response to the gospel. Such responses include active imagination and contextualization of Jesus' prayer in Matthew 9, his proclamations in Matthew 15 and 18, and his parables in Luke 15, as well as Paul's writing in 1st Corinthians 5 within ones own congregation and community. Indeed, reaching out and reconciling with lost family, friends, and neighbors is the new thing that is needed in the ELCA. The age of Luther's Christendom is gone, gone forever. ELCA congregations cannot survive on the assumption that if we build or remodel a facility inactives and the unchurched will come. Nevertheless, Luther's theology of a priesthood of all believers and baptismal vocation can be missional. The Christian faith of every member is all about building and restoring loving relationships that once were lost and need to be found. These restored relationships are what made the difference to Group One ELCA congregational members and the lost that have been found and received into the fold.

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EPILOGUE

PARTICIPATING IN MY FINDINGS

In the introduction I quoted an ELCA bishop who referred to the five year (2001-2005) statistic of 80,000 lost members going out the back door of the church and joining the ever growing number of those unaffiliated with a congregation as "the elephant in the room."[1] This thesis is my commencement into that conversation and my struggle with the question "what does it take to change the readiness of believing belongers to reach out to, reconcile with, and receive back into communion with Christ and the fellowship of a congregation those who have left the church and are lost?"

My review of literature review as and all the required and suggested reading for the courses of this program, make it ever clearer to me that *missio Dei* isn't about Church membership. Participating in God's mission is about our daily baptismal response to the gospel in walking with the Spirit of the risen Jesus Christ into the kingdom of God. The evidence found in this study's search of theological and theoretical literature and statistical analyses of data has reinforced my perception that congregational mission and church leadership development most generally happens in, with, and through congregations that intentionally partner with the Holy Spirit. Such a partnership becomes manifested in congregations that are readily active and contextualizing their ministries and outreach and are Christ-centered in their church and host communities rather than

[1] Mark S. Hanson, "Tackling Membership Decline," *The Lutheran*, January 2007 2006, 58.

merely contemplating the issues of membership decline. From a theological and theoretical perspective, I conclude my five years of study and this thesis not with a bold new truth, but with a truthful story of how I experienced God at work in the life and the service of my congregation as well as in my own life.

Walking with Jacob: Wresting with a Congregation in Need of a Vision

Approximately the same time I was accepted into the Congregational Mission and Leadership Development program, God provided me the privilege to partner with "Jacob" (not his real name) in leading our one-hundred twenty-four year old congregation in Nebraska that had no vision for the future other than a rear view of the past through changes for mission. As were a significant number of those who responded to my study, Jacob—an adult over the age of fifty—was within the past five years, received into this congregation by reaffirmation of faith from a non-Lutheran tradition. He grew up in the western rural part of the state, but moved to the eastern urban part seeking opportunities of higher education and employment. A time in the military exposed him to a plurality of lifestyles outside the heart of the Midwest including his own experiences of marriage and parenthood. His life's journey included divorce and remarriage to a woman who, as a child, attended Sunday school in this rural congregation west of the capital city. However, since the couple was employed in the city, they joined another mainline church as a good compromise to their competing faiths of origin. After the children left home, Jacob built a new home on his wife's family homestead a few miles north of the rural community where she attended Sunday school. They both continued to commute the hour from their new home to their jobs in the city, but over time decided to seek a congregation closer to home.

The first time they were guests at worship Jacob and his wife were hardly noticed by the congregation's membership, whose behavior is to arrive within minutes of the service and leave immediately afterward (due is large part to the insufficient space in the facility for fellowship and because approximately eighty percent of the members are related to one another). As I do with all guests, I visited them one evening that week in their home and listened to them express their hopes of becoming involved in the community and a local congregation. After some time of *church shopping* they became members at the same time two major events happened: the congregation began a year-long program of participation in a mid-sized congregation transformation project, and Jacob lost his job. Jacob needed a good outlet for his energy, and he and his wife joined several life-long and long-time members on the transformation team. After a year of meeting monthly, the team disbanded. The insights and proposals offered to the congregation's leadership were *taken under advisement*. However, this couple helped uncover the feelings of several others who had married into the congregation but who still felt like outsiders. Jacob continued to assimilate into the community and the congregation as well as renew affiliation with another not-for-profit organization. When he was elected to the church council he became the first male *not* related to another member of the congregation or community, by blood or marriage, to hold church office. This was the beginning of a perichoretic partnership that readied some of the leadership for a journey from missional contemplation into a mission of outreach preparation and activation.

During his first year on the council, Jacob began to understand what I had already learned; this congregation preferred to preserve the past and provide worship based on tradition alone. Privately, we compared observations and perceptions of leadership styles

in our Midwest context, covering non-profit organizations, businesses, and farm management. We agreed that the attitudes and behaviors of the membership are more likely to be of a managerial style of status-quo, relying on existing relationships and a network of family and friends and rejecting other styles of leadership. Into our leadership partnering, Jacob brought a business and non-profit organizational perspective and I brought a theological foundation, as well as a non-profit organizational model.

The second and third year on church council, as he gained the trust of the congregation, Jacob was elected president. The members endorsed his leadership style and his partnership with me. As we shared ideas, we agreed that if we were going to revitalize the congregation's declining membership, decreasing worship attendance, and diminished stewardship participation, we needed to have a vision to help change the attitude and actions of members. It was our similar observation that trust was needed among the plurality of parties separated and segregated by a hundred years and two histories, heritage, and traditions. Jacob and I envisioned that the congregational core ministries could best be handled by ministry teams with permission and support given by the church council. In addition, we believed that we would have to model a *team concept*—of the pastor being a player-coach and council members being team-captains—to break the mentality of either having a hired-hand do the work or doing the work alone. We encouraged open and honest communications between church council members and team members responsible for the various ministries. Our hope was to change the congregational emphasis from maintaining existing membership to becoming a church embracing others, a church in mission.

Like all relationships our partnership has evolved as we wrestle with a church council and congregation that often lack a majority ready to change their hearts to become a congregation for the sake of others. In living out the research and study of this thesis, Jacob and I have seen some of the congregation slowly change from contemplation, planning, and implementation. Some of the actions reverted back to the planning stage and some to the contemplation stage, but the implementation of a second worship service has remained as has the team concept of permission-giving to those outside the church council to do whatever it takes to provide education, stewardship, and youth ministries. Jacob and I have often been surprised by the Spirit of God providing opportunities, challenges, and blessings to the congregation through our contact with inactives. More and more, the leadership sees the challenges inherent in being a rural congregation whose population is decreasing. We can no longer rely on our history, heritage, and traditions to attract members; we must imagine a future under the guidance of God's desires for us. Our members have become much more receptive to offering hospitality and social services to guests and nonmembers. Several life-long and long-time members are even offering assistance and financial support for others.

My learning has been manifested in several ways in my personal and professional life. 1) My preaching has changed. Jacob tells me he has witnessed a new emphasis on our call to follow Jesus and to reach out to others, especially the inactives. 2) Jacob also reported understanding how his election as council president has a direct connection to his baptismal calling by God to partner with me and help our congregation through the stages of change needed to receive inactives. 3) Together we have built up a second worship service where the culture is such that members welcome the stranger, greet all

who attend, embrace liturgical changes and spontaneity. After a couple of years experiencing a second worship service, three former inactive couples have reaffirmed their faith, increasing the attendance that rivals the attendance at the traditional worship service. We have seen two families visit Tanzania returning with a challenge opportunity for the whole congregation to participate in financial commitments supporting the building of a school there. The response has been wonderful and thirty families have made a three-year commitment. We have seen *committees* transition into ministry *teams* and, in a few cases, where long-time members have served for decades, additional team members have been actively recruited. They share the planning and service for members and nonmembers alike.

The Spirit of God is constantly on the move—sending me challenges and opportunities to work in the kingdom, reaching out to inactives and the unchurched in our rural area. To live within the biblical stories is to see and hear God at work in our midst as we experiencing a paradigm change. This change emphasizes a readiness to let go of romanticizing the good old days and look toward the work of the Spirit of God in our midst. Many members remain hesitant or resistant to the proclamation that this is what God wants us to do to sustain the vitality of the congregation. However, with each former inactive received, the ratio of congregation's paradigm change grows. Without partnerships like mine with Jacob, the changes we have imagined and the changes that occurred could not have taken place. We have become a much more inclusive congregation and while we are far from being a sustaining, contextually missional congregation, we do have a wonderful glimpse of what God's spirit envisions for us: A church that attracts others not by our seating capacity but by actively reaching others, our

sending capacity. The glory goes to God for the Spirit of revitalization within a congregation in decline.

Walking in the Spirit of Jesus' Mission and Vision

All people who are baptized in the name of the Triune God are called to be a sent people rather than settled people. This missional and vocational point of view requires the essential development, nurturing, and sustaining of relationships and partnerships of walking with and in the Spirit of Jesus. This was reinforced in a course work project that resulted in my video, *God's Trinitarian Mission for Developing Missional Pastors*. I have been strongly influenced by the intersection of existing and emerging missional literature and by biblical-theological interpretation and organizational-planning theory. Two of my course projects: *The Matrix of Forgiveness*, and *The DNA of missio Dei* both reflected this influence and revealed an epiphany to my imagination of what God is doing in coming into our midst as baptized people. All of the required course work projects enabled me to practice examining, analyzing, and interpreting existing congregational missional life cycles, perspectives, and various potential revitalization strategies such as in my relationship with Jacob and the congregation.

In addition to the program focus of mission and leadership development, the high demand of assignment responses, both qualitative and quantitative, were important elements in my determination to begin and complete this work. The environment of *online relationships* supplemented by *residency seminars* enabled me to observe and reflect on a plethora of pastoral leadership styles in addition to my own and contextualized congregational missions. The online logistical aspects, expectations of computer literacy, and introduction to a plurality of post modernity literature presented

challenging perspectives that have changed my perception of leadership and the kingdom of God. My interaction with the instructional cadre provided profound mentoring, offered clear challenges, and set high expectations that resulted in a learning process that brought out my best efforts as a student, pastor, and child of God.

In the spirit of the Jesus who calls, gathers, enlightens, and sends me as a child of God and missional pastor to the Church, my contribution to the conversation regarding *the elephant in the room* is to address the emerging imagination of congregational readiness and leadership development with a perspective toward seeking and reconciling with the lost. For me, congregational readiness that emerges from a modernity perspective of church growth and the missional church, (which has been called *strategic planning)* continues to have some practical application. However, as I listen to the silence or contemplation of strategic planning models and church growth movements regarding biblical and theological foundations and imagination for incorporating *missio Dei*, I am seeking an alternative planning design. I want to see and hear glimpses of God's purpose in what I call, *koinonia processing*.

Koinonia processing for me is similar to how a relational database program is used by a personal computer that has links to various categories and fields (as apposed to a simple database that is linear and like an old-fashion index card file). Koinonia processing invokes the imagination of including and expanding existing and emerging networks of people and their stories with an examination and explanation of how we are all linked to the perichoretic Triune God and one another. I imagine koinonia processing as a tool for paradigm change from contemplation or preparation (which have their place and purpose) to an attitude of readiness and action of contextualizing reconciliation.

Koinonia processing is led by the Spirit of the risen Christ and manifested through the incarnational relationships of the Body of Christ, baptized believing belongers who are actively in communion with Christ, fellowship with other Christians, as preparation to reach out to those not invited or included. By asking, "What is our response to the gospel of Jesus who calls us to seek the lost sheep?" I believe Koinonia processing essentially examines and identifies those disconnected from communion with Christ and dismissed from fellowship with a church just as did Jesus throughout his earthly ministry. For me, Koinonia planning assumes there is no single discipline, model, or solution for transforming membership reduction to growth within ELCA congregations or toward missional reconciliation. There is one mission. If I, as a believer, am to belong to Jesus Christ, it is to respond to the gospel from a point of view that St. Paul calls in 2nd Corinthians 5:17, seeing everything from new perspective reconciled in Christ. This is the theological and theoretical way I now commence (rather than only contemplate) my service to Christ and the Church within community.

A final comment about things I have learned from my five-year journey of learning: None of the partial requirements for the completion of this program can be understood without recognizing God's hand in shaping my response. In Luther's words, "I cannot by my own understanding come to believe in Jesus Christ, but that the Holy Spirit has called, gathered, enlightened and sanctified me . . . ." Through the journey of *re*constructing my theological and theoretical framework (from Christendom foundations into a postmodernity missional framework), I have learned to ask this essential question: How does the Gospel of Jesus Christ inform the responses of God's people in this place and time? Thankfully, God has helped me more readily listen to the stories contextualized

in my life and the lives of those around me so that I am walking with and following Jesus.

APPENDIX A

COVER LETTER



P.O. Box 47 - Cordova, NE 68330
402-576-3431 - ww.telcordova.org

Dear selected ELCA congregation:

Your congregation has reported receiving at least one adult member within the past five years. This means you are in a great position to help me with my study on the readiness of ELCA congregations to reach out to inactive members and the unchurched. As a doctoral candidate attending Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN, and a pastor in a small rural congregation, I am collecting data for my research thesis and I am asking for your help to complete it.

Please take the enclosed three envelops and distribute them as follows: one to a long-time member, one to a member received within the past five years by affirmation of faith (preferred) or by letter of transfer, and one for you as the senior pastor. Enclosed in each packet is a carefully designed and tested questionnaire that can be completed in 20 to 30 minutes. Each questionnaire should be completed independently and returned in the enclosed postage paid envelope before June 30, 2006.

You may be assured that all of the survey responses will be completely confidential. Each of the three questionnaires have an identification number for tracking purposes only so I can confirm that the questionnaires are returned.

If you have questions regarding this research or survey, I would be happy to answer them. You may email me at rsachs@luthersem.edu, or call 402-576-3009.

Thank you for your assistance in distributing the packets.

In service to Christ,

Rob E. Sachs
Researcher

3 enclosures

- Survey packet for the pastor
- Survey packet for long-time member (more than 12 years)
- Survey packet for recently received adult member (less than 12 years)

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE

This project is a partial requirement for the Doctorate of Ministry in Congregational Mission and Leadership Development at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota. The purpose of this study is to examine and explain the attitudes and actions of reaching out to others.

THIS IS A CONFIDENTIAL QUESTIONNAIRE. Please do not put your name on these pages. No personal information will be singled out or reported. Your responses will be kept anonymous and used for the sole purpose of this research study.

>> PLEASE RETURN this questionnaire in the mail before—June 30, 2006 <<

FOR ADMINISTRATIVE USE ONLY: Date Received: ____/____/2006 Survey ID _____

Part 1. Background Information

Please fill in the bubble number ● or fill in a response that best describes you

Year of your birth: 19_____ **Year joined this congregation: 19** _____

Gender:
O - Female O - Male

Highest education completed
O - less than High School
O - High School/GED
O - AA degree Tech Certificate
O - Bachelor degree
O - Master degree
O - Doctorate degree

Marital Status:
O - Single
O - Married
O - Separated/Divorced
O - Widowed
O - Remarried

Race:
O - African-American
O - Arab
O - Asian
O - Caucasian
O - Latina/Latino
O - Native American
O - Pacific Islander
O - Other

Relationship to the congregation:
O - clergy O - lay member

Baptized as: O - Infant/child under 12 O - Child 12 or older / adult

Faith of origin:
O - ELCA (or ALC, LCA, AELC)
O - other Lutheran (LC-MS, WEL)
O - Protestant (UCC, UMC, PCUSA)
O - Catholic / Orthodox
O - Jewish
O - Muslim
O - other (i.e. Buddha, Hindu)
O - none

In the past 12 months, how many times (on average) have you participated in:

Education: _____times/month
Fellowship: _____ times/month
Worship: _____ times/month
Member visits: _____ times/month
Inactive visits: _____ times/month
Unchurched visits: _____ times/month

Part 2. Opinions and Perceptions of reaching out

Please fill in the bubble number ● and fill in the years as best as you can using the following system

① = no ② = yes and if yes *(number of)* years ⑧ = don't know

1. Our members know the Church's mission includes reaching inactives and unchurched. ① ② if yes, ____ years ⑧
2. Our members have intentional training on how to reach inactives and unchurched. ① ② if yes, ____ years ⑧
3. Our members actively reach out to inactives and unchurched in our community. ① ② if yes, ____ years ⑧
4. The pastor emphasizes a missional priority to reach inactives and unchurched. ① ② if yes, ____ years ⑧
5. Our pastor uses sermons to teach ways to reach inactives and unchurched. ① ② if yes, ____ years ⑧
6. Our pastor is like a coach with our members to reach inactives and unchurched. ① ② if yes, ____ years ⑧
7. Our church facilities have been upgraded to reach and receive potential members. ① ② if yes, ____ years ⑧
8. The church programs have been changed to reach and receive potential members. ① ② if yes, ____ years ⑧
9. Our church staff positions have been changed to reach and receive potential members. ① ② if yes, ____ years ⑧
10. I have made a commitment to reach inactives and the unchurched in our community. ① ② if yes, ____ years ⑧
11. I have received intentional training on how to reach inactives and unchurched. ① ② if yes, ____ years ⑧
12. I have been actively contacting and reaching out to inactives and unchurched. ① ② if yes, ____ years ⑧

Part 3. Observations of attitudes and practices

Please fill in the bubble number ● that is your observation using the following system

① = strongly disagree ② = disagree ③ = neutral
④ = agree ⑤ = strongly agree ⑧ = don't know

13. Our members prefer to preserve our Lutheran heritage, name, and traditions.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑧
14. Our members intentionally and readily reach out to welcome guests attending church activities.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑧
15. Our members intentionally and regularly befriend people who do not attend or belong to any church.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑧
16. Our pastor speaks of an urgency to reach people who do not attend and/or belong to a church.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑧
17. Our pastor has a willingness to partner with members to reach people who are unchurched.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑧
18. Our pastor spends as much time meeting people who are unchurched as visiting with members.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑧
19. Our worship emphasizes welcoming the stranger.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑧
20. We offer worship time(s) to accommodate people who cannot attend on Sunday mornings.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑧
21. Our education emphasizes inviting and including non-members in our community.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑧
22. We offer education time(s) to accommodate people who cannot attend on Sunday mornings.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑧
23. Our stewardship emphasizes helping non-members with needs both in our community and beyond.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑧
24. We offer counseling and social referrals or services to accommodate people in need of help.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑧

Part 3. continued, Observations of attitudes and practices

Please fill in the bubble number ● that is your observation using the following system

① = strongly disagree ② = disagree ③ = neutral
④ = agree ⑤ = strongly agree ⑧ = don't know

25. Our members are visionary and open to the changes necessary for us to reach others.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑧
26. Our members are willing to participate in ways to seek those who are searching for God.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑧
27. Our members are known in the community as people making a difference in Christ's name.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑧
28. Our pastor is open to change and willingly finds ways to adapt to challenges.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑧
29. Our pastor is actively involved in equipping members to reach out to non-members.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑧
30. Our pastor is known as a leader who participates in community events not related to church.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑧
31. Our facilities and parking area(s) are attractive and clean.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑧
32. Our facilities and parking area(s) are clearly marked with legible signs.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑧
33. Our facilities and parking accessible to all people, including those with disabilities.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑧
34. Our non-paid and paid staff are trained to welcome and help members and guests.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑧
35. I feel other members support the work I do to reach out to inactives and unchurched.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑧
36. People in our community describe our church as caring and helpful toward others.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑧

Part 4a. Personal Account

Please provide a brief description of YOUR experience as an inactive or as someone unchurched. Describe when, for how long, and what motivated you to eventually join the church? **(PLEASE DON'T USES LAST NAMES)**

Part 4b. Personal Account

Please provide a brief description of YOUR experience contacting an inactive member or someone unchurched. Describe what motivated you contact this person and what was the person's response? **(PLEASE DON'T USES LAST NAMES)**

By inserting my email/postal address in the space below, I am requesting a copy of this study's research summary and granting permission this to be sent to the following address.

My email/postal address is: _____

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