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LIBERATED FOR MISSION:  
THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS INFORMING A FRESH MISSIONAL IMAGINATION

by  
PAMELA M. MAROLLA

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

2020

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## ABSTRACT

*Liberated for Mission*  
*Theology of the Cross Informing a Fresh Missional Imagination*  
by

Pamela M. Marolla

“How might an action research intervention cultivate a hermeneutic of *missio Dei* as it relates to baptismal vocation?” This study used mixed methods action research including interventions, questionnaires, Dwelling in the Word, and interviews. Biblical and theological lenses were God’s liberating nature, baptismal vocation, theology of the cross, *missio Dei* and more. Theoretical lenses were leadership theories, strengths, assets, hospitality, and imaginative interaction. Interventions were a sermon series, dwelling in the word, and contextual leadership. Through these the congregation gained understanding of the liberating nature of God through prophecy, reconciliation, being known, and their own place in *missio Dei*.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of my husband, Hospice Chaplain, Reverend Vince Marolla. I simply could not have completed this work without the love of my life. He is kind, generous, and patient beyond measure. My love and gratitude are immeasurable.

I am honored to thank the congregation referred to as GGLC in this thesis. They are unique beyond all my experience in their willingness to love and serve God and neighbor. I am profoundly thankful to congregational leadership and staff for allowing me the flexibility to take days off-site to read, study, and write.

I am grateful for our adult children Christina and David. They grew up and moved out—freeing up enough of my time to tend to this work. I am so proud of the adults they have become and joyful for the light of Christ which shines brightly in them.

I wish to thank Dr. Anderson and Dr. Luedke at Luther Seminary for helping me see this through to completion. Thank you to Peter Susag from Luther Seminary and Paul Marasa from Knox College for sharing your amazing proofreading skills.

This work is in memory of Rev. Dr. Mons Teig who was a teacher, mentor, colleague, and friend. His life was a testimony to the love of God.

I owe my deepest gratitude to God for giving me the will and the ability to do this work and for surrounding me with so “great a cloud of witnesses” (Heb. 12:1).

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	ix
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	x
 1. INTRODUCTION .....	 1
Research Topic and Questions .....	2
Importance of this Research .....	3
Lenses .....	9
Baptismal Vocation .....	10
<i>Missio Dei</i> .....	11
The Liberating Nature of God .....	12
Theology of the Cross .....	13
<i>Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi</i> .....	14
Leadership Theories .....	15
Assets and Strengths.....	15
Hospitality/Radical Hospitality .....	17
Variables .....	18
Method, Methodology and Design .....	19
The Challenge.....	20
A History of Dominion .....	20
Growth in our Region of the United States .....	25
Decline in Our Region of the United States .....	26
The Intent of this Thesis .....	29
IRB and Other Ethical Considerations .....	29
Definitions .....	31
Assets .....	31
Baptismal Vocation .....	31
Dwelling in the Word.....	32
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).....	32
Faith Formation .....	33
Frame/Reframing .....	33
<i>Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi</i> (Law of Prayer/Law of Belief) .....	33
Liberation Theology .....	34
LGBT+ .....	34
Means of Grace .....	35
<i>Missio Dei</i> (Mission of God).....	35
Reconciling in Christ.....	35
Rust Belt.....	36

Strengths .....	36
Theology of the Cross and Theology of Glory .....	37
Word and Sacrament .....	38
Summary.....	38
2. HISTORY AND BACKGROUND .....	39
Introduction to GGLC .....	39
Prairieville Community .....	42
Religion in the Prairieville Community .....	46
Historic Ministries .....	48
Current Central Ministries of this Christian Community .....	50
Worship and Music .....	50
Faith Formation .....	51
Service to Community .....	51
Hospitality/Radical Hospitality .....	52
Organizational Structure at GGLC.....	57
Organizational Question.....	58
Biblical and Theological Commitments of this Christian Community .....	58
Primary Opportunities, Dilemmas and Challenges .....	59
Opportunities.....	60
Challenges and Dilemmas.....	61
3. THEORETICAL LENSES .....	65
Introduction .....	65
Theoretical Lenses and Supporting Literature .....	65
Leadership Theories .....	65
Identifying Mission .....	66
Reframing.....	68
Adaptive Leadership .....	70
Imagination, Improvisation, and Dancing with the Trinity.....	75
Strengths and Assets.....	79
Hospitality .....	82
Radical Hospitality.....	84
4. THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL LENSES.....	87
Theological Lenses .....	87
Baptismal Vocation .....	88
Theology of the Cross .....	90
Liberation Theologies/Liberating Nature of God.....	94
<i>Lex Orandi/Lex Credendi</i> .....	95
Biblical Lenses .....	97
Baptism and <i>Missio Dei</i> .....	97
Baptism as Entry into <i>Missio Dei</i> : The Baptism of Jesus.....	98

<i>Missio Dei</i> : Jesus Announces his Liberating Mission: Luke 4:18-19, 21	98
The Liberating Nature of God as Articulated in Scripture	99
Liberated: God Hears the Cries of the Oppressed and Responds	100
The Liberating Word of the Prophets	101
Liberated by Reconciliation: The End of the Joseph Story and the	
Prodigal	101
Liberated by Being Fully Known: The Woman at the Well: John 4:1-	
30, 39-42:	103
Theology of the Cross	103
Incarnation – Luke 2:1-21 and John 1:1-18	104
Jesus’ Passion Predictions	105
Matthew 25: Identifying Christ by participating in the lives of the least.	109
5. METHOD AND METHODOLOGY	111
Introduction	111
Method and Methodology	112
Biblical and Theological Perspectives	113
Variables	115
Independent Variables: Interventions	115
Intervening Variables	117
Dependent Variables	117
Timeline for Operationalizing the Variables	117
Research Design	118
Interventions	119
Analysis	119
Quantitative Analysis	120
Baseline/End Line	120
Qualitative Analysis	121
Interviews	122
Dwelling in the Word	125
6. RESULTS OF RESEARCH AND INTERPRETATION	127
Introduction	127
Operationalizing the Variables	128
Baseline Questionnaire/End Line Questionnaire Results	129
Intervening Variables	130
Baseline/End Line Baptismal Identity	135
Baseline/End Line Baptismal Promises	137
A. Live Among God’s Faithful People	138
B. Hear the Word of God and Share in the Lord’s Supper	138
C. Proclaim the Good News of Christ through Word and Deed	139
D. Serve All People Following the Example of Jesus	139



E. Strive for Justice and Peace in All the Earth .....	139
Open Ended Questions .....	141
Sermon/Worship Series and Dwelling in the Word .....	143
Dwelling in the Word Results .....	144
Did God Show up in a Reversal of an Expectation of Someone Powerful and How? .....	144
Who is Challenged/Favored by God? .....	145
Challenged.....	146
Favored.....	146
Liberating Word for You .....	146
Freed From/Freed For .....	147
Interviews .....	149
Liberating Experience .....	149
God Revealed in Unexpected Ways.....	153
Ministries which reflect God's presence with suffering or oppressed	157
7. CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS .....	160
Results and Lenses Summary .....	160
Questions for Future Researchers .....	171
EPILOGUE .....	173
Final Comments.....	174
APPENDIX A. BASELINE QUESTIONNAIRE .....	176
Part I. Background Information and Activity .....	176
Part II. Mission and Ministry – Baptismal Identity .....	177
Part III. Other Questions about Mission and Ministry .....	180
APPENDIX B. IMPLIED CONSENT LETTER FOR BASELINE SURVEY .....	182
APPENDIX C. END LINE QUESTIONNAIRE.....	183
Pre-Questions .....	183
Part I. Background Information and Activity .....	183
Part II. Mission and Ministry – Baptismal Identity .....	185
Part III. Other Questions about Mission and Ministry .....	188
APPENDIX D. IMPLIED CONSENT LETTER FOR END LINE SURVEY .....	189
APPENDIX E. DWELLING IN THE WORD GROUP PROTOCOL .....	190
APPENDIX F. INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR DWELLING IN THE WORD..	191
APPENDIX G. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL.....	193

APPENDIX H. INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEWS .....	194
APPENDIX I. BASELINE AND END LINE FREQUENCIES QUESTIONS 1-7 ON BAPTISMAL ID.....	195
APPENDIX J. INTERVENTION 1. BAPTISM OF JESUS- TEXTS .....	196
APPENDIX K. INTERVENTION 2. EXODUS – GOD HEARD THEIR CRIES AND SET THEM FREE .....	197
APPENDIX L. INTERVENTION 3. JESUS IS ANOINTED TO LIBERATE.....	201
APPENDIX M. INTERVENTION 4. PASSION AND GREATNESS: TAKE UP YOUR CROSS.....	206
APPENDIX N. INTERVENTION 5. LIBERATED BY RECONCILIATION: JOSEPH AND THE PRODIGAL .....	209
APPENDIX O. INTERVENTION 6. LIBERATED BY PARTICIPATING IN THE LIVES OF THE LEAST OF THESE .....	214
APPENDIX P. LITURGICAL TEXTS TO ACCOMPANY INTERVENTIONS .....	219
APPENDIX Q. INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE.....	222
APPENDIX R. INTERVEIW RESULTS: GOD REVEALED/UNEXPECTED WAYS .....	223
APPENDIX S. INTERVIEW RESULTS: LIBERATING EXPERIENCE .....	224
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	225

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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AR	Action Research
ELCA	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
ELW	Evangelical Lutheran Worship, the 2006 worship book of the ELCA
GGLC	Grace of God Lutheran Church, the pseudonym for the congregation that is the focus of this study.
g-o-d	a lowercase shortcut for the words “good old days.” It is a reminder not to idolize the past.
IRB	Institutional Review Board
LGBT+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, others, and allies. There are other acceptable, acknowledged alphabetical abbreviations, but am using this one for consistency
LW	Luther’s Works
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible
RIC	Reconciling in Christ
IBM SPSS	IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

### Tables

Table 1. Prairieville population by decade .....	43
Table 2. Religious adherents 2010.....	47
Table 3. 2015 age range and participation .....	49
Table 4. Distinguishing technical from adaptive challenges .....	70
Table 5. Theology of glory/theology of the cross from Heidelberg Disputations .....	91
Table 6. Dominant theology versus liberation theology .....	95
Table 7. The voice at the transfiguration .....	106
Table 8. Passion predictions in the synoptic gospels.....	107
Table 9. Disciple responses to passion predictions.....	107
Table 10. Jesus teaches about discipleship following disciples' response .....	108
Table 11. Sermon/worship interventions .....	116
Table 12. Interview participant age, length of affiliation, formative faith tradition, and gender.....	124
Table 13. Dwelling in the word participants.....	126
Table 14. GGLC affiliation length.....	130
Table 15. Residence length .....	131
Table 16. GGLC affiliation type .....	132
Table 17. Worship frequency.....	133
Table 18. Faith formation frequency .....	133

Table 19. Other service frequency .....	134
Table 20 Formative faith tradition .....	135
Table 21. Baptismal identity baseline (N=40) and end line (N=23).....	136
Table 22. Live: baseline (N=40) and end line (N=23).....	138
Table 23. Hear: baseline (N=40) and end line (N=23) .....	139
Table 24. Proclaim: baseline (N=40) and end line (N=23).....	139
Table 25. Serve: baseline (N=40) and end line (N=23) .....	139
Table 26. Strive JP: baseline (N=40) and end line (N=23).....	140
Table 27. Summary of baseline and end line means A-E .....	140
Table 28. Intervention dates, themes, and stories .....	143
Table 29. Did God show up in a reversal?.....	145
Table 30. Who is challenged/favored by God?.....	146
Table 31. Responses to dwelling question #7 "liberating word for you" .....	147
Table 32. <i>In vivo</i> responses to dwelling Questions 8, 9, "freed from/freed for" .....	148
Table 33. Focused codes: liberating experience .....	151
Table 34. Axial codes from focus codes: liberating experience .....	152
Table 35. Focused codes: unexpected revelation of God .....	155
Table 36. Axial codes: unexpected revelation .....	156
Table 37. Ministries of this congregation reflecting God's presence with the suffering or oppressed.....	157
Table 38 God's presence with suffering or oppressed .....	158
Table 39. Baseline frequencies baptismal identity .....	195
Table 40. End line frequencies baptismal identity .....	195

## Figures

Figure 1 Prairieville poverty rate by neighborhood .....	46
Figure 2. Income legend .....	46
Figure 3. Technical vs. adaptive work .....	71
Figure 4. Diffusion of innovations.....	74
Figure 5: Communal discernment.....	76
Figure 6. God pleasing ministries .....	142
Figure 7. God pleasing ministries .....	142
Figure 8. Liberating experience theoretical coding .....	153
Figure 9. God revealed in unexpected ways .....	156
Figure 10. God pleasing ministries conclusion.....	163
Figure 11. God revealed in unexpected ways conclusion.....	164
Figure 12. Liberating experience conclusion.....	165
Figure 13. Liberating Experience .....	166
Figure 14. Jesus and the church .....	168

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

I have seen the look on a person's face when they first grasp that God's grace is real and it is for them. These are some of my favorite moments in ministry. Each time they remind me of the story of the Woman at the Well in John chapter four, when the woman after being offered living water, discovers that Jesus already knew all about her before he ever made the offer. She was set free by this good news and could not restrain herself from telling others, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!" "He told me everything I have ever done." (Jn. 4:29, 39)<sup>1</sup> See footnote below for more of the story.<sup>2</sup>

This thesis has probably been a work in progress over much of my lifetime. The process of working on a Doctor of Ministry degree has given me an opportunity to

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<sup>1</sup> All scripture references, unless otherwise noted, will be from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible (NRSV)

<sup>2</sup> Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." <sup>17</sup> The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; <sup>18</sup> for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" . . . The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." <sup>26</sup> Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you." . . . <sup>28</sup> Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, <sup>29</sup> "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" <sup>30</sup> They left the city and were on their way to him. Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." <sup>40</sup> So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. <sup>41</sup> And many more believed because of his word. <sup>42</sup> They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

explore with the people around me, God's liberating nature in their lives and through their stories. The woman at the well is a symbol for many who have been criticized by religious people for things that were or are likely out of their control. She discovered the grace of God through an encounter with Jesus. She discovered the God we profess to be the Triune God through God Incarnate, Jesus Christ. This encounter did more than change her life. It set her free. It liberated her. In her new-found liberation, the first thing she could imagine to do was to proclaim the good news to any who would listen.

I believe congregations often miss out on being God's agents of these liberating experiences because they are working so hard at trying to recreate what they used to have in the good-old-days (g-o-d).<sup>3</sup> In doing so, they can miss opportunities to encounter and share the radical liberating grace of God.

In this chapter, I will present the importance of my research. I will describe the challenge, the research topic and questions, my various lenses, variables, method, methodology and design, IRB and other ethical considerations and definitions.

### **Research Topic and Questions**

My research question is, "How might an Action Research (AR) intervention cultivate a hermeneutic of *missio Dei* as it relates to Baptismal Vocation?" My interest is in researching the possibility of reorienting members' perspective from dependence upon economic and consumeristic trends to one that is more missional and grounded in our baptismal vocation, theology of the cross, and the liberating nature of God. I am also

---

<sup>3</sup> I do not presume to take credit for this acronym, but I also cannot find another source that does. I have, however, served congregations that had a near idolatry for their pasts. As I use this acronym in this thesis, I am mindful that we can honor and celebrate our past, but we must be careful not to idolize it to the exclusion of actively discerning God's mission and will for us in the present.



interested in helping members grow their spiritual imaginations to envision themselves individually and corporately, connected to the Body of Christ and God's mission in this time and place.

### **Importance of this Research**

The liberating nature of God and Martin Luther's *theologia crucis* (theology of the cross) have resonated with me in personal ways through much of my lifetime, certainly, long before I knew of the concepts as theological terms. I recall my own early experience as a lonely teenager dealing with the difficulties of living in a remote rural area. There were no other children in the house and the neighbor closest to my age lived five miles away. In those low times, hymn tunes would run through my mind. As a junior organist for my home congregation, I did not know much about the tunes, but I would look them up in my personal hymnal. I found them by using the metric index. (Meter, as in poetry, refers to the number of syllables per line of text.) Each time I found the hymn I was "hearing," I discovered words that were deeply meaningful to me. They brought me comfort and they helped lead me to a love of Jesus and the cross which he bore for the entire world. These words assured me of God's presence when I thought no one else could hear or see me.<sup>4</sup> As a college student at St. Olaf College,<sup>5</sup> and later as a seminarian, I came to understand this meeting of God with those who suffer as theology of the cross

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<sup>4</sup> There is no way that I can be certain that those hymns were not tucked into my subconscious from other comforting times and settings. Nor, as a Lutheran, do I rely on experiences for confirmation of God's presence and grace, but for me, in those times and places, the experiences were very real.

<sup>5</sup> St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN. St. Olaf is a liberal arts college of the ELCA.

(*theologia crucis*). We do not ascend to or earn God's favor. We see God most clearly in God incarnate.<sup>6</sup>

Its [theology of the cross's] intention was and is to make clear that God comes to us as a hidden God (*deus absconditus*); that God comes to us in the lowliness and suffering (*sub contrario*), in the person of Jesus Christ, thereby meeting us in our weakness, in our guilt, and in our suffering."<sup>7</sup>

Over time, I also began seeing intersections between Luther's articulation of a theology of the cross and liberation theology. It is important to note that liberation theology has countless nuances and differences depending on the community that uses the term. My experience is with feminist liberation theology, Latin American liberation theology, LGBT+ liberation theology, and black liberation theology. In a less-documented form of liberation theology, I have also experienced liberation theology from the point of view of children who have been sexually exploited or abused, and survivors of domestic violence and rape. Over the course of these past few years, as I have been working on this project, I realize that it is outside the scope of this thesis to expound on all the distinct types of liberation theology. For the most part, it is the *liberating nature of God* we see throughout scripture that provides a window to liberation theology and relates intimately to the theology of the cross.

I learned about Latin American liberation theology while in college many years ago. It became far more personal when the congregation I previously served was a sister congregation to a congregation in the Lutheran Church in El Salvador. The bishop and

---

<sup>6</sup> "He was in the world and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own and his own people did not know him . . . And the Word became flesh and lived among us . . ." This is from the prologue or opening chapter of the gospel of John.

<sup>7</sup> H. Gaylon Barker, *The Cross of Reality: Luther's Theologia Crucis and Bonhoeffer's Christology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 24.

his wife, who was the pastor of our sister congregation, introduced me to their congregations and their faith in God revealed in hiddenness and suffering<sup>8</sup> and effecting a liberating hope, faith, and joy. This faith persisted despite having endured a brutal civil war, extreme poverty, and challenges nearly unimaginable to many of us. I heard their stories of persecution and redemption. I learned of the life and teachings of Archbishop Oscar Romero and personally visited the site where now Saint Romero was murdered. I was also accompanied to the place where six Jesuits and their housekeeper and her daughter were slaughtered, a cliff where dead bodies were dumped, and villages that had been decimated by death squads.<sup>9</sup> The pain of the people was still palpable years later. I was humbled that they let me experience these places and their pain. Still, I saw faith, hope, and love. I witnessed in their worship, care for neighbor, and hospitality, a sense of gratitude, joy, generosity, and service. People with meager resources cared for the homeless and the addicted. Sunday morning was a joyful time of worship and community. Frequently, I was humbled when our hosts would serve us chicken, and eat beans themselves, or not eat, because (I am told) their sense of hospitality compelled to see that their guests have the best, even if it meant they went without. Their care of vulnerable children also spoke volumes about their concern for them. I have experienced times when lunch was a vegetable soup and the vegetables went to the children, while the

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<sup>8</sup> Heino O Kadai, "Luther's Theology of the Cross," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (1999): 180. Kadai writes "According to Luther, a theologian worthy of the name, 'comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross'" He is quoting from Luther's Heidelberg Thesis 20.

<sup>9</sup> Robert McAfee Brown, *Liberation Theology: An Introductory Guide*, 1st ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 9-11. Robert McAfee Brown tells the story of an El Salvadoran Jesuit, having been absent at the time of the slaughter of his companions, coming home to find his copy of Moltmann's *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* soaked in the blood of those slain.

adults had watery broth; or when the family had a few chickens, and the daily egg or two would go to children or the least nourished. These were humbling experiences that left me wanting to know more about their spirits.

I see similar liberation themes in some *feminist theologies* as well. Letty Russell writes in *Church in the Round* about those on the margins being invited to the center:

Feminist theologians join this liberation tradition in moving from the questions of those at the center of society to those considered less than human because they are powerless and unimportant. The imagery of margins is to be preferred, however, over that of above and below because one of the ways persons are marginalized is by hierarchical thinking. In societies and churches where they have been considered of no importance, women not only speak out for themselves and all those on the margin but also move from margin to center so that their voices may be heard.<sup>10</sup>

More recently, as the congregation I currently serve has come through over four years of conversations regarding our attitude toward full inclusion of the LGBT+ community, I began hearing stories of shared experiences of people who told of the liberating truth of being fully known that set them free. That freedom came from the exchange of shame for full inclusion, acceptance, and love. A clergy friend was *outed* and exploited after thirty years in the ministry. Nonetheless, he met this horrible experience with grace and dignity. A young adult parishioner who was not yet *out*<sup>11</sup> followed a long-felt call to Word and Sacrament ministry. This beloved child of God exhibited an abundance of gifts for ministry, but I knew some of the challenges that would lie before him. Before he came out, I felt compelled to lead our congregation

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<sup>10</sup> Letty M. Russell, *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/Knox, 1993), 26.

<sup>11</sup> “Out” here is shorthand for “coming out of the closet,” or no longer needing to hide one’s LGBT+ identity.

through the difficult conversations about becoming a Reconciling in Christ<sup>12</sup> congregation so that when he did come out, we would have already had the conversations, and our process would not be personally about him. These conversations were awkward and painful. They were also exceedingly liberating. I will explore this further as I summarize my research and analysis.

In 2015, I shared with my congregation, my own story of surviving childhood sexual abuse. I had first shared with an online group of survivors, and my story spread quickly, including around the world, with more than 60,000 hits in just the first two weeks. It was picked up by *Living Lutheran*.<sup>13</sup> My story resonated with many within the congregation I serve. Everywhere the story traveled, more stories of survivors-set-free abounded. These shared stories of survival and strength were a testimony to the power of God's presence to lift, liberate, and heal. Other people, both locally and around the world, have told me they began to tell their stories because I told mine.<sup>14</sup> They told me they were set free by sharing their experiences and letting go of the secrets. One of the foundations of theology of the cross is to call something what it is. "A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is."<sup>15</sup> Sexually

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<sup>12</sup> See more about this in definitions section at the end of this chapter.

<sup>13</sup> Pam Marolla, "On Forgiveness and Childhood Sex Abuse," *Living Lutheran* (blog), July 22, 2015, <http://www.livinglutheran.org/2015/07/forgiveness-childhood-sex-abuse/>.

<sup>14</sup> This was a year or two before the movement known as #MeToo began. #MeToo became a viral internet hashtag in which women began to tell their stories of abuse, and other women responded, "Me Too."

<sup>15</sup> Gerhard O. Forde and Martin Luther, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1997), loc. 919.

abusing children is wrong. Shaming, dehumanizing, and oppressing anyone made in the image of God is wrong.

As a person of faith, I believe liberation theologies of all sorts are intrinsically tied to a theology of the cross. I believe the triune God, was revealed through the incarnation of Jesus Christ, who was abused, shamed, dehumanized, and oppressed. “but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death even death on a cross.” (Phil. 2:7-8)

I am using this time of doctoral research and analysis to hear the voices of those who recognize their liberation through the good news of Jesus Christ. I am thinking of people who have been excluded from other communion tables, LGBT+, former addicts, survivors of domestic, sexual, emotional, or physical violence, divorcées, divorcés, and more. My interest is in documenting how participants articulate the liberation, joy, relief, and life they find through participation in the mission of God.

I had a conversation with a senior colleague who is a well-experienced pastor and person of color with many years of experience both with racism and in the church, not necessarily exclusive of one another. He frequently writes and comments on racism in culture and church. I asked him about how all of these distinct groups of people find commonality and truth in the theology of the cross. His response was “they all have the common experience of existential oppression.”<sup>16</sup>

As I began to see similarities in liberation stories, and the common experience of existential oppression, it was Wartburg Seminary Professor Craig Nesson, speaking at the Northern, IL Synod Assembly in June 2018, who helped me to see the pieces coming

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<sup>16</sup> Memo note, 10/25/2019

together. Professor Nesson is the author of numerous works on the topics of mission, Luther's theology of the cross, and liberation.

Because these [liberation] theologies deal with the suffering and oppression of particular endangered groups, central to their concerns are the definition of the human; analysis of sin, especially structural sin that diminishes the worth and status of those in each particular group; and drawing upon theological resources to advocate justice for each oppressed group, including creation itself.<sup>17</sup>

The convergence of these quite diverse groups around the theme of liberation theology and my own resonance with them has me pondering what they might offer to my own context. As I reflect on these themes, I see the potential for new and lasting hope for the community I serve and beyond. It is my hope that this work can contribute to larger conversations in church and Christian academy regarding what it means to be faithful to the mission of God. Can we reorient our faith communities' dependence on cultural cues for success, to God's loving and liberating vision for the world? This action research project takes a step in that direction.

### Lenses

In this study, I have set out to analyze participants' understanding of the Lutheran concept of baptismal vocation as it relates to *missio Dei*. My biblical lenses are the liberating nature of God and the theology of the cross. My theological lenses are a continuation of the theology of the cross, and the liberating nature of God. Additionally, the theological lenses will include baptismal vocation, and *lex orandi, lex credendi*.<sup>18</sup> My theoretical lenses will include

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<sup>17</sup> Craig L. Nesson, *Liberation Theologies in America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 493, <http://religion.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-493>.

<sup>18</sup> See definitions on page 21 ff. for brief highlights regarding these terms.

- 1) leadership theories: identifying mission, reframing, adaptive leadership, relationships, and connectedness.
- 2) Strengths and Assets.
- 3) Hospitality: food, space, and radical hospitality.

Through the perspective of these lenses, this study seeks to confirm whether they can inform a measurable change in how and what participants view as faithfulness to the mission of God. This faithfulness would be that which seeks to discern God's purpose and mission for us in this time and place. My organizational challenge is to help the congregation members, while embracing their formidable history, look to "God's preferred and promised future for our congregation and community."<sup>19</sup>

### Baptismal Vocation

The concept of baptismal vocation is a core element of Lutheran theology. "You are a royal ... priesthood" writes the author of 1 Peter.<sup>20</sup> At baptism we claim that the newly baptized is now a child of God and member of the "priesthood of all believers." In 1520, Martin Luther "developed the concept of the priesthood of all believers by virtue of baptism." Luther writes at length about baptismal vocation, but the essence is that we are all called to ministry, even though we have different work to do.<sup>21</sup> He writes,

There is no true, basic difference between laymen and priests, princes, and bishops, between the religious and secular except for the sake of office and work,

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<sup>19</sup> Patrick R. Keifert, *We Are Here Now: A New Missional Era, a Missional Journey of Spiritual Discovery* (Eagle, ID: Allelon Publishing, 2006), 64.

<sup>20</sup> "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

<sup>21</sup> Marc Kolden 10/01/2001, "Luther on Vocation," accessed February 13, 2020, <https://www.elca.org/JLE/Articles/1015>. This is an excellent article from Journal of Lutheran Ethics on the topic of Luther on Vocation. To be clear, vocation is not about occupation but everything "between baptism and the final resurrection."



but not for the sake of status. They are all of the spiritual estate, all are truly priests, bishops, and popes. But they do not all have the same work to do.<sup>22</sup>

### *Missio Dei*

Craig Van Gelder and Dwight Zscheile have articulated the discussion of *missio Dei* around the question of agency. “The key issue, comprised of two closely related questions, is: to what extent are we simply dealing with human agency, and to what extent is God’s agency operative and discernible within human choices?”<sup>23</sup> These authors have other writings that inform this thesis. Zscheile’s other contributions include *The Agile Church*,<sup>24</sup> *Cultivating Sent Communities*,<sup>25</sup> *The Missional Church in Perspective*,<sup>26</sup> and numerous articles, including “The Trinity, Leadership, and Power.”<sup>27</sup> Van Gelder’s other writings include *The Missional Church and Leadership Formation*<sup>28</sup> and *The Ministry of the Missional Church*,<sup>29</sup> among many journal articles.

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<sup>22</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Volume 44: Christian in Society I*, ed. James Atkinson and Helmut T. Lehmann (Saint Louis, MO: Fortress Press, 1966), 129.

<sup>23</sup> Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*, The Missional Network (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 69.

<sup>24</sup> Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Agile Church: Spirit-Led Innovation in an Uncertain Age* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2014).

<sup>25</sup> Missional Church Consultation and Dwight J Zscheile, eds., *Cultivating Sent Communities: Missional Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2012).

<sup>26</sup> Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*.

<sup>27</sup> Dwight J. Zscheile, “The Trinity, Leadership, and Power,” *Journal of Religious Leadership* 6, no. 2 (2007): 43–63.

<sup>28</sup> Craig Van Gelder and Missional Church Consultation, eds., *The Missional Church and Leadership Formation: Helping Congregations Develop Leadership Capacity* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2009).

<sup>29</sup> Craig Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007).

Other authors who have contributed to my understanding of *missio Dei* and *missio ecclesia* (church) include Patrick Keifert, director of Church Innovations Institute and professor of systematic theology at Luther Seminary. Dr. Keifert is the author of *We are Here Now: A New Missional Era*<sup>30</sup> and co-author with Nigel Rooms of the book *Forming the Missional Church: Creating Deep Cultural Change in Congregations*.<sup>31</sup> Many others have informed my thoughts and research, but two final books that must bear mention are David Bosch's *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*<sup>32</sup> and Michael Goheen's *Introduction to Christian Missions Today: Scripture, History, and Issues*.<sup>33</sup> These two are essential to form an understanding of the evolving nature of missions in history.

### The Liberating Nature of God

Jesus, in his “inaugural address,” his first words after his baptism and the beginning of his mission, commences with these words, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” When he finished quoting from Isaiah, he said, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Excerpted from Luke 4).

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<sup>30</sup> Keifert, *We Are Here Now*.

<sup>31</sup> Patrick R Keifert and Nigel Rooms, *Forming the Missional Church: Creating Deep Cultural Change in Congregations*, 2014.

<sup>32</sup> David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 20th Anniversary ed., American Society of Missiology Series, no. 16 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011).

<sup>33</sup> Michael W. Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press Academic, 2014).

To expound on this liberating nature of the mission of Jesus, a cooperative sending by the Triune God, I have explored scripture and numerous resources on a variety of liberation theologies. Numerous authors have informed my awareness of a variety of liberation theologies. In general, *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*<sup>34</sup> is a useful overview of the varieties of liberation theologies. Also beneficial to my understanding were Wartburg Seminary's Craig Nesson's books *Liberation Theologies in America*<sup>35</sup> and *The Vitality of Liberation Theology*.<sup>36</sup> My understanding of black liberation theology is influenced by numerous personal relationships. My first exposure to the topic was with Allen Boesak, and his now classic book *Farewell to Innocence*.<sup>37</sup> Reading and celebrating the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., has been formative, as has my study of the works of Dr. James Cone, particularly his work *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*.<sup>38</sup>

### Theology of the Cross

The theology of the cross provides both a theological and biblical lens. Authors that I have resourced include Gerhard Forde, who had been a professor of Systematic theology at Luther Seminary until he retired in 1998. His books *On Being a Theologian*

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<sup>34</sup> Christopher Rowland, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, 2nd ed, Cambridge Companions to Religion (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>35</sup> Nesson, *Liberation Theologies in America*, 2017.

<sup>36</sup> Craig L. Nesson, *The Vitality of Liberation Theology*, Missional Church, Public Theology, World Christianity 3 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012).

<sup>37</sup> Allan Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence: A Socio-Ethical Study on Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1977).

<sup>38</sup> James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011).

of the Cross<sup>39</sup> and Jurgen Moltmann's *The Crucified God*<sup>40</sup> are staples. Also useful for me were authors Anna Madsen,<sup>41</sup> Tullian Tchividjian,<sup>42</sup> Heino Keadai,<sup>43</sup> and Gaylon Barker.<sup>44</sup>

### *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi*

Prayer and worship have a sort of reciprocal relationship to belief and faith. Catherine LaCugna explains that it was Prosper of Aquina (390-344) who “coined the axiom that ‘the law of prayer founds the law of belief’ (*legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*)” which was a unidirectional way of thinking of these relationships. Geoffrey Wainwright in his now classic book, *Doxology*<sup>45</sup> has a chapter each on *lex orandi*, *lex credendi*.<sup>46</sup> In it he talks about the Latin that can be understood both to say prayer/worship affects our faith or belief, or vice versa. He writes

the linguistic ambiguity of the Latin tag corresponds to a material interplay which in fact takes place between worship and doctrine in Christian practice: worship influences doctrine, and doctrine worship.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Forde and Luther, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*.

<sup>40</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, 1st U.S. ed (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1974).

<sup>41</sup> Anna M. Madsen, *The Theology of the Cross in Historical Perspective* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007).

<sup>42</sup> Tullian Tchividjian, *Glorious Ruin: How Suffering Sets You Free*, Reprint edition (Nashville, TN: David C Cook, 2014).

<sup>43</sup> Kadai, “Luther’s Theology of the Cross.”

<sup>44</sup> Barker, *The Cross of Reality*.

<sup>45</sup> Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life: A Systematic Theology* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1984).

<sup>46</sup> See definitions on page 21 ff. for brief highlights regarding these terms.

<sup>47</sup> Wainwright, *Doxology*, 218.

## Leadership Theories

My leadership theories include identifying mission, reframing, adaptive leadership, relationships, and connectedness. Authors and resources that helped inform my scholarship on each of these topics follow.

- Identifying Mission: Margaret Wheatley<sup>48</sup>
- Reframing: Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal<sup>49</sup>
- Adaptive Leadership: Ron Heifetz and Mary Linsky,<sup>50</sup> Anthony Robinson<sup>51</sup>
- Relationships and connectedness: Margaret Wheatley, Peter Block,<sup>52</sup> and Heifetz and Linsky

Another excellent writer on leadership is Peter Northouse who wrote, *Leadership Theory and Practice*<sup>53</sup> and *Introduction to Leadership*.<sup>54</sup> These two books constitute a compendium on various qualities and types of leaders.

## Assets and Strengths

My second theoretical lens is that of strengths and assets. One resource that has influence my understanding of utilizing assets as a leadership lens was created by Robert

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<sup>48</sup> Margaret J Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2010).

<sup>49</sup> Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*, 5th edition (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, a Wiley brand, 2013).

<sup>50</sup> Martin Linsky and Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*, 1st edition (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002).

<sup>51</sup> Anthony B. Robinson, *Changing the Conversation: A Third Way for Congregations* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2008).

<sup>52</sup> Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publ, 2009).

<sup>53</sup> Peter Guy Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 3rd ed (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004).

<sup>54</sup> Peter Guy Northouse, *Introduction to Leadership Concepts and Practice* (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, 2018).

Sitze and the stewardship team at the ELCA.<sup>55</sup> They refer to assets as “gifts in action.” We are gifted by God and those gifts could be put to use for God’s purpose.”<sup>56</sup> They start with God’s grace as the very first gift. As Sitze asserts, “You’re saved and blessed and graced away from selfishness. You’re grace and washed clean so that you can go about your life as a steward of God’s grace. You’re newly created so that you can give your life away!”<sup>57</sup>

A key for my understanding of strengths comes from a secular source, the Gallup organization. *Strengthsfinder*<sup>58</sup> and *Strengths Based Leadership*<sup>59</sup> have a strategy of identifying strengths of individuals and matching up teams of workers, staff, or volunteers whose strengths complement each other. Individuals all have strengths. Author Tom Rath created a series of questions to help people realize their own strengths in order to apply them to their life situations. There are thirty-four identified strengths. *Strengths Based Leadership* offers leadership advice on investing in the combined individual strengths of the organization, which theoretically maximizes the overall team. Essentially, they propose that an organization’s participants do not all need to possess the same strengths, but if individuals combine them for the purpose of the organization, we

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<sup>55</sup> Robert Sitze, *The Great Permission: An Asset-Based Field Guide for Congregations* (Chicago, IL: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2002).

<sup>56</sup> Sitze, 7.

<sup>57</sup> Sitze, 10.

<sup>58</sup> Tom Rath, *Strengths Finder 2.0* (New York, NY: Gallup Press, 2007).

<sup>59</sup> Tom Rath and Barry Conchie, *Strengths Based Leadership: Great Leaders, Teams, and Why People Follow* (New York, NY: Gallup Press, 2008).

bring more strength to the work we do together. Three key findings<sup>60</sup> of this Gallup research are that:

1. The most effective leaders are always investing in strengths
2. The most effective leaders surround themselves with the right people and then maximize their team.
3. The most effective leaders understand their followers needs

### Hospitality/Radical Hospitality

Though named as a theoretical lens, the lens of Hospitality/Radical Hospitality also is deeply rooted in biblical story and witness. It is a mixed lens. Think of Abraham and Sarah entertaining the visitors (Gen. 17-18). Or of Hebrews 13:2: “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.” I will be using some materials from the hospitality industry.<sup>61</sup> Peter Block’s book, *Community*, relates to hospitality as it encourages relationship building and inclusion. He writes,

We usually associate hospitality with a culture, a social practice, a more personal quality to be admired. In western culture, where individualism and security seem to be priorities, we need to be more thoughtful about how to bring the welcoming of strangers into our daily way of being together.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Rath and Conchie, 2.

<sup>61</sup> Conrad Lashley, Paul Lynch, and Alison J. Morrison, *Hospitality: A Social Lens* (Elsevier, 2007).

<sup>62</sup> Block, *Community*, 145.

Kosuke Koyama connects hospitality to the theology of the cross.<sup>63</sup> The author notes that “[t]he New Testament word for ‘hospitality’ is ‘*philoxenia*,’ to love strangers,<sup>64</sup> and sees Jesus self-emptying act on the cross (Phil.2) as the greatest act of love of stranger.

One source that has deeply informed my thoughts and ministry is a book I frequently share, *Radical Hospitality*, which is a book written from a Benedictine perspective.<sup>65</sup> I have also learned a great deal about hospitality from a group called the Interfaith Amigos, a protestant pastor, a Jewish rabbi, and a Muslim imam,<sup>66</sup> whose books our congregation studied. They also visited our community twice. There will be more on this in chapter three.

### Variables

The interventions for this study were independent variables, including the sermon series and follow up modified Dwelling in the Word<sup>67</sup> sessions. The sermon series included six sermons and follow-up Dwelling group sessions. Our themes for the texts, sermons, hymns, and liturgy linked the intersections of baptismal vocation, *missio Dei*, Luther’s theology of the cross, and the liberating nature of God.

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<sup>63</sup> Kosuke Koyama, “Extending Hospitality to Strangers: A Missiology of Theologia Crucis,” *International Review of Mission* 82, no. 327 (1993): 283–295.

<sup>64</sup> Koyama.

<sup>65</sup> Fr Daniel Pratt and Daniel O. S. B. Homan, *Radical Hospitality: Benedict’s Way of Love*, Second Edition (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2011).

<sup>66</sup> Don Mackenzie, Ted Falcon, and Jamal Rahman, *Getting to the Heart of Interfaith: The Eye-Opening, Hope-Filled Friendship of a Pastor, a Rabbi & a Sheikh*, Quality Paperback Edition, Fourth Printing (Woodstock, VT: Sky Light Paths Pub, 2009).

<sup>67</sup> For definition of Dwelling in the Word, see definitions section later in this chapter and my protocol in Appendix E.



The effects of these interventions created the dependent variables. The dependent variables of this study are the results of the qualitative and quantitative gathering and analysis of data. They measured attitudes and opinions on baptismal identity, liberating experiences, God pleasing ministries, and more. These results are found in chapter six. Intervening variables included (1) member involvement and history within the congregation and community, (2) the ongoing mission and ministries of the congregation (including but not limited to Reconciling in Christ), and (3) ecumenical, and interfaith work that we have already done in order to become a more inclusive congregation. They also included (4) the direction we have begun turning from a model of Christian education to one of faith formation. Other intervening variables included some basic demographic information from the questionnaire. This information gathered indicated whether faith/denomination background, length of time in the congregation, and participation in ministry and leadership have an impact on data results.

### **Method, Methodology and Design**

It has certainly been a challenge to measure attitudes and understanding on a topic with a tagline, “God revealed in hiddenness.”<sup>68</sup> For this research I chose to use mixed methods Action Research (AR) as my overarching method. The methodology included qualitative and quantitative research that included baseline and end line questionnaires, interview protocols, and Dwelling in the Word to follow each of the sermons in the series. I interviewed twelve individuals. All my instruments can be found in the appendices A, C, E, G.

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<sup>68</sup> Gerhard O. Forde, *Theology Is for Proclamation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 22–23.

## The Challenge

The challenge to the Christian church in America is that it has a long history of participation in dominant philosophy and theology. For the Christian, elements of being within the dominant culture would seem to conflict with biblical and theological lenses of God's liberating nature, God's revelation of Godself through the incarnation of Jesus, his teachings, and his cross. In effect, a question emerges: How do we discern the will of God and participate in *missio Dei*, when the dominant culture has vastly different values. Following are some brief historical illustrations.

## A History of Dominion

Throughout the history of the Christian church, particularly the Western church, cultural and political powers have looked to the church to help to grow its numbers and power base. The church also has a history of growing numerically whenever it became attached to political and cultural powers. This is obviously not the exclusive process by which the church grew, considering early Christianity and the current Lutheran Church of Tanzania to name just two extraordinary models. However, it cannot be ignored that there are parallels among the church in its cultural power partnerships from the time of Constantine, through the Doctrine of Discovery,<sup>69</sup> Manifest Destiny, and much more than I can articulate in this particular thesis.

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<sup>69</sup> Ali Watson and Bennett Collins, "Why the Pope Has yet to Overturn the Church's Colonial Legacy," The Conversation, accessed September 26, 2019, <http://theconversation.com/why-the-pope-has-yet-to-overturn-the-churchs-colonial-legacy-39622>.

The conversion of Emperor Constantine to Christianity in the early fourth century was the beginning of a wedding of the Christian church and the secular empire.<sup>70</sup> In the year 330, as the new capital city, Constantinople was dedicated, Constantine forbade pagan worship or sacrifices in the city. Many Christians view this time as one of great triumph and progress for the church. Indeed, through Constantine's leadership and support, churches grew, and church hierarchy was solidified both in Constantinople and Rome. "Bishops became men of power and influence in political as well as religious life, and advisors to the emperor."<sup>71</sup> Of course, Constantine saw the political advantage to the merger of Christianity and state. The empire established and built church buildings. No longer was Christianity a persecuted religion. It was singled out as the only sanctioned religion. In return, the churches, gave their allegiance to the Empire and enjoyed its privileged status. That privilege had its price, which often required a choice between following Jesus and following the ways of the empire. "There were already signs that the church which had suffered persecution for so long would soon be persecuting its opponents."<sup>72</sup> This cooperation between Christianity and Empire continued for many generations. "By A.D. 800, a Pope crowned a new Holy Roman Emperor. The formation of Christendom, as a fusion of Christianity and civil kingdom Christendom—was complete."<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> William H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, 1. paperback ed., 3. [print.] (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1991), 505.

<sup>71</sup> Much of the commentary regarding Constantinian rule comes from William H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1991), 505.

<sup>72</sup> Frend, 505.

<sup>73</sup> Keifert, *We Are Here Now*, 30.

Similarly, the Doctrine of Discovery is a part of our church history that has profoundly affected Christianity's claim to "conquer" lands that are not occupied by Christians. Brian McLaren in a chapter titled "The Genocide Card in your Back Pocket" writes about pre-Columbian papal decrees, particularly the papal bull and many that followed *Romanus Pontifex* of 1455 that "empowered the Christian kings of Europe to enslave, plunder, and slaughter in the name of discovery."<sup>74</sup>

Invade, search out, capture, vanquish and subdue all Saracens (Muslims) and pagans whatsoever, and other enemies of Christ wheresoever place, and the kingdoms, dukedoms, principalities, dominions, possessions, and all movable and immovable goods whatsoever held and possessed by them and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery, and to apply and appropriate to himself and his successors the kingdoms, dukedoms, counties, principalities, dominions, possessions, and goods, and to convert them to his and their use and profit.<sup>75</sup>

Christopher Columbus (d. 1506) was an early example of an explorer who took advantage of this doctrine. Western Imperialism in general is based upon this doctrine. It was still being held up in American case law as recently as 2005.<sup>76</sup>

The doctrine itself is not a single document, but rather a series of bulls, or decrees, issued by the Vatican during the 15th century, one of which called on Christians, to invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens and pagans...the kingdoms, dukedoms, principalities, dominions, possessions, and all movable and immovable goods...held and possessed by them. In essence, from the 15th century onwards, the Doctrine of Discovery effectively allowed "Christian" explorers to claim ownership over those who were living in "non-Christian" lands. Through perceiving lands owned by "non-Christians" as nobody's land, or *Terra Nullius*, the Doctrine gave the Christian kingdoms of Europe the green light

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<sup>74</sup> Brian D McLaren, *The Great Spiritual Migration: How the World's Largest Religion Is Seeking a Better Way to Be Christian* (New York, NY: Convergent Books, 2016), 76.

<sup>75</sup> McLaren, 77. McLaren, *The Great Spiritual Migration*, quoting an English translation of the *Romanus Pontifex*, 1455

<sup>76</sup> "City of Sherrill v. Oneida Indian Nation of N. Y., 544 U.S. 197 (2005)," Justia Law, accessed February 7, 2020, <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/544/197/>.

to claim and kill in the Americas with the blessing of Christendom's most powerful institution.”<sup>77</sup>

Martin Luther (1483–1546), who was a near contemporary of Columbus, and a product of the same church, likely had been influenced by this doctrine as he exhibits in some of his anti-Semitic writings.

They must act like a good physician who, when gangrene has set proceeds without mercy to cut, saw, and burn flesh, veins, bone, and marrow....Burn down their synagogues, forbid all that I enumerated earlier, force them to work, and deal harshly with them, as Moses did in the wilderness.... If this does not help, we must drive them out like mad dogs.<sup>78</sup>

The ELCA has since renounce Luther's anti-Semitism but only in recent decades. The Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America adopted this declaration on April 18, 1994.<sup>79</sup>

A related continuation of this doctrine particularly is a general philosophical belief with deeply religious overtones referred to as Manifest Destiny, which was a philosophy that took root in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. Historian William E. Weeks has noted that advocates of manifest destiny usually touch upon three key themes:

- the **virtue** of the American people and their institutions;
- the **mission** to spread these institutions, thereby redeeming and remaking the world in the image of the United States;
- the **destiny** under God to do this work.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Sarah Augustine, “Time to End the Papal Bull,” Sojourners, August 10, 2015, <https://sojo.net/magazine/septemberoctober-2015/time-end-papal-bull>.

<sup>78</sup> Martin Luther, “On the Jews and Their Lies (Annotated),” n.d., accessed September 28, 2019.

<sup>79</sup> “Declaration\_Of\_The\_ELCA\_To\_The\_Jewish\_Community.Pdf,” accessed February 7, 2020, [https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Declaration\\_Of\\_The\\_ELCA\\_To\\_The\\_Jewish\\_Community.pdf](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Declaration_Of_The_ELCA_To_The_Jewish_Community.pdf).

<sup>80</sup> William Earl Weeks, *Building the Continental Empire: American Expansion from the Revolution to the Civil War*, American Ways Series (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), 61.

At its foundation is a belief that God has chosen the New World for a special favored status, and that we (white imperialists in the New World) were destined for expansion, just as God chose the Hebrew people in the generations prior to Jesus. Though claiming to be rooted in Christian morality,<sup>81</sup> the end results dehumanized, displaced, or destroyed those who were already living on the land. If they were not Christians, they were not considered human, but savage.<sup>82</sup> Historian William Earl Weeks writes, “The nationalist dream of a Manifest Destiny did not include nonwhite people.”<sup>83</sup> He continues,

The universal appeals of the Revolutionary era—liberty, justice, and equality for all the people<sup>84</sup> of the world—had receded, to be replaced by an increasing sense of the special, superior characteristics of white Anglo-Saxon Americans. As the nineteenth century unfolded, American nationalism became defined increasingly in racial terms. The emerging concept of Americans as an Anglo-Saxon people combined with an increasing pessimism regarding the “improvability” of nonwhite peoples. The prior faith that all could benefit from a healthy dose of American progress was replaced by a fatalistic belief in the inevitable demise of what were presumed to be inferior groups. Blacks, Indians, and Mexicans in particular were by the 1830s most often seen as obstacles to progress, incapable of improvement.<sup>85</sup>

The challenge to the Christian church in predominantly white euro-centric immigrant communities would be how we discern the will of God and participate in

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<sup>81</sup> “John Winthrop: A Modell of Christian Charity, 1630,” accessed September 26, 2019, <https://history.hanover.edu/texts/winthmod.html>.

<sup>82</sup> The Declaration of Independence, which declares that “all men are created equal” also refers to existing inhabitants of the land as “the merciless Indian Savages whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.” “The Declaration of Independence: Full Text,” accessed December 18, 2019, <https://www.ushistory.org/declaration/document/>.

<sup>83</sup> Weeks, *Building the Continental Empire*, 63.

<sup>84</sup> Weeks uses the word “people” here, but the “Declaration of Independence” clearly stated “*All men are created equal.*”

<sup>85</sup> Weeks, *Building the Continental Empire*, 63.

*missio Dei*, when the dominant culture believes it already knows the will of God<sup>86</sup> while at the same time frequently contradicting the life and teachings of Jesus regarding the poor and marginalized.

### Growth in our Region of the United States

Growth in the Christian community occurred when waves of mostly European immigrants came to America for new opportunities. As settlers continued to pursue westward expansion in the United States throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, many carried their faith traditions with them and brought new congregations and congregational growth to their new country. Their congregations were gathering places in new immigrant communities.

One such place is the community of my research: a Midwestern community, hereafter known as Prairieville,<sup>87</sup> on territory once inhabited by members of First Nation people. In Prairieville, like many other communities in the early and mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century, new East Coast European immigrants bonded to commonalities from their particular ethnic cultures of origin and their newly found American way of life. In the Midwest it was a common experience to see a Lutheran church of Norwegian origin across the street from one of Swedish or German origin. Language of origin, common foods, and customs, and perhaps fear or mistrust of other cultures made for convenient community.

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<sup>86</sup> Weeks, 62. Writing about Manifest Destiny, “Assumptions about America’s special virtue and its presumed mission to regenerate the world rested upon a bedrock faith that God had destined the United States for its special role. The spread of republican government, Christianity, and capitalism—the essence of America’s regenerative blueprint—could have been entrusted only to a people specifically chosen by God for the task.”

<sup>87</sup> Prairieville is a pseudonym for the community in which my congregation. It is in fictitious Corn County. All names and places in this document are pseudonyms unless otherwise noted.

Waves of new immigrants, growing families and job availability kept communities growing. Often extended families stayed mostly in the same community for several generations. For those religiously affiliated, which was quite common, it was assumed that churches would grow as would the communities. Pat Keifert writes, “The parish pastors’ responsibility was to maintain the flock: to hatch, match, and dispatch the members. Evangelism and mission became relatively irrelevant. Evangelism was done by the parishioners having babies.”<sup>88</sup>

Western Christianity has a lengthy history of partnerships between church and earthly power, success, growth, and majority status. It seems through my readings, experience and observation that Western Christianity’s partnership and roots in Doctrine of Discovery and Manifest Destiny, and our attachment to culture, power, and growth became primary in congregations, often to the exclusion of basic Christian teachings like seeing Jesus in the other (see Mt. 25), “blessed are the poor in spirit,” (Mt. 5:3), the rest of the beatitudes (see Mt. 5), and many of the teachings of Jesus. It represents a theology of glory and a constant expectation of growth, prosperity, and expansion. How do Christians respond when that growth and expansion are no longer a certainty?

### Decline in Our Region of the United States

Since the immigrant waves of white Christians of European descent began to slow, their (still Anglo Saxon Euro-Centric) cultures started to blend. Mainline congregations were no longer of single ethnic heritage but were still divided by race. Vocational mobility (upward mobility) made it less likely that multiple generations and

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<sup>88</sup> Keifert, *We Are Here Now*, 31.



extended families would stay in a single community. We are, as communities, less homogenous in our specific European heritage. In general, these mainline church communities that had been dependent upon models of community economic success and homogeneity are in decline. The ELCA has declined since its formation as a merger of the LCA, ALC, and AELC in 1988, from 5,288,230 members to 3,363,281 as of December 31, 2018.<sup>89</sup> For these and a wide variety of other reasons, we are currently living in a period referred to as post-Christian or at least post denominational.<sup>90</sup>

When predominantly mainline Christian churches of White European descent started to sense a numerical deflation among their membership in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they had numerous options before them. In my personal experience, these options were often grounded more in business models than the teachings of Jesus. Throughout my years of involvement in the Lutheran church, baptized in 1964, confirmed in 1979, and ordained in 1992, I have experienced various iterations of the church. As a child of the 70s, I have experienced the viewpoint that a charismatic youth pastor can change the church and bring in young families. In the 1970s through the current time, I have experienced a variety of “outreach” programs intended to inform our neighbors why our church was the best choice among all the other neighborhood Christian churches. I have experienced congregations who thought the answer was contemporary music, often accompanied by lyrics of dubious theological content. Programs, curriculum, and symposiums were often touted as the solution to declining

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<sup>89</sup> “About the ELCA,” ELCA.org, accessed October 15, 2018, <http://elca.org/About>.

<sup>90</sup> Missional Church Consultation and Zscheile, *Cultivating Sent Communities*, 1.

membership. Putting more money into doing what we used to do but doing it harder was not working. Cutting the budget was not the answer.

Continuing to expect solutions that may have been successful in the past, is simply a form of addressing adaptive leadership problems with technical solutions. However, as Linsky and Heifetz point out, “When you focus your energy primarily on the technical aspects of complex challenges, you do opt for short-term rewards.”<sup>91</sup>

Similarly, the theological lenses laid upon these stated issues within the church were often framed within a theology of glory. As Gerhard Forde noted,

A theology of glory . . . operates on the assumption that what we need is optimistic encouragement, some flattery, some positive thinking, some support to build our self-esteem. Theologically speaking it operates on the assumption that we are not seriously addicted to sin, and that our improvement is both necessary and possible. We need a little boost in our desire to do good works.... But the hallmark of a theology of glory is that it will always consider grace as something of a supplement to whatever is left of human will and power.”<sup>92</sup>

As I attended conferences, read books, and received publishing house offerings, it was often clear that the church had its eye on cultural marks of success – more members, more participation, bigger buildings, and more money. This is not to say that they were unfaithful; but even today, when congregation leaders and synod officials get together, you will hear the questions, “How many do you worship?” My response is, “We worship one God. I can also tell you about our attendance and ministries.”

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<sup>91</sup> Linsky and Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line*, 18.

<sup>92</sup> Forde and Luther, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, 105.

### The Intent of this Thesis

In my thesis research, my intention was to seek to provide a way to reframe this cultural model of success and theology of glory with a model of faithfulness that finds its joy and purpose in the gospel itself, through the intersections of Martin Luther's theology of the cross, and a biblical and theological understanding of God's liberating nature as they are woven through a Lutheran understanding of baptismal vocation.

In societies in which the surrounding culture can no longer be assumed to produce Christians, the church must engage the shaping of disciples with fresh intention. A missional view of God offers rich resources for re-envisioning how disciples might be formed in the power of the Spirit for faithful participation in the triune God's communal, creative, and reconciling movement in the world.<sup>93</sup>

I believe God is calling us into a time of fresh missional intention. I believe the Spirit is shaping us for faithful ministry that proclaims God's liberating good news.

### **IRB and Other Ethical Considerations**

This research project conforms to Luther Seminary Institutional Review Board (IRB) standards. All participants were over the age of eighteen. Participants were given information regarding the purpose and process of this research. They were informed of the voluntary nature of this study and informed of measures I have taken steps to keep the data confidential. Informed consent forms were used in conjunction with gathering qualitative data (appendix F, H). Implied consent forms were used in gathering quantitative data. Informed consent forms were copied for participants to have their own copy (appendices B, D).

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<sup>93</sup> Missional Church Consultation and Zscheile, *Cultivating Sent Communities*, 1.

All data were kept confidential. Hard copies of data are in a locked file in my home office. Only my advisors and I have access to interview data. I acknowledge my dual role as both pastor and researcher as an ethical consideration. I believe I have ethically maintained my boundaries in both of these roles.

Electronic data were password protected. Raw data will be destroyed after June 1, 2023. Federal guidelines specify a minimum of three years for retention of data.

All identifying information pertaining to names and places was removed before the thesis was submitted with the exception of El Salvador, Costa Rica, and (Augustana) Swedish references. While I have made every effort to ensure confidentiality, anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

## Definitions

### Assets

Assets are a significant measure by which I address missional leadership. For the purpose of this thesis it is exceedingly important to note that I do not use the word “assets” in the traditional financial respect (i.e. assets versus liabilities). Instead, I draw my definition of assets from ELCA stewardship leadership materials. Bob Seitz writes that “our first asset is God’s unconditional love.”<sup>1</sup> The basic concept is that all that we have and all that we are, including salvation itself, are gifts of grace, unconditionally given from God. Living in that awareness, God has given us what we need to fulfill our purpose in God’s mission, to live and serve without fear.

### Baptismal Vocation

Part of our Lutheran identity is the belief that we are called to ministry from the time of our baptism forward. In baptism, we are called children of God, joint heirs of the kingdom of God and we have “joined in God’s mission for the life of the world.”<sup>2</sup> Baptismal vocation is an understanding that God has a purpose for each of us and calls us to mission and ministry in our everyday lives. It is not only about those who are called into rostered service but is also about the priesthood of all the believers.<sup>3</sup> As written in

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<sup>1</sup> Sitze, *The Great Permission*, 30.

<sup>2</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 227.

<sup>3</sup> “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” (1 Peter 2:9)

the Evangelical Lutheran Church Document “Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective”  
Social Statement Summary,

Every Christian is called through baptism to participate in society by doing good in the places of responsibility — marriage, family, work, school, volunteer associations, community organizations and political parties. Baptismal vocation is the primary way that God works through the church in the public arena. Because of this, congregations and other places of ministry sustain the baptismal vocation of ELCA members. Christians fulfill their vocations in many ways and have many gifts. Baptismal vocation is the primary way that God works through the church in the public arena. Because of this, congregations and other places of ministry sustain the baptismal vocation of ELCA members. Christians fulfill their vocations in many ways and have many gifts.<sup>4</sup>

#### Dwelling in the Word<sup>5</sup>

This is a practice of a communal gathering around a biblical text, asking and listening to each other as participants respond to questions about “what they have heard from God”<sup>6</sup> in a given reading. I used a slightly modified form of Dwelling in the Word, which is described in my methodology section.

#### Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)

The ELCA is a merger of the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), the American Lutheran Church (ALC), and the Association for Evangelical Lutheran Churches in America (AELC) in 1988. The ELCA is the largest Lutheran denomination in America

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<sup>4</sup> “Church SocietySS Summary.Pdf,” accessed October 15, 2018, [http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Church\\_SocietySS\\_Summary.pdf?\\_ga=2.162703929.402165197.1539640818-1935199094.1529760907](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Church_SocietySS_Summary.pdf?_ga=2.162703929.402165197.1539640818-1935199094.1529760907).

<sup>5</sup> Dwelling in the Word, is a practice developed by Pat Ellison and Patrick Keifert, *Dwelling in the word: a Pocket Handbook*, Church Innovations. Robbinsdale, MN, 2006. This practice has similarities to the ancient practice of *lectio divina* (divine reading) in that it encourages the practice of deep listening and allowing Scripture to speak to the listeners.

<sup>6</sup> Keifert and Rooms, *Forming the Missional Church*, 18.

and the fourth largest Christian denomination in the United States. There are about four million members.<sup>7</sup>

### Faith Formation

In our context, faith formation has recently become used as a way of reframing what we used to call Christian education. Rather than focusing primarily on education, we are more interested in forming well-rounded disciples of all ages. Faith formation includes, worship, service, outreach, personal devotion, learning, and telling the good news.

### Frame/Reframing

To reframe something is to see a situation through a distinct perspective or lens. A frame, as explained in chapter three, is a “coherent set of ideas or beliefs forming a prism or lens that enables you to see and understand more clearly what goes on from day to day.”<sup>8</sup>

### *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi* (Law of Prayer/Law of Belief)

This Latin axiom from the 5<sup>th</sup> century comes from a 5<sup>th</sup> century motto, *lex supplicandi statuat lex credendi* (the law of prayer constitutes the law of belief) which explores the relationship between worship and belief. I will also be exploring the

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<sup>7</sup> “About the ELCA.”

<sup>8</sup> Bolman and Deal, *Reframing Organizations*, 41.

additional element of *lex movendi*<sup>9</sup> (movement) as it relates to the church's participation in *missio Dei*.

### Liberation Theology

I am using Liberation Theology and the liberating nature of God throughout this thesis with the understanding that the term "Liberation Theology" is loaded with all sorts of meaning from the various groups who have adopted the terminology. Here are the similarities among them that cause me to find it important for this work.

Liberation theologies employ action-reflection (praxis-oriented) methodologies in response to forms of oppression, normally consisting of five elements:

1) identification with particular forms of oppression and suffering, 2) prophetic critique of that condition, 3) social analysis of the causes of oppression and suffering, 4) biblical and theological engagement to address that suffering and overcome that oppression, and 5) advocacy of structural change toward a greater approximation of justice. Liberation theologies engage in intentional reflection upon particular experiences in which these five elements interact dynamically according to the forms of suffering and oppression specific to particular populations, historical experiences, and contexts.<sup>10</sup>

### LGBT+

The acronym LGBT+ is one of the many shorthand ways of referring to those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or an ally of someone who is in that group. Members of this community taught me that the plus sign is a sort of way of saying "etcetera." People in this community have often been specifically excluded from churches and religious activities. The phrase "All are welcome" is no guarantee that they

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<sup>9</sup> Daniel Anderson, "Church Emerging: A Missional View," in *Created and Led by the Spirit: Planting Missional Congregations* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), 142–44.

<sup>10</sup> Craig L. Nesson, "Liberation Theologies in America," (New York, NY: Oxford University Press), *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, December 19, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.493>.



will, indeed, be able to be affirmed in a congregation for being *out* (“out of the closet,” or having revealed their sexual orientation or gender identity). Being out occurs on a number of levels. Being *out* to safe people does not necessarily mean *out* to a larger community.

### Means of Grace

In brief, the Lutheran understanding of this term is Word and Sacrament. The ELCA teaching document, *Use of the Means of Grace* describes this term in this way:

Principle One: Jesus Christ is the living and abiding Word of God. By the power of the Spirit, this very Word of God, which is Jesus Christ, is read in the Scriptures, proclaimed in preaching, announced in the forgiveness of sins, eaten and drunk in the Holy Communion, and encountered in the bodily presence of the Christian community. By the power of the Spirit active in Holy Baptism, this Word washes a people to be Christ's own Body in the world. We have called this gift of Word and Sacrament by the name "the means of grace." The living heart of all these means is the presence of Jesus Christ through the power of the Spirit as the gift of the Father.<sup>11</sup>

### *Missio Dei* (Mission of God)

David Bosch writes,

In the new image mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God....The primary purpose of *missio ecclesiae* (mission of the church) can therefore not simply be the planting of churches or the saving of souls; rather it has to be service to the *missio Dei*, representing God in and over against the world, pointing to God, holding up the God-child before the eyes of the world in a ceaseless celebration of the Feast of the Epiphany.

### Reconciling in Christ

To be a *Reconciling in Christ* (RIC) congregation is a designation that a congregation is welcoming and affirming of all people, but specifically reaching out to

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<sup>11</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, ed., *The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1997).

the LGBT+ community and their allies.<sup>12</sup> The process of becoming RIC is one that includes study, conversation, and the creation of a welcome statement. GGLC became a reconciling congregation in January 2017.

### Rust Belt

According to Elizabeth Knowles,

A Rust Belt is a part of a country considered to be characterized by declining industry, ageing factories, and a falling population, especially the American Midwest and NE states. Coinage of the term is often attributed to the US Democratic politician Walter Mondale, who opposed Ronald Reagan in the presidential election of 1984.<sup>13</sup>

A good resource for learning more about the effects of being in a community in the Rust Belt community is Chad Broughton's book, *Boom, Bust, Exodus: A Tale of Two Cities*.<sup>14</sup> It tells the story of a community whose main manufacturer moved its production to Mexico and how both communities changed.

### Strengths

According to Peter Northouse, a strength "is an attribute or quality of an individual that accounts for successful performance. In simple terms, a strength is what we do when we are performing at our best."<sup>15</sup> Strength is also a frame that author Tom Rath, with the Gallup organization, used to develop an assessment to help people

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<sup>12</sup> The teaching materials and designation for becoming a reconciling congregation come from an organization based in St. Paul, MN called, Reconciling Works: Lutherans for Full Inclusion.

<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Knowles, "The Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable," Encyclopedia.com, January 11, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Chad Broughton, *Boom, Bust, Exodus: The Rust Belt, the Maquilas, and a Tale of Two Cities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>15</sup> Northouse, *Introduction to Leadership Concepts and Practice*, Location 66.

discover their strengths and talents.<sup>16</sup> The basic premise of Rath's work is that we are culturally conditioned to address our deficits, sometimes to the exclusion of nurturing our strengths. Rath's purpose is to redirect our focus toward strengths.

### Theology of the Cross and Theology of Glory

Theology of the Cross (*theologia crucis*) is Luther's name for the doctrine that "our knowledge of God must be drawn from the suffering Christ in his humiliation."<sup>17</sup> Luther first contrasted *theologia crucis* with *theologia gloriae* in his Heidelberg Disputation of 1518.

Theologia gloriae emphasized God's majesty and omnipotence, and the human capacity for wisdom and spiritual achievement, encouraging human pride and self-righteousness. It spawns a glorious, triumphant church, loves human reason and philosophy, and despises the foolishness of the cross. Theologia crucis on the other hand, points to the grace of God through Christ's suffering which was God's own suffering with us and for us.<sup>18</sup>

There are arguably two *theologies of the cross*.<sup>19</sup> In the first, God is credited with bringing about suffering as a direct result of sin. "The second theology of the cross, evident in Luther's early sermons, his Lectures on Hebrews, as well as the Heidelberg Disputations, specifies not that God causes suffering, but that God uses the suffering that already exists in the world to create "life [out of] the antitheses of suffering and death."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Rath, *Strengths Finder 2.0*, 1.

<sup>17</sup> Alan Richardson and John Stephen Bowden, eds., *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 566.

<sup>18</sup> Harold Wells, "Theology of the Cross: Luther and the Liberationists," *Touchstone*, June 2017, 48.

<sup>19</sup> Daniel J. Peterson, "We Preach Christ Crucified: Rejecting the Prosperity Gospel and Responding to Feminist Criticism Using Luther's Second Theology of the Cross," *Dialog* 48, no. 2 (June 2009): 196, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6385.2009.00455.x>.

<sup>20</sup> Peterson, 196.

## Word and Sacrament

The Lutheran church maintains that Jesus has given us two sacraments: Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, the latter of which is also referred to as the Lord's Supper, Eucharist, or simply communion. *Word*, usually expressed with a capital "W," refers to God revealed in Holy Scripture and the Word made flesh in Jesus Christ and the proclaimed Word. A sacrament, in the Lutheran tradition, is something Jesus commanded us to do and uses a physical element—something we can see, touch, and sometimes taste; and it relates to God's promise, the word of God, which gives faith. See "Means of Grace" above.

## Summary

In chapter one, I have outlined for you my topic and research question, variables, importance of this research, my method and methodology, IRB, and other ethical considerations. It is a basic understanding of my motives and methods for conducting this research in this time and place. I have provided some basic definitions of terms that are used in this thesis. In chapter two I will describe in further detail the history, background, and context of the congregation and community I serve, as well as its challenges and joys.

## CHAPTER 2

### HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

#### **Introduction to GGLC**

In chapter one, I wrote about the importance of this research, and gave a brief overview of the lenses, topic, variables, method, as well as IRB considerations and definitions. Chapter two will introduce the context for my research.

I believe the history and context of the congregation are important to understanding the overall thesis. In this chapter, I include timeline and demographic information about the community. I am serving an historic congregation of the former Swedish Evangelical Augustana Synod in America. For this thesis, its name is Grace of God Lutheran Church (GGLC).

When I first arrived in the fall of 2012, I listened to members talk about the good old days (g-o-d) when both the pews and the Sunday school wing were full. For many, the expectation for this new pastor, and for several before me, was to restore the congregation to the g-o-d. As the new person in the community, I had not experienced those days with them, but I could certainly understand and appreciate their nostalgic fondness for their memories. Our congregation is rich in spirit, talents, gifts, and assets.<sup>1</sup> It occurred to me that in the absence of the g-o-d, God might just be trying to show us a

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<sup>1</sup> Sitze, *The Great Permission*.

new future. If, as I wrote about my experiences in the introduction, God can be revealed amid civil war, assault, marginalization, discrimination and so many terrible atrocities, then perhaps the decline experienced by a Rust Belt community is not the worst thing that can happen to a congregation. Perhaps God can even find new ways to show up in our own midst.

GGLC Church is a 169-year-old congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, ELCA. Established in 1851, it was one of the first of the Swedish Lutheran congregations in our region. The congregation had substantial growth in its first century, as evidenced by twice outgrowing its worship space. As an historic Lutheran congregation in the region, GGLC is known to have launched several other congregations. Its offshoots include an Evangelical Covenant Congregation and at least one other Lutheran congregation in our community, established in the late 1800s. This congregation created another congregation consisting of a group of members who transplanted several states away. The most recent “birthing,” as people recall it, was back in 1905, when a group decided to form a new Lutheran congregation across the street, for the purpose of worshipping in English rather than Swedish.<sup>2</sup> We may never know the truth about whether the beginnings of these new congregations were intentionally started as missions of GGLC or whether they were divisive splits of the original congregation. Our congregation chooses to frame these events in a positive light. Indeed, the two offshoots that are still in Prairieville have collegial ministry relationships with GGLC.

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<sup>2</sup> Grace of God Lutheran Church, *Grace of God Lutheran Church Centennial* (Prairieville: Grace of God Lutheran Church, 1951), 16.

GGLC is now in its third building on this site. The congregation outgrew two earlier buildings and an off-site multi-story education building. This off-site education building supported a Sunday school of around 400 students. Our current facility was erected in 1926. The current worship space is a sixty-five-foot-tall neo-gothic structure with many intricate stained-glass windows and stunning oak woodwork. There is a Parish Hall adjacent to the nave that can seat between one-hundred and one-hundred and forty for a meal or fellowship. A second story educational wing beyond the Parish Hall and additional rooms in the basement are indications of a time when there were many children and classes. The size and scope of the building are important parts of our past. There are photos in the church of the Augustana Synod holding its synod assemblies in our building. The facility has been remarkably well stewarded over the years. Relatively recent renovations have included a complete renovation/restoration of our main east and west stained-glass windows as well as a major renovation of the bell tower, a new sound system, a new organ, mud-jacking our parking lot and sidewalks,<sup>3</sup> and a great deal of tuck-point<sup>4</sup> restoration work outdoors.<sup>5</sup> All of this is to say that the congregation has stewarded and continues to faithfully steward, our facilities.

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<sup>3</sup> Mud-jacking is the action of physically lifting slabs of concrete and leveling them by adding a cement/concrete mixture underneath the slab.

<sup>4</sup> Likewise, tuckpointing is a brick repair technique where damaged mortar is ground out between bricks and replace with new mortar. I did not know either of these terms before pastoring this congregation.

<sup>5</sup> GGLC Church, *GGLC Church Centennial*. Prairieville: GGLC Church, 1951.

### Prairieville Community

Prairieville was founded by abolitionists in the 1830s. From the 1850s throughout much of the 20th century, Prairieville was an exceedingly successful base for manufacturing and industry. Along with its strong industrial base, it also became a railroad hub and drew East Coast and international investors, speculators, and educators.<sup>6</sup> We are home to a private four-year liberal arts college and a community college both of which are a tremendous boost in the number of arts and educational offerings the community enjoys. Major employers in the community are the two hospitals, a medium security prison, a large national chain art supplies store headquarters, and the railroad. The combination of immigration, economic stability, and growth over that first century in our community contributed much to successful church planting and growth in our community. Driving over a recently constructed railroad overpass bridge into the city center, visitors will see a beautiful view of what is called the “steeple-scape,” a view of our many expansive historic church buildings.

The realities of today though are of a population that has been in decline for some time as shown in Table 1.

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<sup>6</sup> Tom W., *Remembering Prairieville*, American Chronicles: A History Press Series; American Chronicles (Series) (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2009).



**Table 1. Prairieville population by decade<sup>7</sup>**

<b>Census</b>	<b>Pop.</b>	<b>%±</b>
1850	323	—
1860	4,953	1,433.4
1870	10,158	105.1
1880	11,437	12.6
1890	15,264	33.5
1900	18,607	21.9
1910	22,089	18.7
1920	23,834	7.9
1930	28,830	21.0
1940	28,876	0.2
1950	31,425	8.8
1960	37,243	18.5
1970	36,290	(2.6)
1980	35,305	(2.7)
1990	33,530	(5.0)
2000	33,706	0.5
2010	32,195	(4.5)
Est. 2018	30,432	(5.5)

Table 1 indicates this city, which had a continuous history of significant growth from its inception in the 1850s, has now been in a steady decline since the 1960s. In fact, that decline was 18.3% from 1960 to the 2018 estimate, a nearly 20% reduction in population.

<sup>7</sup> Administration and Customer Services Division US Census Bureau, “US Census Bureau Publications,” accessed September 30, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/>.

Today, our community struggles in many ways like other Rust Belt communities around the country.<sup>8</sup> Our status as a railroad hub city once assured steady factory jobs. These jobs, like the population, have been in decline over the past few decades. “In 2002, the town of Prairieville, a slowly declining midwestern Rust Belt city of 34,000, learned that it would soon lose its largest factory, a popular name brand refrigerator plant that had anchored Prairieville's social and economic life for half a century.”<sup>9</sup> When I arrived in 2012, the 2004 closure of this plant was talked about in the community as if it were still a very fresh wound. It was one of the last few vestiges of the g-o-d.

Along with the causes mentioned above, there is greater mobility among young adults who move away for better opportunities. Families are smaller in general. This population decline has been the catalyst for our school district to close three of eleven schools in recent years. Two of them were elementary schools. All three schools served primarily minority populations. The superintendent of the school district pointed out recently that our student population was 8,000 in 1980, and 4,000 in 2019.<sup>10</sup> A major grocery store has closed on the southern side of the city, leaving a great many people in a food desert. According to the USDA, “To qualify as a ‘low-access community,’ at least 500 people and/or at least 33 percent of the census tract's population must reside more

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<sup>8</sup> city-data.com, "Poverty-Prairieville," accessed 9/1/16, 2016. <http://www.city-data.com/poverty/poverty-Prairieville-Illinois.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Broughton, *Boom, Bust, Exodus*. Publisher's overview.

<sup>10</sup> Notes from local clergy meeting with superintendent of school district, October 2019.

than one mile from a supermarket or large grocery store (for rural census tracts, the distance is more than 10 miles).”<sup>11</sup>

Currently, the median income for Prairieville city residents is \$34,602, in comparison to \$60,960 for the state.<sup>12</sup> The poverty rate in Prairieville is 22.5%. One out of every 4.5 residents of Prairieville lives in poverty. Forty-six percent of public-school children qualify for free and reduced school lunches.<sup>13</sup>

Figure one is a map of Prairieville.<sup>14</sup> Lighter shades represent higher poverty rates. Darker shades represent higher income. See figure 2 for income legend. The city limits are the area inside the outline. The size of the city is 17.75 square miles, just over four miles east to west and north to south. The cross represents the location of GGLC. The church is in close proximity to the poorest sections of the community and the food desert area of the city (mostly south of the cross). Poverty rates are indicated per neighborhood in red numbers.

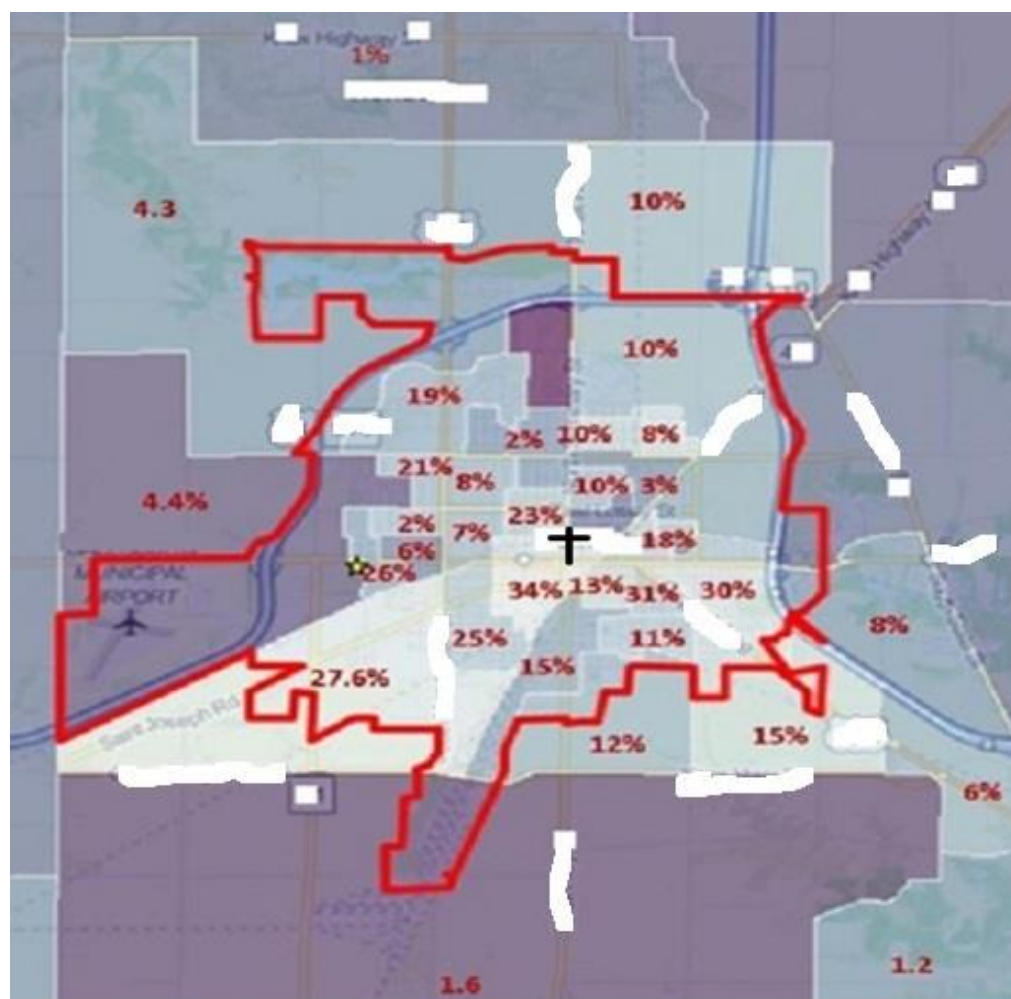
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<sup>11</sup> “USDA Defines Food Deserts | American Nutrition Association,” accessed June 18, 2019, <http://americannutritionassociation.org/newsletter/usda-defines-food-deserts>.

<sup>12</sup> “Prairieville, State, Profile: Population, Maps, Real Estate, Averages, Homes, Statistics, Relocation, Travel, Jobs, Hospitals, Schools, Crime, Moving, Houses, News, Sex Offenders,” accessed June 17, 2019, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Prairieville-Illinois.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Jennifer LaFleur, “The Opportunity Gap: XXXX High School,” 2016, <http://projects.propublica.org/schools/schools/171608001923>.

<sup>14</sup> White boxes are covering city identifying information that has been redacted.



**Figure 1 Prairieville poverty rate by neighborhood**



**Figure 2. Income legend**

### Religion in the Prairieville Community

Table 2 shows religious affiliation dated 2010. The website notes that the *nones*<sup>15</sup> represent the largest group of respondents. Their numbers have gone up by roughly 5,000

<sup>15</sup> *Nones* is a reference to those who claim to have no religious affiliation of any kind.

between years 2000 and 2010, far outpacing all other religious groups, which are generally in decline.<sup>16</sup>

**Table 2. Religious adherents 2010<sup>17</sup>**

Corn County 2010	%	Adherents	Congregations
Black Protestant	.8	422	3
Catholic	6.3	3,347	6
Evangelical Protestant	9.8	5,208	44
Mainline Protestant	16.9	8,952	35
None	64.7	34,264	—
Other	1.4	726	5

The economy and population declines parallel a notable decline in mainline protestant worship.<sup>18</sup> Our setting is not unique. The general consensus among local clergy is that this trend has only continued since these 2010 statistics. This is also confirmed by surveys data nationally. As the Gallup organization notes,

Church attendance has edged down in recent years. Gallup's latest yearly update from its daily tracking survey shows that in 2017, 38% of adults said they attended religious services weekly or almost every week. When Gallup began asking this question in 2008, that figure was 42%<sup>19</sup>

- Half of Americans are church members, down from 70% in 1999.
- Most of the decline attributable to increase in percentage with no religion.
- Membership has fallen nine points among those who are religious.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Table two statistics come from website city-data.com. In order not to reveal the location of this study, city and county are not referenced.

<sup>17</sup> Prairieville, State. Profile: Population, Maps, Real Estate, Averages, Homes, Statistics, Relocation, Travel, Jobs, Hospitals, Schools, Crime, Moving, Houses, News, Sex Offenders,” accessed June 17, 2019, <http://www.city-data.com/city?Prairieville.state.html>.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.city-data.com>.

<sup>19</sup> Gallup Inc, “Church Leaders and Declining Religious Service Attendance,” Gallup.com, September 7, 2018, <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/242015/church-leaders-declining-religious-service-attendance.aspx>.

<sup>20</sup> Gallup Inc, “U.S. Church Membership Down Sharply in Past Two Decades,” Gallup.com, April 18, 2019, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/248837/church-membership-down-sharply-past-two-decades.aspx>.

## Historic Ministries

GGLC Church, throughout its long history, has been considered a central and stable congregation in our area. Back in its day, it was known as a “cathedral on the prairie.” Worship, music, pastoral care, and Christian formation have been our primary ministries since our founding in 1852. In 1884, the congregation boasted weekly Sunday School attendance of 400 and attendance at the parochial school of 125.<sup>21</sup> Our pastors and musicians have committed themselves to the congregation’s ministries for some rather lengthy tenures. For example, our previous three organists stayed 28, 36 and 52 years, respectively. There had been a tradition of Swedish choir schools, which continued until our numbers dwindled below what could be called “choir” in 2013-14. (See 2015 statistics in table 3.) This was not a sustainable position based upon numbers of children actually in the congregation and financial realities of the congregation. In November 2015, our education/youth/music director/organist of twenty-eight years retired. She was the third person in that role since the construction of the 1926 building. She was also a full-time lay professional (rostered Associate in Ministry).

Back in the day, the good old days (g-o-d), this congregation was bursting at the seams every Sunday. An interim pastor, just before my arrival in 2012, cleaned up the membership records to reflect the actual membership of around 300 people. At the time of my arrival, 21% of the active membership was over the age of 80. Another 22% were between 70-79, and so forth. Children present at services totaled fourteen and that

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<sup>21</sup> GGLC Church, *The Dedication and Diamond Jubilee Festival of the GGLC Church Prairieville, Il*, ed. Charles Bengtson (GGLC Church, 1928).

included mostly those who attended only at Christmas and Easter. I knew that the congregation was at a serious turning point.

**Table 3. 2015 age range and participation**

Age Range	n on Membership Rolls	n of this Age Range Active in Worship or Ministries	% of People in this Age Group Active in worship or ministries	% of Total Activity by this Age Group
0-9	23	7	30	3
10-19	33	7	21	3
20-29	39	13	33	6
30-39	24	7	29	3
40-49	17	9	53	4
50-59	35	33	94	15
60-69	52	50	96	23
70-79	54	48	89	22
80-89	36	32	89	15
90-101	16	13	81	6
Total	329	219		100

This congregation, like many of our neighboring congregations, was in numerical decline. Between 2006 and 2015, average weekly attendance has gone from 205 to 120. In 2019, the average Sunday worship attendance was seventy-five.

Overall, among the twenty-five ELCA congregations closest to Prairieville, the average attendance is down by 32%. (See figure 2.) Technically, our congregational membership had declined from 833 to 291 between 2008 and 2015. A great portion of that was a statistical adjustment during a period of interim ministry in 2011. Membership has historically been and continues to be predominantly Caucasian.

Twenty-five ELCA congregations are situated within 30-35 miles of Prairieville, mostly small town and rural.. Some are in a shared conference. Some are not. On

average, attendance is down 32% in the ELCA congregations within about forty miles of Prairieville between 2006 and 2015. I am using the numbers available and on record.<sup>22</sup>

The Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church had a strong presence in our region. The congregation often hosted Augustana Synod assemblies. An ELCA college just forty miles away was formerly an Augustana Synod college and seminary. This seminary produced pastors for Augustana Lutheran congregations until 1962. There is a deep sense of history in our congregation, in our conference, and in our synod. Currently, with the exception of more recent mission starts, the congregations of our synod are entirely the product of the former Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Among its historic ministries, Luther League, the youth organization, was quite popular. The women's organization was regularly active. The congregation sponsored a Boy Scout troop and a bowling team. I have been told by some that back in its day, it was a "society" church, one in which a person had to own the "right clothes" to attend.

#### Current Central Ministries of this Christian Community

Our current ministries share much with our historic ministries in terms of worship, music, and faith formation. Current ministries have a much greater emphasis on service to community and hospitality/radical hospitality.

#### **Worship and Music**

We worship weekly throughout the year with one weekly Service of Holy Communion on Sundays. Our style of worship is, for the most part, quite traditional, with

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<sup>22</sup> ELCA.org has a feature on their website that allows one to look up congregations by proximity to zip code. This enables the searcher to find individual congregations and much data about each.



organ and denominational liturgy. Lay people serve as lectors, assisting ministers, ushers, and communion servers. They share faith stories, acolyte, and sing in the choir. We find ourselves blessed with an abundance of talented musicians who share their talents to the glory of God as we worship. Our musical leaders are also very “tuned in” to *lex orandi*, *lex credendi* and do their best to use music to support the Word and Sacraments.

### **Faith Formation**

This is an adaptation of what was once Sunday school, confirmation, and adult education. It includes all the activities of the congregation that serve to help us all grow into more faithful disciples and followers of Jesus. Learning, serving, proclaiming, and devotional activities for those of all ages are part of faith formation. This is a relatively new direction for us since letting go of our previous model of Christian education, which was heavily dependent on teachers and curriculum. There will be more on this as I expound on adaptive leadership.

### **Service to Community**

GGLC likes to open itself to the community. We have a food pantry that serves community members three times a month. Our food pantry does not ask questions about income or whether they frequent other food pantries. If they come and say they would like food, we simply ask how many people they are feeding.

In other areas of service, members will often make and serve home-made food at the church for funerals. One of our elders says of every funeral meal, “This is our compassionate service.” She makes sure that every luncheon is set up with China plates already on the table, just like Christmas dinner – for members or non-members, rich or poor, popular or little-known.

We also have an annual outdoor pet blessing for the whole community and host an annual neighborhood block party. For this block party, we use an online plat map to find name and addresses of our neighbors, and hand-address the envelopes for an individualized touch.

The congregation has taken it upon itself to make birthday cakes for each student at the alternative high school in our community. At the beginning of each school year, we hand out cards that ask for birth dates and a choice of cake and frosting flavors. The cakes are delivered on the day of their birthdays (or Friday the day before a weekend). This came about through a conversation between our members and the principal of this high school who helped us understand that although these students have lots of things distributed to them, few of them have people in their lives who actually celebrate them personally. The students are given choice of cake and frosting. The cakes are home-baked by members and come with signed cards reminding them that a real person made this cake just for them today.

### **Hospitality/Radical Hospitality**

One Sunday, early in my ministry at GGLC, a few members were at church early before worship, getting things ready, when a stranger came in the back door. He had come in from the train station with a big duffle bag. This is common experience in our railroad town. He was looking for a way to catch a bus to the next town over. There were four people in the building aside from him and me. They asked if he was hungry. One got him breakfast. Two were making coffee and served him a cup. The other went to check on the bus schedule. The first one pulled some easy travel food from the food pantry.

They had him fed and on his way before anyone else even arrived. This was but one of my early exposures to this congregation's gift of hospitality.

In the years since I have been at GGLC, we have recognized our facility as an asset that was being underutilized. We had one worship service on Sunday mornings and Sunday school, committee meetings, choir rehearsal, and not much more. With the exception of the activities of the church office, these few hours of use every week left our building vacant of any activity during the rest of the week. We were seriously underutilizing all that had been entrusted to us. We approached the local Habitat for Humanity affiliate in 2013. Their office space was in an undesirable location up against railroad tracks, and too small for the work they do. We offered them the main floor of a house attached to the church building for the same price they had been paying for their other space. We have shared space and activities for these six years now.

We welcome numerous musical organizations to use our worship space and share in not only a large performing space, but also really amazing acoustics. These organizations are community, collegiate, and professional. Because of our sharing of space, hundreds more people are in the space every year than we would have otherwise seen. In fact, a professional vocal ensemble decided to make our space their home base and offered to share the cost of rebuilding our Steinway B grand piano. We hope that they will see in the architecture, art, symbols, and signs of ministry, that we believe that God sees everyone as precious.

GGLC is a nearly entirely white congregation. Shortly after the 2015 shootings at Mother Emmanuel, AME,<sup>23</sup> we reached out to our local African Methodist Episcopal congregation. Some of our members worshiped with their congregation and spoke words to acknowledge this tragedy and stand with them. Another time, we shared a meal together and joined in a walk through our neighborhood to pray with and for our own neighbors and neighborhood. We regularly go Christmas caroling together. Members were willing to stretch out of their normal personal and social spheres and found blessing in these events. GGLC has been hosting and serving our community Martin Luther King Day breakfast for the past three years.

In partnership with a local liberal arts college and another congregation, we brought a trio of speakers to the community two years in a row. In the second year, on World Communion Sunday, the Interfaith Amigos, a protestant pastor, a rabbi, and an imam all spoke from our pulpit and shared bread and wine in our worship service.<sup>24</sup> Members of the community from many faith traditions, and some with no faith tradition, found this service profoundly moving. It has brought us closer to our local Jewish faith community and more open to attending Islamic events hosted on a nearby college campus. It brought us hope.<sup>25</sup> Because of these beginnings, our city now has an

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<sup>23</sup> “Charleston Shooting,” accessed June 27, 2019, <https://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/charleston-south-carolina-church-shooting/>.

<sup>24</sup> The Interfaith Amigos are Imam Jamal Rahman, Pastor Don Mackenzie, and Rabbi Ted Falcon, they have been speaking and writing together since 9/11.

<sup>25</sup> Note that this is the congregation that was the originator of an 1875 ruling by the Lutheran General Council meeting that “Lutheran pulpits for Lutheran ministers only; Lutheran altars for Lutheran communicants only” was adopted by the Lutheran General Council. (Identity of City and State will not be revealed here.)

Interfaith Collective of faith leaders from all types of faith traditions.<sup>26</sup> Our catchphrase is “to build bridges of understanding, kindness, compassion and respectfulness for all persons.”

In 2015-2016, GGLC started having conversations about becoming a Reconciling in Christ congregation (RIC).<sup>27</sup> Through this process, we asked ourselves questions about what inclusion really meant and whether it genuinely included LGBT+ individuals. We watched a documentary about Episcopal Bishop Gene Robinson (and others) that explored their variety of coming-out experiences with church, families, and religious leaders.<sup>28</sup> We listened to each other’s stories. Many were painful accounts of exclusion. It was fresh, honest, and sometimes raw. A critical topic of conversation was the difference between the use of the language, “all” are welcome,” and naming some of the “all” that have been traditionally excluded from many Christian circles. People expressed strong emotions on all sides of the topics during these conversations. Several members left the church. In the end, we voted to become a reconciling congregation in January of 2017. The Welcome Statement that we developed as part of that process follows.

As a community of the children of God, Grace of God Lutheran Church is called to serve and share the Good News of God’s Grace for all people. Throughout Scripture, Jesus exemplified this Grace by being radically, infinitely welcoming to cultural and religious outsiders, offering them dignity, compassion, and inclusion. Modeling the example of Jesus, the community of Grace of God Lutheran Church welcomes all to worship, receive the sacraments, and share in fellowship and service.

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<sup>26</sup> Our interfaith collective has a website; however the city name is in its title. In order to honor my commitment to anonymity I cannot print the URL here.

<sup>27</sup> See chapter one definitions for more about RIC.

<sup>28</sup> Films Media Group and First-Run Features (Firm), *For the Bible Tells Me So*, 2015, <http://fod.infobase.com/PortalPlaylists.aspx?wID=106238&xtid=66000>.

- We welcome new visitors and long-time friends; the young, the old, and everyone in between...
- We welcome people regardless of religious or faith background; believers, questioners, and seekers...
- We welcome people of every race, culture, and ethnicity...
- We welcome people of all genders, gender identities and sexual orientations (LGBTQ+), along with their family and friends ...
- We welcome people regardless of family status; single, married, divorced, separated, and partnered...
- We welcome people of every socioeconomic and educational level and all political affiliations...
- We welcome people with differing physical, mental, and emotional abilities and challenges...
- We welcome people with fears, phobias, criminal backgrounds, addictions, broken hearts, or regrets and all who seek renewal through the love and mercy of Jesus Christ.

The members of Grace of God Lutheran Church believe that we are called to strive for love, reconciliation, and wholeness in a world of anger, alienation, and brokenness. We treasure our similarities and celebrate our God-given differences in the heart-felt belief that diversity enriches and challenges the ministry and life we share in Christ. You are loved and welcome here!

*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal. 3:28)*

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Following the 2016 presidential election, there was a great deal of fear among the LGBT+ community, particularly among young adults who were still in various stages of coming out. As a result of some conversations, the congregation decided to host a weekly opportunity for young adults to gather and talk about what was on their minds. It was specifically welcoming to LGBT+ young adults and was called Safe Space and is still a

ministry of the congregation. Now, members of Safe Space take it upon themselves to gather items for “blessing bags” for the homeless. We try to distribute the bags in person. We also give them to both hospital emergency rooms and the local ambulance service. We believe grace leads to grace.

### Organizational Structure at GGLC

In terms of staffing, GGLC currently has one full-time pastor, a half-time administrative assistant, a half-time communications coordinator, a part time custodian, a part-time organist, and a part-time director of music ministries. In terms of congregational lay leadership, our congregation council calls for fifteen members.

For a congregation that has a weekly worship attendance of only about seventy-five people,<sup>29</sup> we seem to have a large number of committees. Not long ago, I attended eleven meeting of congregation committees in a single month. This was a combination of seven standing committees and five ad hoc committees. This is but one indicator that we may be administratively top-heavy.<sup>30</sup> As a congregation, we will need to take up the conversation of whether this is business or busyness, and how much is necessary and life-giving to the body of Christ gathered and to those we are trying yet to reach. With the learning we are all doing from this doctoral program, we will have more language to inform our decisions in ways that honor *missio Dei*.

The GGLC committee structures are designed for a much larger, program-oriented congregation, which at one time it was. In the 1990s there were two full-time

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<sup>29</sup> GGLC congregation records, accessed August 18, 2019

<sup>30</sup> In 2019 the congregation council voted to reduce its size from fifteen to eleven. This was a good step in realizing that we are not in need of as large of a leader board as we once did.

pastors, often an additional visitation pastor, and a full-time Associate in Ministry (now referred to as a Deacon in the ELCA). When I arrived, we had both a Christian Education Committee and a Youth Activities Committee, hold-overs from at least a generation ago. There were more adults on these committees than young people in ministry. Our standing committees also include Stewardship, Outreach/Social Ministry, Finance, Buildings and Grounds, Worship and Music, and now, Faith Formation (which replaced both CE and YAC).

### **Organizational Question**

An organizational question related to this research might be to ask what our structure might look like if we asked more questions about *missio Dei*. Additionally, we need to discover what, where, why, and how God is looking at us to get on board with God's intended purpose for us in this time and place. Finally, we must decide how we are grounded in a sense of baptismal vocation—and what that might mean for us?

### **Biblical and Theological Commitments of this Christian Community**

This congregation shares a passion for the basics of Jesus' teachings and ministry. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." (Luke 10:27) We are also committed to discerning the answer's to Jesus' questions from Matthew 25, "When did we see/not see you, Lord?"

We are growing in our trust that God will provide, even if the future does not look like the past. We try to keep our eyes open to how God hopes to use us in an effort to share the good news. We are amazed each time another person's gifts are lifted up in the community as fitting into the body of Christ in this time and place. One of the principles



of this congregation (spoken and unspoken) is that once we realize how amazing God's grace is in our own lives, we are compelled by our own joy to share it with others.

Michael Goheen writes a perspective on mission that we share,

Mission is no longer primarily understood as the geographic expansion of Christianity, but rather as the task given to God's people everywhere to communicate the good news not only with their words but also with their lives and deeds. Mission is witness in life, word and deed.<sup>31</sup>

### **Primary Opportunities, Dilemmas and Challenges**

The primary opportunities, dilemmas, and challenges of GGLC can be generally grouped around a sense that we are competing with our own past despite knowing that we can never go back. In every previous generation, this congregation has always known what to do when it outgrew its facilities. They built them bigger and more elaborate. They brought on more staff. They organized more committees. They recruited more volunteers.

Now that there are fewer families with fewer children and the general economic level of the community has declined, the congregation has found itself still trying to use technical leadership techniques to address adaptive leadership issues. For instance, back in 1995, when the general overall decline was beginning to be noticed, the congregation called an "outreach pastor."<sup>32</sup> When very few children were coming to Sunday School, the congregation was still begging for teachers and looking for a better curriculum that was easier to teach and would better hold the interest of the children.

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<sup>31</sup> Michael W. Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press Academic, 2014). 26.

<sup>32</sup> GGLC Annual Report, Prairieville, 1995

A quick look at our synod's statistics shows that it is not an issue unique to GGLC.<sup>33</sup> Of 145 congregations reporting data, 106 are listed to be in decline, 24 are listed as stable (which may also mean that they have reported no data), and 15 are listed as growing. Much more could be done with this data, but it indicates to me that the amount of pressure we have been putting on pastors and leaders to help numerically declining congregations to survive or thrive is disproportionate to reality. Could we be doing more collaboratively and cooperatively? If we trust that God can bring life out of death, what do we have permission to let die? Where might we experience resurrection and new life?

We are also not unique among mainline churches in that we experience substantial age gaps among our membership. When I arrived in 2012, 20% of the congregation was over the age of eighty. Those over age seventy were also a heavy proportion of the congregation. My first several years of service were spent doing many funerals. The population that was seriously missing included those between twenty and fifty years of age, and the generation younger. Congregation members initially articulated this to me as "we don't have any children." Their hope was to put more effort into children's ministries. They have tried this in the past and it did not work.

### **Opportunities**

I began my call to GGLC in November 2012. I have maintained that we will do well to always lead with what God has first given us. I have encouraged the congregation's leadership to look at ministry in terms of its assets. Early on, we did

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<sup>33</sup> ELCA.org, *number\_synod\_state\_Data\_Kit* (ELCA.org, 2016).

several council retreats. Annually, as we bring on new council members, each new council member receives a brief book on assets-based ministry.<sup>34</sup> We seek to discern together how God might be able to use what has already been given to us, in service to God and neighbor.

The energy and capacity of our members to reach out and care for others is a primary asset. They have the gift of hospitality. We have a solid core of members who are ready to try a new thing. Talking together about what it looks, and sounds like to be inclusive is both challenging and rewarding.

In our assets assessments, our facility ranked as one of our greatest assets. Though it is always in need of some new repair, we have also shared the space very intentionally through our partnership with Habitat for Humanity of Corn County. We have also shared the space with numerous community organizations and touring musical groups, both amateur and professional, and even allowed space for striking public school teachers several years ago. We have now begun housing two refugee families in a nine-bedroom home on our property. These opportunities to open the space have helped us share with others what matters most to us.

### **Challenges and Dilemmas**

One of our greatest challenges that we began addressing was that the congregation's inability to connect very well with young adults; at least, not the young adults who were raised in this congregation. I believe this is in part because of a tradition of separating children from the worshipping congregation during Sunday School. The first

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<sup>34</sup> Sitze, *The Great Permission*.

English language hymnal for this predominantly Swedish synod of several generations back<sup>35</sup> had an “Order of Service for Sunday School” which included a full order for confession led by the Sunday school superintendent.<sup>36</sup> (There was no absolution.) This would indicate to me that the children had historically been separated from their parents during worship.

Frequently, once a young person was confirmed, that was their last day of church attendance. When I arrived, the congregation was paying teenage girls to staff the nursery. They had no role for teenage boys to fill. This sent all sorts of messages both to the teenagers and to the little children. “If you cannot sit still during church, you get to go upstairs to play with toys and teenagers.” When these teenagers grew up, they had no investment in the church, other than perhaps a sentimental attachment that brought them back to the beautiful facility for weddings. There were also few jobs to keep them in the area.

I am addressing this as an issue of connecting with young adults. That is not how the congregation was addressing it when I arrived. Their surface assessment was that we do not have any children. The technical solution was to say that we needed more programming for children. We were paying a rostered leader half-time for child and youth programming. This person saw four to six young people on a good week. Child and youth ministry as we have done them in the past have now proven an unsustainable model. Connecting with children without the context of their families was more about

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<sup>35</sup> *The Hymnal and Order of Service*, Abridged (Rock Island, IL: Augustana Book Concern, 1925).

<sup>36</sup> *The Hymnal and Order of Service*, 658.

programming and less about Christian formation or Christian relationships. I believe it was an unintentional tradition that discounted our belief that children also have the Holy Spirit and not all education need be top-down in nature.

In 2012, only about 20% of all the activity of the church was occurring through members who are under the age of fifty.<sup>37</sup> On the positive side, we were able to engage many retired and nearly retired individuals in ministry. However, the few remaining members of the “Greatest Generation,” a term that Tom Brokaw popularized, are well up in their years.<sup>38</sup> Many of the deaths in the congregation during my time here have been from that generation. For this congregation (and many others, I imagine), they represented an unmatched type of character and sense of commitment.

My question became, “What would it look like to develop relationships with young adults?” For these younger generations, church is often at best one of many options for their time. However, we are discovering that they will participate in something they believe is meaningful, is real, and has integrity. I believe the message of the gospel is all that and more. We have a message of hope that is unmatched by any competing activity.

As I referenced in the previous chapter, 64.7% of Prairieville is religiously unaffiliated.<sup>39</sup> This certainly presents challenges to all of us who seek to share the good news of Jesus. Along with challenge, though, I see hope in the statistics. It is hopeful, because we believe that God wants to connect with all people. And we know that God is

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<sup>37</sup> See table 3 above for age range and participation.

<sup>38</sup> Tom Brokaw, “The Greatest Generation,” recorded 1998, Random House Audiobooks.

<sup>39</sup> City-data.com, *Religious Statistics Table, Corn County*, vol. 65.7 k, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Prairieville-state.html> (2016).

always willing and able to do a new thing! It embodies the challenge of “connecting ecclesiology and missiology.”<sup>40</sup> I am hopeful that it is perhaps possible to learn from those who are not coming to church. It is painful to admit that these statistics suggest that the church’s former ways of reaching out to the un-churched or de-churched has not worked for many, many people. It is also not necessarily surprising. Our congregation, like many, celebrates its own immigrant heritage, which for us was Swedish Lutheran. Census data shows us that in Corn County today only 8.3% of the population is Swedish. As one of our senior members is fond of saying, “There are no more boats coming from Sweden to fill our pews.” Our hope though, is in the God who brings life out of death, the “God who makes all things new” (Rev. 21:5).

I believe the importance of this work revolves around reframing our expectations as a Christian community called, gathered, and enlightened by the Holy Spirit. The reframing sees God as the primary initiator/motivator/actor of the mission in which we are involved rather than the other way around.

This chapter was an overview of the history and community surrounding GGLC and our challenges and opportunities. Chapter three will explore my theoretical lenses.

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<sup>40</sup> Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation, The Missional Network* (Grand Rapids, MI. Baker Academic, 2011).

## CHAPTER 3

### THEORETICAL LENSES

#### **Introduction**

In my previous chapter I provided some contextual history and background, biblical and theological commitments and reflections, and primary opportunities, dilemmas, and challenges. In chapter three, I will expound on my theoretical lenses.

#### **Theoretical Lenses and Supporting Literature**

My theoretical lenses are primarily four leadership theories, strengths-based and assets-theories, and hospitality. My missional leadership challenge is to help the congregation members to embrace their history, but also to look to, as Patrick Keifert is often fond of saying, “God’s preferred and promised future for our congregation and community.”<sup>1</sup>

#### Leadership Theories

My reading and reflection for this doctoral program have offered me many opportunities to study a variety of leadership theories. I have gleaned much from many of them that will be useful for me to exercise as a leader. For the purpose of this thesis, I

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<sup>1</sup> Keifert, *We Are Here Now*, 64.

will identify four as key lenses. They are: (1) Identifying Mission, (2) Reframing, (3) Adaptive Leadership, and (4) Relationships and Connectedness.

### **Identifying Mission**

Mission has both secular and faith-based implications. First from an organizational and leadership lens, Margaret Wheatley writes,

When an organization knows who it is, what its strengths are, and what it is trying to accomplish, it can respond intelligently to changes from its environment. Whatever it decides to do is determined by this clear sense of self, not just because a new trend or market has appeared.<sup>2</sup>

It seems obvious that it is important to identify a mission when leading work that has a mission. However, apparently it is not always obvious to those in the midst of the work. This problem can be true of the church. Congregations can get side-tracked<sup>3</sup> with all sorts of things not related to, or only peripherally related to their actual mission.

Even Steve Jobs was fired from Apple in 1985.<sup>4</sup> Bolman and Deal talk about this firing as an issue of Jobs not “understanding of the importance of aligning an organization with its mission”<sup>5</sup> Although this was a company that Jobs had, in fact, co-founded, he had lost sight of its mission. Leadership must keep the mission foremost.

We in the church often find ourselves facing in the same conundrum. In my experience with congregational ministry, it is common to find little discernment about

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<sup>2</sup> Margaret J Wheatley, *Leadership, and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2010), Kindle ed. loc.1363–64.

<sup>3</sup> Because Prairieville is a railroad hub, I want to note the etymology of the phrase side-tracked. A side-tracked train is exactly what it sounds like. It is a train that is taken off the main tracks and set to the side. Literally, that train is going nowhere.

<sup>4</sup> Bolman and Deal, *Reframing Organizations*, 4.

<sup>5</sup> Bolman and Deal, 3.



what or how ministries are chosen. “That’s what this committee does” is one way to close down creative discernment. “It has always been done that way” has been jokingly referred to as the seven last words of the church, but these types of comments express a larger truth. It is human nature and systems theory that a person or organization wants to find its comfort zone or homeostasis. In mission, though, we are always being called forward in exercising expressions of love of God and love of neighbor. Helping our congregation members renew their sense alignment with the mission of God is an ongoing and critical leadership challenge.

The word *mission* is packed with meaning for the church. The Greek ἀπόστολος (apostolos, from which we get the word *apostle*) has the connotation of being someone who has been sent on a mission, a missionary. The early apostles were *sent*.

For many generations, the word “mission” became disconnected from the priesthood of all believers. Beyond the very early church, and for many generations thereafter, the Christian church considered missionaries to be people called by God but sent by churches. Anthony Robinson writes, “mission was not an inherent characteristic of every congregation that belonged to all its members; rather, mission was something done by specially designated ‘missionaries’ in territories or nations that were not Christian.”<sup>6</sup> Robinson writes about a robust change in the conversation in recent decades to talk very specifically about God being the sender. He explains this shift in understanding the word *mission* or *missional*.

If the church is missional to its very core and being, and its primary purpose is to change lives and to grow people of faith who are disciples of Jesus for the sake of the world, then we can no longer think of the church as “for us” and mission as “for others.” That is no longer a helpful framework, description, or division. The

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<sup>6</sup> Robinson, *Changing the Conversation*, 21.

church, our church, is not “ours.” It is God’s church, called to be an instrument of God’s mission of healing and mending God’s creation.<sup>7</sup>

When writing a mission statement with GGLC some years ago now, we decided to start with three basic questions. We did a sticky note exercise that helped us look together at (1) our identity, (2) our purpose, and (3) our context—who we were called to serve. We posted many words for our sense of purpose, calling, and identity. We compiled them together in various configurations. We gathered in groups and tried on ideas. Ultimately, we had a simple consensus. Our mission statement is: “We are children of God, called to love God and serve neighbor.” It professes our baptismal identity as children of God and it reveals Jesus’ great command: “‘you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:30-31)

## **Reframing**

The ability to renew a sense of alignment with *missio Dei*, will require for some a radical reframing of their sense of church.

“Reframing requires an ability to think about situations in more than one way, which lets you develop alternative diagnoses and strategies. We introduce four distinct lenses or frames-1) structural, 2) human resource, 3) political, and 4) symbolic—each logical and powerful in its own right. Together, they help us decipher the full array of significant cues, capturing a more comprehensive picture of what’s going on and what to do.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Robinson, 27.

<sup>8</sup> Bolman and Deal, *Reframing Organizations*, 5.

I believe that each of these frames provide leadership resources that leaders would be wise to be aware of. These frames pertain to multiple types of leadership challenges. As they describe these frames, the most useful to me in congregational leadership has been that of the symbolic frame. They describe symbolic framing as having central concepts of culture, meaning, metaphor, ritual, ceremony, stories, and heroes. The basic leadership challenge they articulate is that of creating faith, beauty, and meaning.<sup>9</sup> The calling of preaching and leading worship is certainly a suitable vehicle for carrying these concepts. There is so much richness to the ritual and biblical witness, they can hardly be ignored as instruments of leadership. Casting visions of meaning and purpose, offering words of hope, grace, love, and forgiveness are more than merely words. I believe they carry the impact of performative language.<sup>10</sup>

Reframing involves “changing the way we tell the story of ourselves.”<sup>11</sup> It is an adaptive leadership issue to help the congregation turn the corner to change its story, which for some is “woe is us, we do not have xyz that we used to have in the past.” Could we reframe that narrative to look more like, “praise God for the life-changing ministries God is doing within and among us?”

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<sup>9</sup> Bolman and Deal, 19.

<sup>10</sup> I learned of this term many years ago in college or seminary. Performative language or utterance stems from a Jewish understanding of the word as doing what it says. Former mentor, Professor Mons Teig was adamant, for instance, that you never use the word, *may* in a blessing. “May is for wishful thinkers. A blessing is a blessing.”

<sup>11</sup> Anthony B. Robinson, *Changing the Conversation: A Third Way for Congregations* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2008), 58.

## Adaptive Leadership

Adaptive leadership and technical leadership represent two contrasting methods of leading. While they both have a place, it is not the same place. Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky<sup>12</sup> have written much about the two. Technical leadership, simply put, is summarized in this statement: “When we don’t know what to do, we do more of what we know.”<sup>13</sup> Table 4 outlines the simple difference. Trying to find better curriculum and adding more Sunday school teachers when you have only six children is using technical leadership on an adaptive challenge. Creating a new experience for children that reflects the congregation’s views on discipleship, learning, service, and worship, and putting it into action with the children, is meeting an adaptive challenge with an adaptive solution.

**Table 4. Distinguishing technical from adaptive challenges<sup>14</sup>**

	What’s the Work?	Who Does the Work?
Technical	Apply current know-how	Authorities
Adaptive	Learn new ways	The people with the problem

“In mobilizing adaptive work, you have to engage people in adjusting their unrealistic expectations, rather than try to satisfy them as if the situation were amenable primarily to a technical remedy.”<sup>15</sup> In reality, it is challenging and messy work. As our congregation went through the process of becoming an RIC congregation, we had to use all of these skills, realizing that different people would adapt at different rates, and some

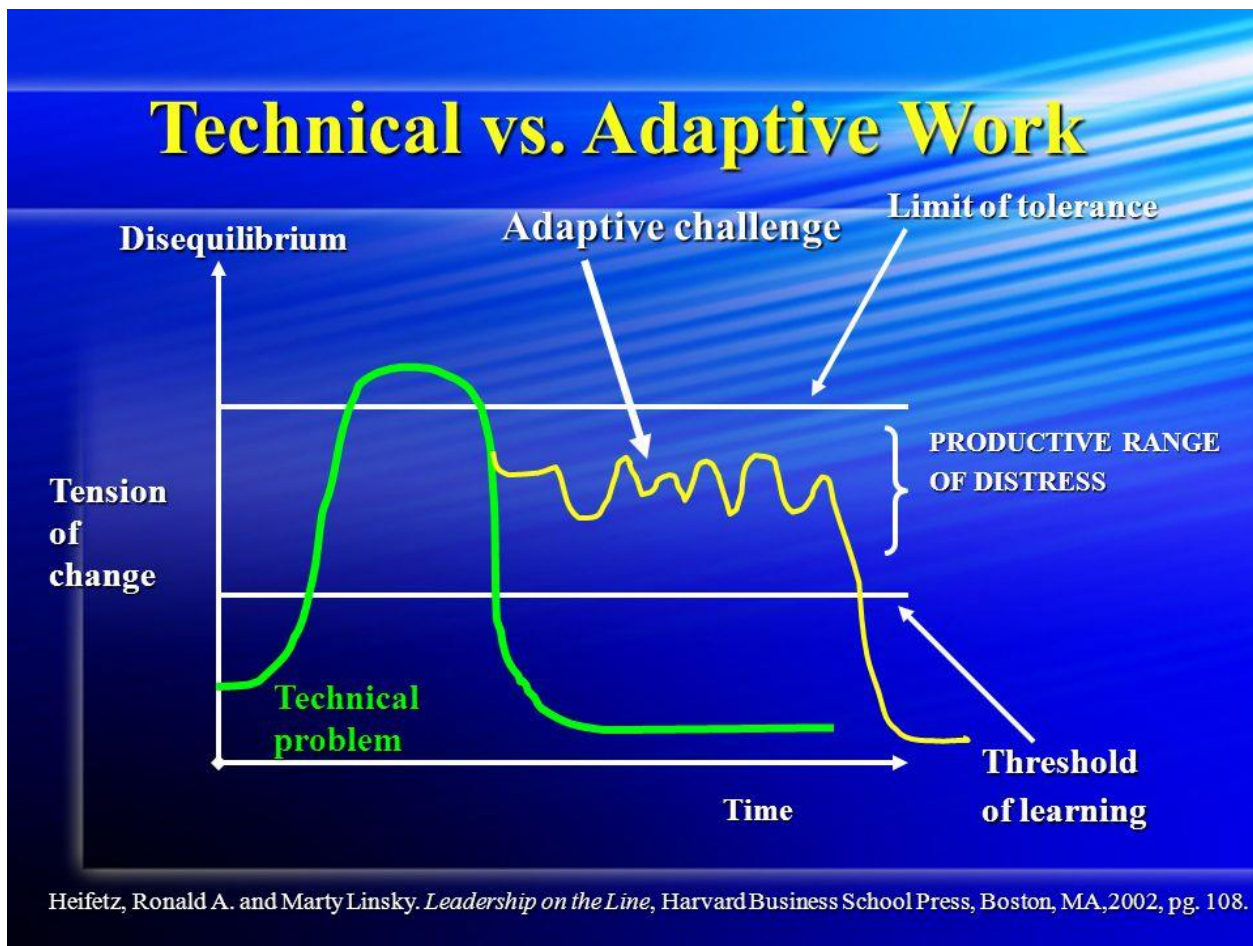
<sup>12</sup> Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*.

<sup>13</sup> Bolman and Deal, *Reframing Organizations*, 7.

<sup>14</sup> Heifetz and Linsky, 14.

<sup>15</sup> Heifetz and Linsky, 14.

would not adapt at all. As you can see on figure 3, there are two axes of tension and time. Individuals within the system will tolerate only a limited amount of disequilibrium. A range of learning can happen during adaptive work that lies just below the limit of tolerance.



**Figure 3. Technical vs. adaptive work<sup>16</sup>**

Another element of their teaching on adaptive leadership (fig. 3) helps us understand there is a productive range of distress that lies between the threshold of learning, and the limit of tolerance.<sup>17</sup> The productive range of distress, in my experience,

<sup>16</sup> Heifetz and Linsky, 108.

<sup>17</sup> I did a small social experiment in my first year as a pastor at GGLC. During the season of Lent, I announced ahead of time that we would be using a modern language adaptation of the Lord's Prayer. It

helps me see that when congregation members start arguing over petty things, it might be time to introduce something that offers them a little challenge. It is what they call “controlling the temperature.”<sup>18</sup>

Being aware of the temperature occurs through what they refer to as learning to move back and forth from the “dance floor to the balcony.”<sup>19</sup> That is, we should stay engaged with the work at hand, but also we need to step back once in a while to observe the big picture. In my context, the balcony is where I listen to the congregation at large, especially those not in decision-making capacities. In the process of this study, I am discussing and sharing with our congregational leadership and my listening team, some of these techniques as well. When we can listen to a member’s discomfort at change, we can take it at face value, hear it, and value them as a child of God. These leaders are understanding with me how to interpret and manage technical and adaptive challenges.

Even if the system contains conflict and disequilibrium, it is still very possible to catalyze change with good leadership methods and strategies.

For example, getting to the balcony, finding partners, adjusting the thermostat, pacing the work, making your interventions unambiguous and timely, bringing attention back to the issue and showing the relevant communities a different future than the ones they imagine are all methods of dealing with the disequilibrium that you generate.<sup>20</sup>

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would be only for the season of Lent and would be for the purpose of hearing the words in a fresh way. The experiment gave me an idea of how different people coped with changed. It turned out to be predictive of other ways these same people would handle other changes. I could prepare accordingly.

<sup>18</sup> Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 107–16.

<sup>19</sup> Heifetz and Linsky, 51 ff.

<sup>20</sup> Heifetz and Linsky, 160.

The writings of Heifetz and Linsky have been instrumental in assisting our leadership to understand the difference between technical and adaptive challenges and leadership solutions. Intentionality is needed to introduce these theories to new leaders as they take their places among existing leadership. Adaptive leadership challenges can be difficult to identify. However, the larger the group of participants working toward a solution, the better the chances of finding a solution that works for the larger community and not just as a quick fix. Trust becomes an all-important component in moving forward to experiment with possibilities. “Habits, values, and attitudes, even dysfunctional ones, are part of one’s identity. To change the way people see and do things is to challenge how they define themselves.”<sup>21</sup> They write,

For transformative change to be sustainable, it not only has to take root in its own culture, but also has to successfully engage its changing environment. It must be adaptive to both internal and external realities. Therefore, leadership needs to start with listening and learning, finding out where people are, valuing what is best in what they already know, value, and do, and build from there. It’s dangerous to lead with only a change idea in mind. You need both a healthy respect for the values, competence, and history of people, as well as the changing environment, to build the capacity to respond to new challenges and take advantage of new openings.

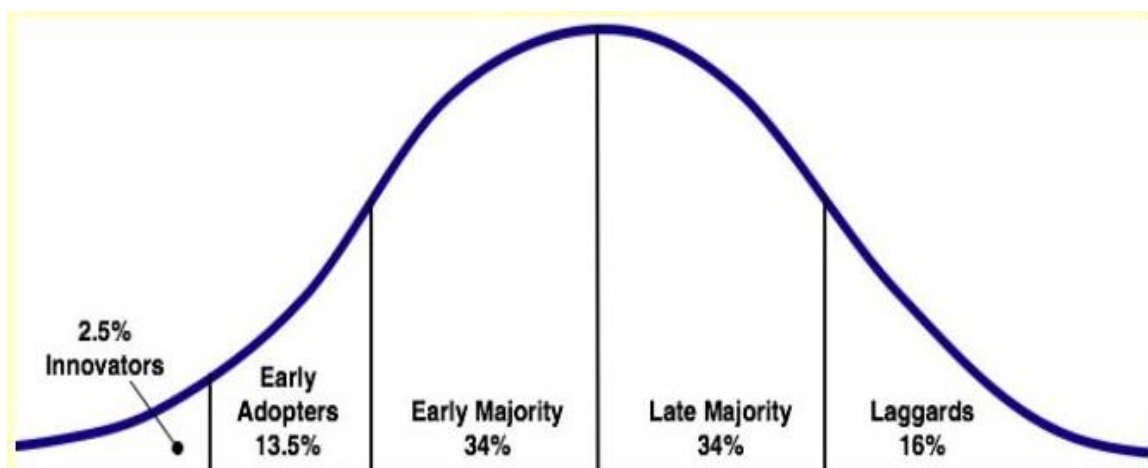
In this congregation, I began my ministry by celebrating their past and learning everything I could about the congregation and community. I recorded oral histories. I listened to stories about generations past. I met and cherished the last remaining WWII veterans. I realize these stories are fading into the shadows, as fewer and fewer story tellers remain to give account of this time in history. Honoring the past, can we also now allow for faith that God brings resurrection out of death? Can we take the stories of our

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<sup>21</sup> Linsky and Heifetz, 27.

members finding light in the darkness and weave them into our new story? These were some of the hopes of this study.

Another element to adaptive leadership that has informed my leadership praxis is understanding the theory of diffusion of innovation introduced to our cohort by Rev. Dr. Dwight Zscheile.<sup>22</sup> Figure 4 shows this social science lens as bell curve with a horizontal axis representing time.<sup>23</sup> The vertical represents adopters of the change. There are just a few people who are early innovators. They are the ones who come up with ideas. Early adopters try out the ideas. Some illustrations of this diagram will include a “chasm” after the early adopters as a way to note that, if the idea cannot “jump” beyond those early adopters, it will likely fail. There will be an early majority, a late majority and then what Rogers refers to as “laggards.” It is a good reminder that innovations do not necessarily catch on at the same time by everyone involved. It is also important to note that leaders are responsible to the entire one hundred percent.



**Figure 4. Diffusion of innovations**

<sup>22</sup> Class notes, January 12, 2017

<sup>23</sup> Class notes, January 12, 2017, from the works of Everett Rogers on the Diffusion of Innovation.



### **Imagination, Improvisation, and Dancing with the Trinity**

In the end, this work of missional leadership is relational, improvisational, and responsive within its environment. As I mentioned in the Identifying Mission section above, the congregation chose to look at (1) our identity, (2) our purpose, and (3) our context in order to write our mission statement. Context is typically the most fluid of the three. It is a communal work to come back and revisit these three on occasion.

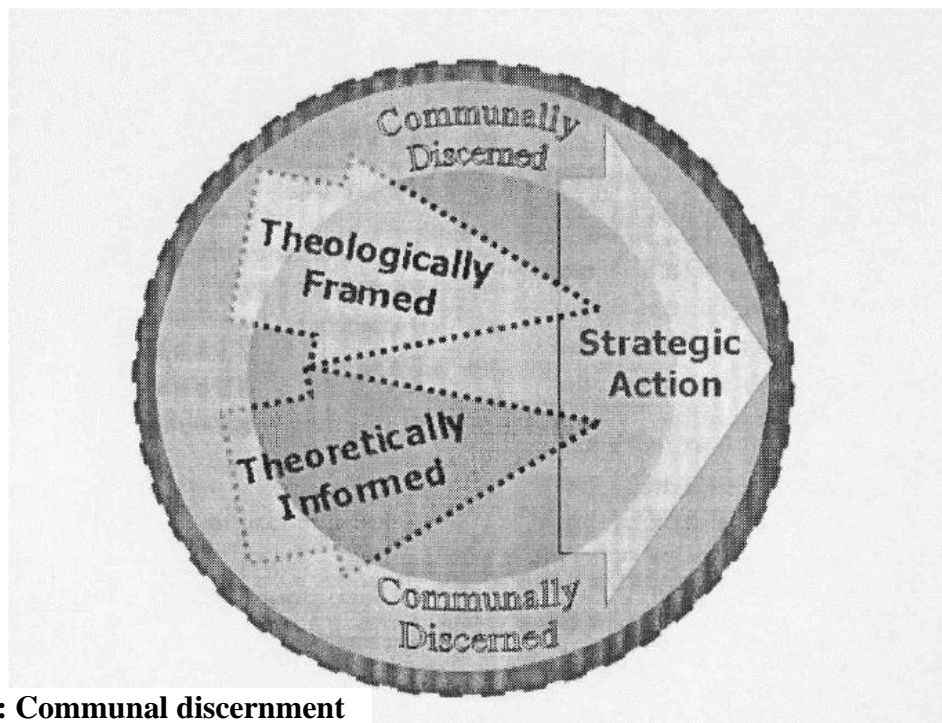
Craig Van Gelder writes about the hermeneutics of leading in mission as a complex set of challenges that call for thoughtful and communal discernment requiring leadership, time, and mutual commitment: in four dimensions.

[U]nderstanding Christian leadership in congregations today requires an approach that works from the hermeneutical turn. It is the assertion of this essay that such an approach to leadership involves at least four interpretive dimensions that need to be integrated into a common framework. These dimensions are: Texts, Context, Community and Strategy/Action.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Craig Van Gelder, "The Hermeneutics of Leading in Mission," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 3, no. 1–2 (2004): 141–42.

<sup>25</sup>Van Gelder goes on to talk about how Christian leadership can most effectively integrate these dimensions, relationally, interactively woven into each other. Hence the



**Figure 5: Communal discernment**

circular diagram which relates the necessity of communal discernment to surround the process. Theologically framed and theoretically informed are the two necessary inputs that lead toward strategic action.<sup>26</sup> This diagram (figure 5) illustrates a process which could be used as an action/reflection cycle where all the components inform one another in a shared process. For instance, the theological and theoretical lenses of this thesis inform much of what I bring to the leadership conversation in my context. It is in communal discernment (which include theological and theoretical insights as well as strengths and assets of the community) that strategic actions are implemented.

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<sup>26</sup> Van Gelder, "The Hermeneutics of Leading in Mission," 153.

<sup>27</sup> Margaret Wheatley writes of this connectedness, “I have learned that in this exquisitely connected world, it’s never a question of ‘critical mass.’ It is always about critical connections.”<sup>28</sup> Her reference is like that of *improv* as it is used in jazz music and theater. In improvisational jazz, the players start with a tune, a key, key changes, and the players’ individual and combined experience. Everything else they do is a product of their training, experience, knowledge of the others, communication, and trust. Not all musicians need to be at the same level of ability to create jazz music in combo.

Similarly, with interactive improvisational theater, the actors are given a scenario and perhaps brief character profiles. They proceed to enter a scene together. They play off each other. They do not monologue. Mistakes do not end the scene but become an opportunity for further creative response. Rather than having a mindset of, “no, that is not possible” or the purported seven last words of the church, “we have never done it that way,” improv is about playfully saying, “yes, and . . . !” In church, many things happen that are unplanned. “Yes, and...” does not mean chaos reigns but is, instead, an acceptance that our circumstances describe our current reality. We name what is. We go forward from where we are. “Yes and...” is an invitation to a new thing. It is not a re-reading of an old script and hoping it has a new ending. In fact, “the system is healthiest when unproductive units fail, allowing their resources to be recycled into other, healthier units.”<sup>29</sup>

Transitions can mean that there is no one left in a community who remembers how to organize a ladies auxiliary or run a vacation Bible school. But there may

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<sup>27</sup> Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 210 ff.

<sup>28</sup> Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science*, Kindle loc. 863–65.

<sup>29</sup> Nancy Tatom Ammerman and Arthur Emery Farnsley, *Congregation & Community* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 347. Quoting Carl Milovsky

also not be any ladies who need an auxiliary or children who need a vacation Bible school. That is, those skills may have died for lack of a clientele, or they may have migrated to where they are, in fact, needed. Transitions may also result in the disruption of patterns of connection among congregations and between them and other institutions. As congregations change in constituency and program, their networks of connection will change.<sup>30</sup>

Improv actor and comedian Tina Fey would add, “Now, obviously in real life you’re not always going to agree with everything everyone says. The Rule of Agreement reminds you to ‘respect what your partner has created’ and to at least start from an open-minded place.”<sup>31</sup> Heifetz and Linsky also relate missional leadership to improvisation.

Leadership is an improvisational art. You may have an overarching vision, clear, orienting values, and even a strategic plan, but what you actually do from moment to moment cannot be scripted. To be effective, you must respond to what is happening.<sup>32</sup>

We are in a specific time and place. We are individuals called together by the Holy Spirit in a community. We cannot move in the past. But we can look around us, see what we are already given and say, “*Yes and . . .*” to God.

As we think about the missional church as improvisational, I would like to offer LaCugna’s description of *perichoresis*, as the “divine dance.” Of the Trinity, she writes, “There are neither leaders nor followers in the divine dance, only an eternal movement of reciprocal giving and receiving, giving again and receiving again.”<sup>33</sup> She later continues, “

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<sup>30</sup> Ammerman and Farnsley, 348.

<sup>31</sup> “Tina Fey’s Rules of Improv,” 1, accessed June 30, 2019, <https://kicp-workshops.uchicago.edu/eo2014/pdf/Tina-Feys-rules-of-improv.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 73.

<sup>33</sup> Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York, NY: Harper, 2006), 272.

Not through its own merit but through God's election from all eternity (Eph. 1:3-14) humanity has been made a partner in the divine dance. Everything comes from God, and everything returns to God, through Christ in the Spirit. This *exitus* and *reditus* is the choreography of the divine dance which takes place from all eternity and is manifest at every moment in creation.

How exciting to think we have been called into an improvisational dance with the Trinity. God has given us this imagination for participation in *missio Dei* to dance us forward into God's preferred and promised future.

### Strengths and Assets

Strengths and assets are a theoretical lens that pairs with the biblical concept of *God who provides* in times when we are most apt to view things from a lens of scarcity. There are a few classic biblical examples that come to mind, such as the near sacrifice of Isaac, the feeding of 5000, the widow of Zarephath, manna in the wilderness, and Jesus turning water into wine. Christian steward principles remind us that all that we have, we have only because it has been entrusted to us by God. Strengths and assets are also elements that have been entrusted to us by God.

I group strengths and assets together for the purpose of this thesis because of their similar principles. Strengths and assets are an additional way to reframe the way we tell our story. They assist us in assessing what God has given us to work with in this time and place.

Some years ago, I was part of a pilot program in the ELCA in which some leaders in our synod were chosen to participate in a strengths-based retreat. The retreat was based

upon the Gallup organization books *Strengths Based Leadership*<sup>34</sup> and *Strengthsfinder 2.0*.<sup>35</sup>

Strengths-based leadership theory challenges the notion that we need to constantly be giving our best energies to our deficits. It offers a perspective that allows individuals to address their work with self-awareness and integrity:

At its fundamentally flawed core, the aim of almost any learning program is to help us become who we are not. If you do not have a natural talent with numbers, you are still forced to spend time in that area to attain a degree. If you're not very empathic, you get sent to a course designed to infuse empathy into your personality. From the cradle to the cubicle, we devote more time to our shortcomings than to our strengths.<sup>36</sup>

Certainly, the theory does not imply that we ought not seek to improve ourselves or learn new things. It is more a matter of identifying strengths and putting our energies into utilizing those strengths. The strengths-finder equation is

$$\begin{array}{rcl}
 & \mathbf{Talent} & \text{(is a natural way of thinking, feeling, or behaving.)} \\
 \mathbf{X} & & \\
 & \mathbf{Investment} & \text{(is time spent practicing, developing your skills, and building} \\
 & & \text{your knowledge base)} \\
 \hline
 = & \mathbf{Strength} & \text{(the ability to consistently provide near-perfect performance)}^{37}
 \end{array}$$

From a stewardship perspective, strengths (as well as assets) are the things that God has entrusted to us. No individual has strengths in every field; therefore, strengths-based leadership emphasizes self-awareness and awareness of the strengths of the team (congregation in this context) and bringing people together who have complementary

<sup>34</sup> Rath and Conchie, *Strengths Based Leadership*.

<sup>35</sup> Rath, *Strengths Finder 2.0*.

<sup>36</sup> Rath, 3.

<sup>37</sup> Rath, 20.

strengths, utilizing those strengths with a discerning heart toward *missio Dei*. This concept, perhaps more than any other, has changed and improved my ability to lead.

Peter Block uses the word *gifts* to describe this idea of lifting up rather than identifying deficits. He writes (in regard to human and social services),

We are only interested in the needs and deficiencies. If a family or person has no pressing needs and deficiencies, nothing that can be categorized, we have no interest in them. Perhaps we should develop diagnostic categories for people's gifts.

The Apostle Paul would write about these as spiritual gifts. (I Cor. 12-13) "There are a variety of gifts . . . but the greatest of these is love."

Consider how often, when congregations are facing the prospect of bringing in new pastoral leadership, they look for someone who has strengths in areas where their last leader did not. They often seem to have amnesia regarding to the immediate-past leader's strengths until they realize the new leader does not have that as a strength. For instance, Pastor A had great administrative abilities but was not so great with pastoral care. The next pastor, B, is chosen for strengths in pastoral care, then criticized for not being much of an administrator. Strengths-based leadership on the part of the lay leadership would have been looking to identify strengths, as well as areas that were not strengths. Rather than criticizing the leader for not having *all* the strengths, they could choose the ones that were most important, and start looking for support in the other areas. Personally, I am happy to inform my leadership team that I trust them to deal with, for instance, issues of buildings and grounds, insurance and so forth. These are not my expertise. My time and energies are better served elsewhere. More importantly, there are other people who do have those areas of expertise, and whose strengths ought to be utilized to the glory of God.

I have been working with GGLC council members for the past six years to talk about strengths and assets. Many of us have come through family, church, and educational systems that focus primarily on deficits, or historic roles. What a freeing awareness it is to not have to be best at everything. Other examples that I recall are the days in congregations when a respected senior adult male was typically appointed head usher. Often, these were people who thrived on organizing things and managing people. Introducing people into that role who had gifts for hospitality, compassion, and encouragement changed the atmosphere right at the front door.

At GGLC, we have two part-time office staff. One is administrative and other does communications. When we needed to replace the former person doing communications, we did not need that person also to have office management and accounting skills. We could concentrate our staff search on someone who communicated well. Strengths-based leadership looks at what strengths are already in the works, and what other strengths would round out the team. Another phrase for highlighting these strengths that people bring with them is “social capital”:

To understand what is happening in a community, in fact, it may be more useful to observe the stock of skills and connections it comprises than to inventory the organizations themselves. This “social capital” is the essential stuff of our lives together, the network of skill and trust that makes civic life possible’<sup>38</sup>

### Hospitality

Many of us learn about hospitality from our parents. I was no exception. I remember asking my mother once why we left the door unlocked when we went away.

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<sup>38</sup> Ammerman and Farnsley, *Congregation & Community*, 347.



Our farmhouse was in a very remote rural area with a road going by it. Her response was simply, “Well, what if someone needs to get in?”

Hospitality is, of course, a biblical lens. “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it” (Heb. 13:2). From our biblical witness, it is a historically notable practice that goes back at least to the time when Abraham and Sarah fed the three visitors. Hospitality also points us forward to God’s eschatological promises:

Missional theology calls us to an expansive understanding of God’s work in those most unfamiliar to us and in God’s wider world. I must emphasize that our relationships in mission with diverse others are not merely instrumental to our own self-growth but anticipatory of the eschatological communion that is our destiny, where we will join with people of every tribe and nation at the heavenly banquet.<sup>39</sup>

Hospitality is in that sense, a biblical and theological lens. But it is also a cultural lens not exclusive to Judeo-Christian practice. The Islamic Club at our local liberal arts college invites the community to break the fast with them at the end of Ramadan each year. Cultures all over the world of any and no religious affiliation have differing practices of hospitality. For instance,

Evidence from British history suggests that social and cultural obligations to be hospitable lasted into the Medieval period but began to break down in the 16th and 17th centuries. Several of Shakespeare’s plays use the dishonouring of the laws of hospitality as a device to increase the villainy of a character’s actions. For example, the killing of Duncan while he is a guest in Macbeth’s house, the blinding of Buckingham by King Lear’s sons-in-law leads him to cry out: ‘But you are my guests’. Contemporary audiences would have understood that these acts were breaking the laws of both hosts to protect their guests, and of guests to act honourably to their hosts. Obligations in Western societies to behave

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<sup>39</sup> Missional Church Consultation and Zscheile, *Cultivating Sent Communities*, 21.

honourably as guest or host may not have the same cultural sanction as they once had, but they still exist in a modern mode of operation.<sup>40</sup>

The quote above comes out of a tourism industry teaching material. I find it interesting that as our culture puts away its China plates and seldom eats together as a family, this industry understands hospitality as something all people long for in some way. Like all commercial ventures, vendors seek to fill needs that people have, or convince them that they have the need so that they can make the sale. My purpose is not sales. It is in opening space for genuine community.

### **Radical Hospitality**

Radical hospitality is not a new concept. Nor is it a trend or a program. It is about opening ourselves to others without expectation. It is foundational to following Jesus. One of the main complaints against Jesus during his earthly ministry was “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:2). When Jesus shared his last supper with the disciples, he did so with the knowledge that he would be betrayed and denied. Still, he washed their feet and shared a meal. And he taught them one last time about love and service. Fr Daniel OSB and Loni Collins Pratt write about this, saying,

Radical hospitality must uncompromisingly remain fundamental to its revolutionary nature. This is not to say that the word radical necessarily means “extremist”—it doesn’t. Radical refers to what is *fundamental*, (emphasis mine) or the root of something. You may remember from high school science that the term radical also describes an atom that doesn’t lose its identity during change. Our identity as people of faith and communities of faith will be gained, not lost, in the changes required to become radically hospitable.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Lashley, Lynch, and Morrison, *Hospitality*, 5.

<sup>41</sup> Pratt and Homan, *Radical Hospitality*, 2011, loc. 117.

GGLC has a core commitment to this radical hospitality. This has not always been the case. There are older members who remember friends telling them, “I can’t go to your church because I don’t have the right clothes.” We are, as all congregations are, a work in progress. But this congregation has had significant conversations over the past few years regarding what this means. Hospitality starts with our own hearts and values. “When we speak of hospitality, we are always addressing issues of inclusion and exclusion.”<sup>42</sup> Our leadership is working to continue to cultivate this as a place where no one ever feels like an *other*. Part of that commitment meant asking questions about who was absent from church, from leadership, from our general field of vision. Young adults were at the top of that list. To address this, we entered conversations with young adults regarding what might make a difference for them. As a result, we began a Friday night Safe Space, a time and place set aside for conversations with young adults who have been *othered* by churches or by the language of other Christians. Some of the members of this group now have leadership roles in GGLC, serving on congregation council, choir, treasurer, and voting delegate to our synod assembly.

Another result of those conversations is our status as a Reconciling in Christ congregation. We are committed to our LGBT+ siblings in Christ. This is about more than a statement of welcome. It is a matter of heart. One of our members calls it “love without asterisks.”

I believe radical hospitality is connected to theology of the cross in that it finds people where they are, walks with them whoever they are, and loves them as they are. It is not a program to be learned. It is to focus on the needs of the other:

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<sup>42</sup> Pratt and Homan, loc. 517.

The phrase radical hospitality refers to the activities and desires that inspire individuals and communities to welcome those who are unlike themselves. Rather than viewing any person in terms of how they benefit us, radical hospitality means accepting the person with no thought of personal benefit. Instead of seeking persons who will support the congregation, actively seek persons who need the support of the congregation. To become hospitable means finding ways to welcome the marginalized, forgotten, and misunderstood among us.<sup>43</sup>

And so, how do these lenses relate to my research question, “How might an Action Research (AR) intervention cultivate a hermeneutic of *missio Dei* as it relates to Baptismal Vocation?” I believe that keeping our mission in front of us, as *missio Dei* and not just *missio ecclesia* will be an important component. As we keep *missio Dei* before us the work of leadership will be to

- Reframe our dependence on our past story for meaning, which will increase our reliance on God for our congregation’s present and future and give a greater sense of hope and purpose.
- Utilize adaptive leadership to help us to look at challenges more realistically and creatively.
- Focus our attention on the imaginative, creative, and improvisational work that God calls us into in community.
- Help others discover their own strengths, assets, and gifts as they can be utilized for the glory of God
- Seek out opportunities to share hospitality, particularly with those who have been *othered*.

In this chapter, we have explored my theoretical lenses and supporting literature. In chapter four, I will expound upon my biblical and theological lenses.

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<sup>43</sup> Lonni Collins Pratt and Daniel O. S. B. Homan, *Radical Hospitality: Benedict’s Way of Love*, First Edition (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2002), 5.

## CHAPTER 4

### THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL LENSES

In chapter three, I discussed my theoretical lenses and reviewed literature pertaining to those lenses. Those lenses have shaped my perspectives on leadership as I continue to grow in understanding my own role as pastor and community leader. In this chapter, I shall explore the theological and biblical lenses of my research. My biblical lenses highlight the biblical witness of the liberating nature of God and the theology of the cross. My theological lenses are of baptismal vocation, Luther's *theologia crucis*, *lex orandi/lex credendi*, and God's liberating grace as they relate to the mission of God.

#### **Theological Lenses**

The theological lenses I am using will rely primarily on writings from the period of the Reformation to our own time. The lenses I am using are (1) baptismal vocation, (2) theology of the cross, and (3) the liberating nature of God as seen through a variety of liberation theologies. As I was preparing my interventions, it seemed incomplete for me to simply preach on a theme. As one who finds the language of the entire worship service to be an important ministry, I became very intentional to use hymns, prayers, and other liturgical texts that would highlight and accompany the biblical and theological lenses of the study. This is how a fourth lens came into use during the interventions: *lex orandi, lex credendi*, an axiom from the early Roman church regarding the nature of how prayer (worship, liturgy, hymns) informs our beliefs. Mutually, our beliefs inform our prayers.

## Baptismal Vocation

The topic of baptismal vocation begins with Jesus' own baptism, which I will address at greater length in the section on biblical lenses. From a theological perspective, Jesus' baptism is unique. He had no need to repent of sin or profess his faith. There was nothing unclean about him. However, he claimed it needed to happen in order to "fulfill all righteousness" (Mt. 3:15). I would submit that his baptism was his public entry into participation in *missio Dei*. As Dr. Martin Marty writes about the baptism of Jesus,

[Jesus] too stepped into the water. John had been preaching that his own baptism was for the forgiving of sins after repentance. Here was one who, he was given to see, was the Righteous One of God who had no sin, no need for repentance, no possibility of being forgiven. To baptize him on the usual terms would have been at best meaningless and at worst a negation, a blasphemy. Yet the man from Nazareth said that this baptism must occur. It was "to fulfill all righteousness." In that act Jesus identified himself with the plan of God's righteousness. He was himself the suffering servant of whom the second Isaiah had spoken. He was the anointed of God. From now on he could speak of his purposes as a "baptism of suffering." <sup>1</sup>

In the Lutheran tradition, we acknowledge that we have been called in baptism to participate in the mission of God. Our baptismal identity, child of God, calls us to be about God's family business wherever we are. Our baptismal vocation leads us to use our daily experiences to witness and serve God and neighbor. Christians fulfill their vocations in many ways and have many gifts. <sup>2</sup>

The primary way that the church carries out its responsibility in the world is through the everyday life of ordinary Christians. Every Christian is called through baptism to participate in society by doing good in the places of responsibility — marriage, family, work, school, volunteer associations, community organizations and political parties. Baptismal vocation is the primary way that

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<sup>1</sup> Martin E. Marty, *Baptism*, First Edition (Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), 12.

<sup>2</sup> "Church\_SocietySS\_Summary.Pdf," 1, accessed June 23, 2019, [https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Church\\_SocietySS\\_Summary.pdf?\\_ga=2.162703929.402165197.1539640818-1935199094.1529760907](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Church_SocietySS_Summary.pdf?_ga=2.162703929.402165197.1539640818-1935199094.1529760907).

God works through the church in the public arena. Because of this, congregations and other places of ministry sustain the baptismal vocation of ELCA members.

In the Lutheran Church, we traditionally baptize infants or children while very young, in the belief that God does the works of grace before we can claim any works or worthiness on our part. Martin Luther in his 1529 *Large Catechism* writes, “My faith does not constitute baptism but receives it.”<sup>4</sup> It is a *means of grace*. (See definitions in chapter one.) Grace is an undeserved gift. We follow the command of Jesus’ great commission to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 28:19). At baptism, we believe that we are called into the mission of God. This is our baptismal vocation. We become part of the “priesthood of all believers.”<sup>5</sup>

As we are baptized and received the gifts of God, these gifts go with us as we live and grow into them. Our passions, gifts, energies, and all that we have are gifts from our gracious God and we use them to serve God and neighbor, in gratitude to God. (In the secular world, these would be referred to perhaps strengths or assets.) Our baptismal liturgy, as expressed in our current worship book commonly referred to as *ELW*,<sup>6</sup> is rich with word of Trinitarian relationship, hope, deliverance, and *missio Dei*.

We proclaim the promise:

God, who is rich in mercy and love, gives us a new birth into a living hope through the sacrament of baptism. By water and the Word God delivers us from sin and death and raises us to new life in Jesus Christ. We are united with all the

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<sup>4</sup> Theodore G. Tappert, *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1989), 442.

<sup>5</sup> But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9)

<sup>6</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, 234.

baptized in the one body of Christ, anointed with the gift of the Holy Spirit and joined in God's mission for the life of the world.

We renounce:

Do you renounce the devil and all the forces that defy God, the powers of this world that rebel against God, and the ways of sin that draw you from God?

Response: I renounce them.

In the liturgy, the congregation professes our communal faith in the Triune God through the words of the Apostles' Creed. We baptize in the name of the Triune God. When teenagers or adults affirm their baptisms, they affirm as their own the commitment their parents and sponsors made at their baptism.

You have made public profession of your faith. Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in holy baptism:  
to live among God's faithful people,  
to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper,  
to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed,  
to serve all people, following the example of Jesus,  
and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?

These promises are at the heart of the concept of baptismal vocations. They are a large part of my baseline and end line questionnaires. I asked questions of how participants see role models, have opportunities, and are encouraged to live into these promises.

### Theology of the Cross

*Theologia crucis* is a term first used by Luther in 1518 in his Heidelberg Disputations, to make a distinction between this and *theologia gloriae*, which "emphasizes God's majesty and omnipotence, and the human capacity for wisdom and spiritual achievement, encouraging human pride and self-righteousness. It (theology of glory) spawns a glorious, triumphant church, loves human reason and philosophy, and despises the foolishness of the cross."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Wells, "Theology of the Cross: Luther and the Liberation," 147.



For Luther, one could be either a theologian of the cross or a theologian of glory, not both.<sup>8</sup> Theology of the cross is a perspective that God comes to us as a hidden God, hidden in lowliness and suffering in Jesus Christ who meets us in our weakness and suffering. Gerhard Forde writes, “But the hallmark of a theology of glory is that it will always consider grace as something of a supplement to whatever is left of human will and power.”<sup>9</sup> Theology of the cross is a faith-mind-set that believes Christians do not have to rely on a culture-centered optimism but rely instead on God, who is able to bring something out of nothing and life out of death.

**Table 5. Theology of glory/theology of the cross from Heidelberg Disputations<sup>10</sup>**

<b>The Theologian of Glory</b>	<b>The Theologian of the Cross</b>
<b>Thesis 19</b>	<b>Thesis 20</b>
1. That person does not deserve to be called a theologian	1. But [that person deserve to be called a theologian
2. Who claims to see the invisible things of God	2. Who comprehends what is visible of God ( <i>visibilia et postiora Dei</i> )
3. By seeing through earthly things (events, works).	3. Through suffering and the cross
<b>Thesis 21</b>	
4. The theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil.	4. The theologian of the cross calls a thing what it is.

Daniel Peterson takes up a critique from some feminist theologians that theology of the cross has the danger of glorifying suffering or attributing it to God which opens it up to be misused to coerce those in abusive or oppressive relationships to remain in those

<sup>8</sup> Forde and Luther, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, xii.

<sup>9</sup> Forde and Luther, 16.

<sup>10</sup> Forde and Luther, Kindle ed. loc. 880.

relationships. Peterson explains that Luther had two theologies of the cross. In the first, which is Luther's position in *Lectures on Romans* and *The Bondage of the Will*, "God's wrath is the cause of pain and suffering in the world because of human sin."<sup>11</sup> The second theology of the cross, attributed to Luther's early sermons and *Lectures on Hebrews*, "would have God use the suffering that already exists in the world to create life . . . as a way of renewing the prophetic protest against the gospel of prosperity and its disregard for the marginalized and the poor of contemporary American society, if not the world."<sup>12</sup> When I use the term *theology of the cross*, I am referring to this second understanding. Theology of glory finds this message offensive. "Because the theology of glory is always looking through what is actually given, the bad, poor, needy, and lowly are invisible. They don't show up on the scale of values and are not regarded."<sup>13</sup>

In Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus says, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross [daily] and follow me (Mt. 16:24, Mk. 8:34, Lk. 9:23). These are found in the context of Passion predictions and arguments among the disciples about greatness and Jesus' teachings about the first and last. Certainly, the majority of American Christians describe themselves as Evangelical Christians,<sup>14</sup> and they are, by definition, eager to tell what they believe. Therefore,

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<sup>11</sup> Peterson, "We Preach Christ Crucified."

<sup>12</sup> Peterson.

<sup>13</sup> Forde and Luther, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, Loc. 1241.

<sup>14</sup> Pew Research Center, "Religion in America: U.S. Religious Data, Demographics and Statistics | Pew Research Center," *Religious Landscape Study* (blog), accessed October 1, 2018, <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>.

theologies of glory or dominant theology are far more prominent or representative in American theological opinion and observation than theologies of the cross.

Themes of theology of the cross are represented in the dichotomies between power/powerlessness, law/gospel, hidden/revealed, freedom/bondage, and justification by grace/self-righteousness (works). Jürgen Moltmann writes,

For man seeks God in the law and attempts to conform to him through the works of the law, in order to bring himself into the righteousness of God. If he sees and believes in God in the person of Christ, condemned by the law, he is set free from the legalist concern to justify himself. Man seeks God in the will for political power and world domination. If he sees and believes God in Christ who was powerless and crucified, he is set free from this desire to have power and domination over others.<sup>15</sup>

The following is an excerpt from our predecessor synod's centennial book.

Discovering this source was a profound experience for me to find that the first sermon delivered at GGLC in 1852 referenced one of the key biblical texts associated with Luther's theology of the cross.

In the record of the first one hundred years [of the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Synod], the Rev. T. N. Hasselquist stands out among the founding fathers as a man of vision and of unbounded energy. When Hasselquist came from Sweden in 1852 to become pastor of a church in Prairieville,<sup>16</sup> IL all the circumstances were discouraging. He was not wanted by immigrants who had become disheartened by hardships or who had been made hostile by religious conflicts. It was a dark night when he preached his first sermon in a cabin room which had no ceiling, which was not plastered, and which was lighted only by a few candles held by members of the small congregation. He chose his text carefully: "And I, brethren, when I came unto you, came not with excellency of speech or wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 69.

<sup>16</sup> A reminder that though this quote is from a primary source, Prairieville is the chosen pseudonym for this thesis.

<sup>17</sup> Oscar Olson and George Wickstrom, eds., *A Century of Life and Growth: Lutheran Augustana Synod 1848-1948* (Rock Island, IL: Augustana Book Concern, 1948), 21.

Grace of God Lutheran Church had been founded by a theologian of the cross. 1 Corinthians 2:2 was one of the Apostle Paul's "here stand I" speeches. It was Martin Luther's. It is mine. Pastor Hasselquist knew none of the earthly successes that subsequent generations of GGLC would know. This first iteration of GGLC had no building, no running water, no electric lights, no earthly symbols of success, and it was cranky. It was also called, gathered, enlightened, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit.<sup>18</sup> It was given gifts to participate in the mission of God.

### Liberation Theologies/Liberating Nature of God

God's nature is to liberate. We see that from the Exodus story forward to the resurrection and the eschatological promise. God is revealed throughout Scripture as a liberator.

At the moments of God's profoundest revelation there is always suffering: the cry of the captives in Egypt; Jesus' death cry on the cross; the sighing of the whole enslaved creation for liberty.' If a person once feels the infinite passion of God's love which finds expression here, then he understands the mystery of the triune God. God suffers with us - God suffers from us - God suffers for us: it is this experience of God that reveals the triune God.<sup>19</sup>

As I mentioned in the beginning, my view of liberation theologies includes that of Latin American liberation theology, feminist liberation theology, black liberation theology, LGBT+ liberation theology, feminist liberation theology, and liberation from addiction, debt, slavery, and oppression of all sorts. I believe liberation theologies are intricately linked to Luther's theology of the cross. Each is a response to particular forms

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<sup>18</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, 1162. These words are from Luther's 1529 *Small Catechism*, "Explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed."

<sup>19</sup> Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 204.

of oppression. Robert McAfee Brown, in his notes on chapter three, indicates the differences between dominant theology and liberation theology. (See table 6.)

**Table 6. Dominant theology versus liberation theology<sup>20</sup>**

Dominant Theology	Liberation Theology
1. responds to the <i>nonbeliever</i> whose faith is threatened by modernity	1. responds to the <i>nonperson</i> whose faith is threatened by forces of destruction
2. begins with the world of modernity and remains thought-oriented	2. begins with the world of oppression and becomes action-oriented
3. is developed “from above”—from the position of the privileged, the affluent, the bourgeois	3. is developed “from below”—from the “underside of history,” the position of the oppressed, the marginated, the exploited
4. largely written by “those with white hands,” the “winners”	4. only beginning to be written, must be articulated by those with dark-skinned, gnarled hands, the “losers.”
5. focuses attention on a “religious world that needs to be reinforced	5. focuses attention on a political world that needs to be replaced
6. linked to Western culture, the white race, the male sex, the bourgeois class	6. linked to “the wretched of the earth,” the marginated races, despised cultures and sex, the exploited classes.
7. Affirms the achievements of culture—individualism, rationalism, capitalism, the bourgeois spirit	7. insists that the “achievements” of culture have been used to exploit the poor
8. want to work gradually, reforming existing structures by “supervision	8. demands to work rapidly through liberation from existing structures by “subversion”

### *Lex Orandi/Lex Credendi*

This axiom has to do with the relationship between worship and belief.

*Orandi*=prayer and *credendi*=belief. Our prayers, worship, liturgical text, and hymns affect our beliefs. Our beliefs also affect our worship. It is sometimes also additionally said, *lex movendi* (movement). These three together have much to do with our lived-out

<sup>20</sup> Brown, *Liberation Theology*, 138.

experience of worship, belief, and our sense of attachment to the mission of God. In

chapter four of the ELCA document *Use of the Means of Grace*, we read the following:

The Means of Grace Lead the Church to Mission: Principle 51 In every celebration of the means of grace, God acts to show forth both the need of the world and the truth of the Gospel. In every gathering of Christians around the proclaimed Word and the holy sacraments, God acts to empower the Church for mission. Jesus Christ, who is God's living bread come down from heaven, has given his flesh to be the life of the world (John 6:51). This very flesh, given for the life of all, is encountered in the Word and sacraments.<sup>21</sup>

Joris Geldhof writes,

Liturgical theologians interpret the liturgy as the normative horizon for any theoretical theological reflection and take the liturgy not as the only but as the primary source for theology. This operational principle is reflected in the age-old adage *lex orandi, lex credendi*, which in its earliest formulation implies that the “law of faith,” or belief content, is determined, or shaped, by the “law of prayer,” or liturgical praxis.<sup>22</sup>

Further, as this study is primarily about the mission of God, I believe this axiom extends itself into *lex orandi*, *lex credendi*, and *lex movendi* (movement), as introduced to me by Dr. Daniel Anderson’s writing. “Worship and faith are connected in reciprocal relationship with the movement of God and the church in the world.”<sup>23</sup> Using the image of a perichoretic dance of the trinity presented by Catherine LaCugna, Anderson ties mission and movement together:

A missional church—co-missioned with God—moves with God into the world to disturb, change, dislodge, begin, affect, influence, and provoke to redemption and reconciliation. As a church created by the Spirit's *imago Trinitatis* (in the image of the perichoretic Trinity), we move with God, with one another, and with the other for the sake of God’s mission in the world. It is our worship and faith that shape the church as we go into the world, even as our going shapes our worship and faith. The relationships of *lex orandi*, *lex credendi*, and *lex movendi* provide

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<sup>21</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *The Use of the Means of Grace*, 56.

<sup>22</sup> Joris Geldhof, “Liturgical Theology,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, March 2, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.14>.

<sup>23</sup> Anderson, “Church Emerging: A Missional View,” 141.

lenses for reflection on the emerging church movement and its relationships with the larger church's history and traditions.<sup>24</sup>

### **Biblical Lenses**

My biblical lenses are baptism and *missio Dei*, the liberating nature of God, and theology of the cross. A plethora of Scriptures can validly articulate these lenses: I have chosen the following.

#### **Baptism and *Missio Dei***

God who is rich in mercy and love, gives us a new birth into a living hope through the sacrament of baptism. *By water and the Word God delivers* us from sin and death and raises us to new life in Christ. We are united with all the baptized in the one body of Christ, anointed with the gift of the Holy Spirit, *and joined in God's mission for the life of the world.*<sup>25</sup> (emphasis mine)

In the ELCA, the presiding minister addresses the assembly with these words at the very beginning of the baptismal liturgy. These words are permeated with the grace of God. The subject of all of these actions is the living God. These introductory words give us an entry into my biblical and theological lenses of baptism and *missio Dei*. “By water and the Word God delivers ...” this relates to the lens of liberating nature of God. “We are ... joined in God's mission for the life of the world.” This draws us to the lens of *missio Dei*. The fact that these words were crafted for our common liturgical use also lends to them the effect of *lex orandi, lex credendi*. Numerous key biblical promises unite Christians regarding baptism. We believe that we are

- Born again/born from above, born of water and the Spirit (Jn. 3:3-8)
- A child of God (Gal. 3: 26-29)
- baptized in the triune God's name (Mt. 28:19)

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<sup>24</sup> Anderson, 141.

<sup>25</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, 227.

- Forgiven our sins, receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38-39)
- Sins washed away (Acts 22:16)
- Made righteous according to God's mercy (Titus 3:5)
- Given spirit of adoption, joint heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:14-17)
- Saved/promised new life (Peter 3:21-22, Rom. 6:3-7)<sup>26</sup>
- A member of the body of Christ, the Church (1 Cor. 12:12-13)

### **Baptism as Entry into *Missio Dei*: The Baptism of Jesus**

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." (Luke 3:21-22)

The baptism of Jesus is recorded in all four gospels. There are commonalities in each Gospel of Jesus being God beloved, announced by Father and Spirit, and there is a brief separation between heaven and earth. It is one of the clearest places in Scripture where all three persons of the Trinity are accounted for in one story. In the three synoptic gospels, Jesus is then driven into the wilderness to be tempted. When he returns, he announces his mission.

### ***Missio Dei*: Jesus Announces his Liberating Mission: Luke 4:18-19, 21**

Jesus, in his *inaugural address* immediately following his baptism and temptation, as recorded in the gospel of Luke says,

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say

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<sup>26</sup> Romans 6:3-5 is read in full as part of the ELW funeral liturgy. "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore, we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his."



to them, “*Today* this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (emphasis mine)<sup>27</sup>

Arriving from his time of temptation in the wilderness following his baptism, the gospel of Luke has Jesus enter the temple in Nazareth and begin to announce his mission. Luke is noticeably clear in this chapter to articulate the Spirit’s accompaniment with Jesus through his baptism, through the wilderness and temptation, and in the “power of the Spirit” (v. 14) as he returns to the synagogue. He then announces that the Spirit of the Lord is upon him and anointed him (v. 18). Jesus’ mission and ministry are primarily trinitarian. The mission he announces is a radical reversal of the *status quo*. The poor, the captives, the blind, the oppressed, and the indebted all receive a word of good news as Jesus announces his mission. In fact, just a few chapters later in the gospel of Luke, after John the Baptist is imprisoned, he sent some of his own disciples to Jesus to see if he was really the one they were waiting for. Jesus responds,

Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me. (Luke 7:22-23)

#### The Liberating Nature of God as Articulated in Scripture

I read a news story some months ago about an abridged Bible published in 1807.<sup>28</sup> The title page reads “Parts of the Holy Bible Selected for the Use of the Negro Slaves in the British West India Islands.” The public intent of this Bible was to Christianize slaves. Under the auspices of slave owners caring deeply about the spiritual affairs of their

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<sup>27</sup> Luke 4:18-19

<sup>28</sup> *Select Parts of the Holy Bible, for the Use of the Negro Slaves, in the ...* (Printed by Law and Gilbert, 1807), <http://archive.org/details/selectpartsholy00unkngoog>.

slaves, 90% of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and half of the New Testament were excluded from this publication.<sup>29</sup> For example, it does not include the story of the Exodus, but does include the giving of the Law. God's liberating nature was not revealed in this overly abridged version of Scripture.

It may well be, and I will recognize my bias here, that the Bible is the most outrageously liberating text on Earth. As the editors of the abridged version proved, you must chisel out a great percentage of it to make it not so. The story of our Triune God, as set out in holy scripture, is the story of a God that longs to liberate. It is the story of God, in relationship to humanity, liberating in many and profound ways. Following are some of the many accompanying biblical texts to support this lens.

### **Liberated: God Hears the Cries of the Oppressed and Responds**

I have also heard the groaning of the Israelites whom the Egyptians are holding as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. Say therefore to the Israelites, 'I am the Lord, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians. (Exodus 6:5-7)

God has a heart for liberating the oppressed. The Israelites, through no merit of their own, had God's attention. God heard their cries and chose Moses to lead them to liberation. They became God's people, chosen by God and saved from their Egyptian captors. Table nine in chapter five includes references to the many texts regarding the

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<sup>29</sup> "Museum Highlights 'Slave Bible' That Focuses on Servitude, Leaves out Freedom," *Religion News Service* (blog), November 27, 2018, <https://religionnews.com/2018/11/27/museum-highlights-slave-bible-that-focuses-on-servitude-leaves-out-freedom/>.

liberating nature of God that I used for my interventions. Here are a few that reflect this lens.

### **The Liberating Word of the Prophets**

The prophets often refer to God's liberating nature. Justice for the oppressed, downcast, poor, hungry, and widows, are frequent themes. Here is one of many examples from the prophet Isaiah.

Is not this the fast that I choose:  
     to loose the bonds of injustice,  
     to undo the thongs of the yoke,  
 to let the oppressed go free,  
     and to break every yoke?  
 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,  
     and bring the homeless poor into your house;  
 when you see the naked, to cover them,  
     and not to hide yourself from your own kin? (Is. 58:6-7)

Before Jesus is born and well before he is able to announce his own mission, the Gospel writer Luke poetically offers that Jesus' mother sings her song of praise to God when she finds that God has chosen her to birth the savior. The words of her song of praise are an indication of what the mission of this coming savior will be. It is the story of great reversals.

"My soul magnifies the Lord... He has shown strength with his arm;  
     he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.  
 He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
     and lifted up the lowly;  
 he has filled the hungry with good things,  
     and sent the rich away empty. (Luke 1:41-55 excerpt)

### **Liberated by Reconciliation: The End of the Joseph Story and the Prodigal**

In the Old Testament story of Joseph and his brothers, the brothers were very jealous of the favor that their father showed to Joseph. Joseph also recounts numerous dreams indicating that Joseph was above the brothers, though he was younger. Joseph's

brothers treated him horribly and even sold him into slavery, after which they caused their father great grief by telling him that Joseph was dead. After many years of separation from his family, how does Joseph finally respond when his brothers come to him? With grace and mercy. With that, the brothers are liberated from their guilt.

Joseph wept when [his brothers] 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.” In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them. (Ex. 50:17-21)

Similarly, we are told in the gospel of Luke that a father’s son goes off to wander and squander. After a time, he finds himself hungry and alone. The story tells us “he comes to himself” (Luke 15:17). Even as he is working on his speech to ask his father to allow him to come back as a slave, the father is *running* to meet him.

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!’ And they began to celebrate. (Luke 15:20-24)

This, like the reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers, is an act of sheer grace and mercy. In both cases, there is no necessary cause for mercy. Joseph and the father had been treated miserably. But the grace that these two exhibited in reconciling with those who had wronged them points to the larger story of God’s reconciling love for humankind, a reconciliation that is beyond our comprehension. Jesus on the cross, asks the father to “forgive them for they know not what they do” (Lk.23:34). Through the cross, we are reconciled to God: as Peter asserts,

When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls. (1 Peter 2:23-25)

**Liberated by Being Fully Known: The Woman at the Well: John 4:1-30, 39-42:**

The story of the *woman at the well* may, at first glance, be an unusual choice; it is one of very particular reversals. Culturally speaking, there is much that is wrong with this encounter. This rabbi, Jesus, should not be talking to a strange woman in the middle of the day. She has had many husbands, but, whether by death or divorce, it was likely not her choice. Jesus shows that he knows everything about her past and offers her his living water. In doing so, she is liberated. In being liberated and accepted, she cannot help but become a witness to the good news. This story is parallel to many of the contemporary liberation stories that I have witnessed. When we share our stories and we are known and fully accepted, we are set free.

Theology of the Cross

The biblical lens of theology of the cross is a one by which we find God in the most unlikely places, accompanying the weak, helpless, suffering, and outcast. As Paul writes, “but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (1 Cor. 1:23). In this study I am concentrating primarily on the life, teachings, suffering, and death of Jesus as the way of the cross. Through the perichoretic nature of the Trinitarian God, we know of God best through the incarnation of Jesus,

who, though he was in the form of God,  
 did not regard equality with God  
 as something to be exploited,  
 but emptied himself,  
 taking the form of a slave,

being born in human likeness.  
 And being found in human form,  
 he humbled himself  
 and became obedient to the point of death—  
 even death on a cross. (Phil. 2:6-8)

### **Incarnation – Luke 2:1-21 and John 1:1-18**

God is revealed in Christ in the seemingly most hidden way possible. The incarnation of Jesus, the Son of God, was revealed in this way. “This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger” (Lk. 2:12). The gospel of Luke informs us that the arrival of this defenseless infant, with no capacity to hurt, harm, or hate, was announced first to shepherds in the fields. The Christmas story is so lovingly familiarized with children’s pageants, songs, and sentimentalities, that we have all but lost the lowly nature of the arrival of the Son of God. Admittedly, my only familiarity with noble birth is through media coverage of births among the British royalty; but the biblical witness is clear. The “King of kings and Lord of lords” (Rev. 19:16, 17:14, 1 Tim. 16:5) arrived without any of the customary cultural fanfare due a royal birth.

John’s Prologue also reminds us that when the “Word became flesh and dwelt among us,” the Word did not get much fanfare or attention: “He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him” (Jn. 1:10-11).

When God chose to reveal God’s nature to humanity, it was through Jesus’ incarnation. Therefore, the incarnation is a revelation of the Trinity putting on flesh and taking on the form of humanity. It is also an indication of God revealed in hiddenness, a hallmark of theology of the cross. As unlikely as the appearance of a royal baby in a manger, is the shameful, cruel, and public manner of death that Jesus would endure.

## Jesus' Passion<sup>30</sup> Predictions

In each of the three synoptic gospels, Jesus is recorded as predicting his passion three separate times. The fact that each of the three gospel writers chose to write of these passion predictions three separate times would indicate that this was tremendously important to the overall story they were trying to portray. Even Jesus' infancy is mentioned only in Luke and Matthew, and those accounts tell quite different stories. The fact that each of the first, second, and third telling in each gospel was generally set within the context of the same accompanying stories is also an indicator of the importance the gospel writers attached to this information. Jesus' prediction was that he would "be rejected, endure great suffering, be killed and rise in three days. (See tables nine, ten, and eleven for details about Scripture references and context.)" Contextually, they are related to arguments about begin greatest and least.

- "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves, and take up their cross (daily) and follow me." (Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:24, Luke 9:23)
- Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:25, Mark 10:43) Luke writes, "the least of you is the greatest."
- Before the third passion prediction, in Matthew, the mother of James and John as for great seats in the kingdom. In Mark, it is James and John themselves that ask for these seats.

The first prediction in Matthew and Mark follows the transfiguration. In Luke it is the story immediately following the first prediction. Jesus' purpose and mission are not the glory on the mountaintop, nor are they to enshrine Moses and Elijah. In fact, Moses

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<sup>30</sup> Passion, from the Greek, *πάσχω* "to suffer, to be acted on."

and Elijah disappear in this mountaintop experience, never to be seen again. However, while they are on the mountaintop, just as it happened at his baptism, a voice announces Jesus to be God's son and the witnesses are given the imperative, "Listen to him."

**Table 7. The voice at the transfiguration**

Matthew 17:4-5	Mark 9:6-8	Luke 9:34-36
<sup>4</sup> Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." <sup>5</sup> While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and <b>from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"</b>	<sup>6</sup> He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. <sup>7</sup> Then a cloud overshadowed them, and <b>from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"</b> <sup>8</sup> Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them but only Jesus.	<sup>34</sup> While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. <sup>35</sup> Then <b>from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"</b> <sup>36</sup> When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and, told no one any of the things they had seen.

If Jesus baptism is the initiation into his earthly ministry of *missio Dei*, then this announcement at the transfiguration, and the command to "listen to him" are certainly meant to redirect the readers' attention toward what is coming next, toward what Jesus is about to say. Jesus is pointing toward Jerusalem and he knows what is about to happen. "Listen to him!" Still, the disciples prove in each Gospel, that they would not understand this message until after the resurrection, indeed, until the Holy Spirit would come upon them. Greatness in the kingdom of God is not a theology of glory. It is in identifying with the least, and with the cross.



**Table 8. Passion predictions in the synoptic gospels**

Passion Prediction	Preceding Prediction	Matthew	Mark	Luke
First	Peter's Confession	16:13-33	8:31	9:18-22
Second	Transfiguration and healing	17:22-23	9:31	9:44
Third	Rich young ruler	20:17-19	10:32-34	18:31-33

**Table 9. Disciple responses to passion predictions**

	Matthew	Mark	Luke
First	Peter rebukes Jesus	Peter rebukes Jesus (8:32-33)	Transfiguration follows immediately. They see Moses, Elijah in glory and Peter wishes to make dwellings
Second	They were greatly distressed	The disciples do not understand and are afraid to ask Jesus about it. (9:32)	They did not understand. They were afraid to ask.
Third	Request of mother of James and John for great seats in the kingdom	James and John ask if they may sit next to Jesus in glory (10:35-37)	They understood nothing.

**Table 10. Jesus teaches about discipleship following disciples' response**

Prediction	Matthew	Mark	Luke
First	If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.	Jesus commands them to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow him. (8:33-9:1)	Jesus commands them to take up their cross and follow him
Second	Teaching on temple tax. "Children are free."	Jesus teaches that first must be last and those who receive children in his name receive him (9:33-50)	Jesus teaches about true greatness. Whoever welcomes this child in my name, welcomes me and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me, for the least among all of you is the greatest.
Third	Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.	To be great, Jesus teaches, disciples must become servants, to be first, they must become slaves; and he came to serve by giving his life as a ransom for many (10:38-45)	Jesus heals a blind beggar

### **Matthew 25: Identifying Christ by participating in the lives of the least.**

Throughout the gospels, Jesus is found identifying with what Matthew describes as “the least of these.” (Mt. 25) He heals, forgives, and brings to the center, the sick, the lame, the outcast, the poor, and the oppressed. This final biblical lens has been a central theme of our shared ministry at GGLC. The question “When did we see you Jesus?” is answered, but not by a simple acknowledgement of a visual sighting. The righteous and the unrighteous alike see the poor, hungry, naked, imprisoned. Those who are blessed are the ones participating in the lives of these Jesus calls the “least.” They are the ones who alleviate the misery of those who are downcast.

Over the past few years, the leadership of GGLC has turned its attention toward discerning God’s purpose for us in this time and place. The question of Matthew 25, “When did we see you, Lord?” is one that we ask ourselves frequently. As we look to really see Jesus in our neighbor, and welcome, feed, visit, and include them, we are finding ourselves living in more trust and joy. We believe this to be discerning our place in *missio Dei*.

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’”<sup>41</sup> Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared

for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (Matthew 25:31-46)

In this chapter, I wrote about the biblical and theological lenses used to frame my perspective on this research. In chapter five, I will explain my research design and methodology.

## CHAPTER 5

### METHOD AND METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

In chapter four, I presented the biblical and theological lenses used to frame my perspective on this research. In this chapter, I explain my research design, method, and methodology.

My research question is, “How might an AR intervention cultivate a hermeneutic of *missio Dei* as it relates to baptismal vocation?” My research sought to discover relationships between baptismal identity and vocation, and participant understanding of theology of the cross and the liberation that comes from the Good News. My question stems from my own internal wonderment about how our congregation members understand their own Lutheran baptismal identity as children of God, called and chosen to serve in *missio Dei*. Part of that wonderment is what they believe *missio Dei* to be. Is it merely to come to church? Is it to give intellectual assent to a set of beliefs or to convert others to those beliefs? Or is it more? I explained in chapter one about my experiences and encounters with joy and liberation as they related to a wide variety of difficult circumstances. As children of God and members of the priesthood of all believers, I believe each of these participants is bestowed with gifts by the Holy Spirit, and each has a contribution to the whole. My intentions for this study were for participants to come to

a more joyful awareness of their baptismal identity as it calls and compels them to discern and join in God's liberating work in the world.

### **Method and Methodology**

I used Action Research (AR) as my overarching methodology. Mixed methods included qualitative and quantitative instruments. David Coghlan and Teresa Brannick write,

Action research is connoted by a procedure of collecting data from participants of a system and providing feedback about the findings of the data as an intervention to influence – presumably in a helpful way – the ongoing action process of the system.<sup>1</sup>

The mixed methods included baseline and end line questionnaires, which sought mostly quantitative data, but I also included two open-ended questions that were analyzed as qualitative data. These were census surveys of those participating in worship. The questionnaires were offered to all adult participants in worship.

Interview protocols were qualitative instruments used to glean a greater depth of understanding of participant views of the lenses. Interview participants were chosen as a purposive sampling of those who, through the baseline questionnaire, indicated a “liberating experience” and a willingness to talk about it.

Interventions included a sermon series and worship texts that supported the themes. The modified Dwelling in the Word series were also interventions. The recorded results of Dwelling in the Word session were analyzed as qualitative data. By using mixed methods, I have been discovering patterns of information in general through

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<sup>1</sup> David Coghlan and Teresa Brannick, *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization*, 4th ed. (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications, 2014), 47.

quantitative methods in my baseline and end line questionnaires. Qualitative methods, which include the interviews, open-ended questions on the questionnaires, and the Dwelling in the Word process, gave me greater depth of understanding and the ability to use participants' own words in analyzing data. Early in the process, I formed a reading team to discuss with me the papers written in preparation for the thesis. During the gathering of data, I recruited volunteers from the Dwelling in the Word sessions to record participant reflections on newsprint.

My lenses of strength, assets, hospitality, and leadership theories informed my intent for this project to further empower congregation members in their own gifts and places in this organization.

All participants signed either informed consent (interviews and Dwelling) or implied consent forms (baseline and end line questionnaires). Participants were assured of the confidential nature of this work. Pseudonyms were used for individual quotes, as well as for congregation and place names. They were informed that all raw data would be locked, or password protected and only accessible only to me and my advisors, and that raw data will be destroyed after June 1, 2023

### **Biblical and Theological Perspectives**

Biblical and theological perspectives as they pertain to the research methodology have brought me to a great deal of reflection over these past months. My biblical and theological perspectives relate to a great quantity of research already done in the fields of theology of the cross and a variety of liberation theologies as they intersect with a Lutheran perspective of baptismal vocation.

My interventions were a sermon series, with hymns and liturgy supportive of the themes of the interventions. Liturgical texts and hymns were steeped in language of the liberating nature of God and *theologia crucis*. These interventions relate to the theological lens of *lex orandi, lex credendi*, which has to do with the relationship between prayer/worship and faith/belief. They relate to and inform each other, in that what we pray affects what we believe; in turn what we believe affects our prayers. Interventions also included the Dwelling in the Word sessions, as the texts for these sessions were specifically chosen to further our awareness of the themes introduced in worship.

Worship is at the heart of the mission and ministry of GGLC as they seek to best honor God with their words and deeds. In fact, the order of our worship service is always the same: Gathering→Word→Meal→Sending→. After we are fed and nourished by Word and Sacrament and share our Christian community, we are sent with words like “Go in peace. Serve the Lord. Thanks be to God.”<sup>3</sup> The action of sending is an important part of worship for us. It highlights the baptismal vocation of the members to go out into their everyday world to serve God and love neighbor.

Biblical and theological lenses of baptismal vocation, theology of the cross, *lex orandi/lex credendi*, and the liberating nature of God—particularly as used in the interventions—offered participants concentrated perspectives on their place in the *missio Dei* in this particular time in the life of our congregation and community.

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<sup>3</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, 115.



The liturgical texts for the worship services were rich with baptismal imagery. The themes were based on my theological and biblical lenses. See table eleven for accompanying texts and appendix P for accompanying liturgical texts.

- Baptism of Jesus: Baptized and Beloved
- A Liberating God: The Exodus
- Jesus Inaugural Address, after Baptism, Wilderness, Temptation: I Came to Free
- Greatness and the Cross
- Liberated by Reconciliation
- Liberated by Participation in the Lives of the Least of These – Seeing Jesus

### **Variables**

Variables in this study included independent variables, the interventions. In addition, they included intervening variables, which included demographic questions. They also included dependent variables, which were the results of the collection and analysis of data.

#### **Independent Variables: Interventions**

The interventions are independent variables, which include a six-sermon series with their supporting Scripture texts, hymns, and liturgy revisions. We also used modified Dwelling in the Word groups in those same weeks following each worship service. The Dwelling group contained participants who had, and those who had not, attended worship prior, so we started each session by reading the Scriptures the sermon series were based upon. The Dwelling protocol is found in Appendix E. Our themes were the intersections of baptismal vocation, *missio Dei*, Luther's theology of the cross, and the liberating nature of God. The effects of these interventions were the dependent

variables. Sermon series topics, themes, Scripture readings and hymns, along with liturgical revisions, are listed in table 11.

**Table 11. Sermon/worship interventions**

<b>Date</b>	1/13	3/10:	3/17	3/24	3/31	4/7
	Bapt./Lord	Lent 1	Lent 2	Lent 3	Lent 4	Lent 5
<b>Themes</b>	Baptism of our Lord  Baptized and Beloved	God Heard Their Cries.  Exodus – Liberated by the mighty acts of God GOD revealed “I am”	Jesus’ beginning  (Mary’s song, incarnation, baptism, temptation, inaugural address, opposition	Greatness and the Cross  Passion Predictions 3 times x 3 gospels Saint Romero	Liberated by Reconciliation  Joseph, brothers, and Prodigal	Liberated by Participating in the Lives of “The Least of These”
<b>Scripture OT</b>	Is.43:1-7	Ex 3:1-15	Is 61	Is 53:1-7	Gen. 50:15-21	Deut. 10:17-19
<b>Psalm</b>	Ps. 29	103:1-14	Ps 113:1-8	Ps 89:2-4	Psalm 65	Ps 82 :1-4
<b>NT</b>	Acts 8:14-17	Rom 6:3-11	Phil 2:1-11	Galatians 6:2-15	Romans 5:8-11	James 1:19-27
<b>Gospel</b>	Luke 3:15-17, 21-22	John 8:31-36 Refer to transfiguration	Luke 4:16-30	Mark 8:31-38	Luke 15:11-32	MT 25:31-46
<b>Hymns<sup>4</sup></b>	455 Crashing Waters  305 When Jesus Came to Jordan	729 The Church of Christ  400 God of Tempest	654 Church’s One Found.  710 Let Streams of Living Justice	712 Lord Whose Love  723 Canticle of the Turning	714 O God of Mercy  720 We are Called	715 Christ be our Light  707 Lord of Glory (ref. naked, sick, in prison, hungry

<sup>4</sup> Hymn numbers refer to hymns in ELW.

For each of the worship services, I also included a Thanksgiving for Baptism entrance rite and the initial words of promise from our baptismal liturgy (refer to chapter four). This was used as the introduction to the profession of faith, the Apostles' Creed, our baptismal creed.

### Intervening Variables

Intervening variables included participants' religious background and history, formative faith traditions, participation, and activity in worship, faith formation, and other ministries of the congregation. They also included participant awareness of the ongoing mission and ministries of the congregation. These intervening variables consider some basic demographic information from the questionnaires such as age, and a participant's length of time affiliated with the congregation and community. These intervening variables were measured as to whether they played a role in participant responses to theological questions, mostly regarding baptismal identity.

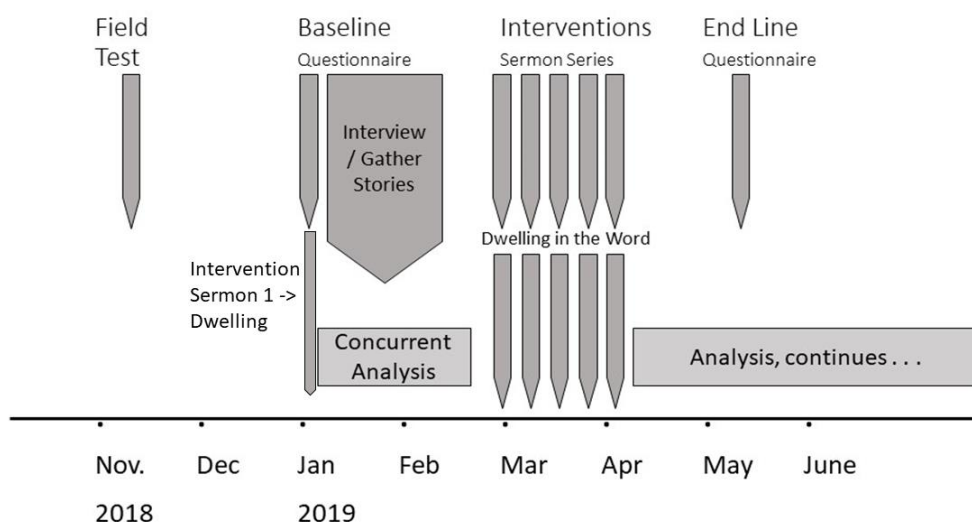
### Dependent Variables

The dependent variables of this study are the results of the qualitative and quantitative gathering and analysis of data. How the participants responded to the variety of interventions over this period determined, in part, whether the interventions have influenced participant attitudes and understanding regarding baptismal vocation, theology of the cross, and the liberating nature of God.

### Timeline for Operationalizing the Variables

In November 2018, I field tested my instruments with members of a neighboring congregation. I used the congregation's newsletter and bulletins to introduce this

researcher to them in the January 2019. (See appendix Q.) The first intervention and baseline questionnaire were to occur on the Baptism of our Lord Sunday (1/13/19). However, due to inclement weather, and low attendance, the baseline questionnaire (appendix A) and Dwelling in the Word exercise (appendix E) were postponed until the following weekend. Interviews were conducted in the weeks of the season of Epiphany, January 20-March 3, 2019, as I began to analyze baseline data. (For interview protocol see appendix G.) The remaining interventions occurred during the season of Lent, March 10-April 7, 2019. I conducted an end line questionnaire (appendix C), which was distributed May 19, 2019, and which participants were able to return until May 28, 2019. Analysis occurred concurrent to and following data collection. Analysis continued throughout 2019. This process is represented in figure 6.



**Figure 6. Timeline for Operationalizing the Variables**

### Research Design

We recruited members of a neighboring congregation in field testing the instruments. I asked their pastor to ask for volunteers from their congregation council,

and six responded. They helped me see the need to make a few adjustments in my instruments. Questionnaires, protocols, and consent forms are found in appendices A-H.

### **Interventions**

As my primary set of interventions, I chose to use a sermon series focusing on the liberating nature of God, and the mission and ministry of Jesus begun at his baptism. The first sermon was on Baptism of our Lord Sunday. The subsequent sermons were presented on Sunday mornings in the season of Lent (3/10/19-4/7/19). The reason for this split was two-fold. The Baptism of our Lord was thematically important to the overall theme of baptism in this study. It also gave me an opportunity to review my approach and instruments before continuing the full five-week series of interventions. The purpose of the series was to offer a concentrated opportunity for participants to hear and explore the good news from a multi-focused perspective of baptismal vocation, the liberating nature of God, and theology of the cross, to consider the mission of God in, among, and around us. I consider the Dwelling in the Word sessions also to be an intervention in that we studied particular texts chosen to deepen their understanding of the themes of the sermon series.

### **Analysis**

I analyzed the data using quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative results measured participant understanding of a variety of questions on baptismal identification and vocation. They were also very useful in collecting demographic information. Qualitative analysis gave me greater depth of understanding participant responses.

## Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data were collected through the use of baseline and end line questionnaires. I sought to collect data on participant attitudes and opinions on a number of questions related to baptismal vocation, *missio Dei*, and the liberating nature of God. Peter Nardi offers reasons why quantitative surveys sometimes have advantages over qualitative. I found the following to be the most compelling:

- Ideal for asking about opinions and attitudes
- Can guarantee anonymity
- Easier to code closed ended items
- Can address multiple topics in one survey<sup>5</sup>

### **Baseline/End Line**

A baseline questionnaire was distributed January 13, 2019. An end line questionnaire followed on May 13. These questionnaires were distributed as a census to adults present in worship on those Sundays. Questionnaires were available for a period of two weeks. The questionnaires were distributed at the end of worship with instructions about my research and regarding implied consent. Adult attendees were encouraged to finish them before they left, or to complete them in the adjacent Parish Hall. They were given a two-week window of time in which to return them. Of the baseline questionnaires distributed, forty completed baseline questionnaires were returned. The same method was used to distribute and collect end line questionnaires. Of those, twenty-three were completed and returned.

There were three identical sections to the baseline and end line questionnaires: Demographics, Baptismal Vocation, and other questions about Mission and Ministry. All

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<sup>5</sup> Peter M. Nardi, *Doing Survey Research: A Guide to Quantitative Methods*, Fourth edition (New York: Routledge, 2018), 16.

but two questions in the sections on Baptismal Vocation and Mission and Ministry questions were measurements of agreement of a statement. A six-point Likert scale was used to measure them. There were two open-ended questions at the end of the questionnaire.

I used descriptive statistical tests to assist in data analysis, using a six-point numerical Likert scale measured from lowest to highest for agreement levels for each statement. My report on descriptive statistics to analyze the quantitative data includes. N, which indicates number, total population, lower-case n, which indicates frequency, or how many in each response, and M which indicates mean, or mathematical average.

Demographic data such as date of birth and length of participation were used for paired t-tests to determine shifts in responses prior to and following interventions. The descriptive demographic data were also used to determine the impact of intervening variables. Independent t-test were conducted upon baseline/end line data received using IBM SPSS<sup>6</sup> software to assist in analyzing data and for paired t-tests.

### Qualitative Analysis

My qualitative data come from three sources. There were two open ended questions in the baseline and end line questionnaires. I also did a series of modified Dwelling in the Word sessions. Additionally, I interviewed twelve individuals. Qualitative analysis offers the ability to seek information at a greater depth than quantitative. Nardi notes advantages to qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups. The advantages of which I took note included the following:

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<sup>6</sup> “IBM Statistical Package of the Social Sciences (SPSS) Software, Version 25 (IBM, 2017),” March 7, 2019, <https://www.ibm.com/products/spss-statistics>.

- Unanticipated answers can occur, thus leading to new, unexpected findings
- Can clarify meaning of questions
- Better for insights about complex issues and topics
- Allows for respondents' views and perspectives<sup>7</sup>

I employed Kathy Charmaz' method to analyze and interpret data word-by-word, line by line, and incident by incident to result in *in vivo* codes, then grouped into focused codes. These were further grouped into axial codes, and the relationship between the axial codes were explained with theoretical codes. Once coding began, I was able to identify concepts, themes, and events, and could group them to evaluate which ones would produce a better understanding of the research question through theoretical coding. I kept memos and notable quotes files. I utilized NVivo software<sup>8</sup> to assist in coding qualitative data.

Additional software that I used to assist my research was an online source, transcribe.wreally.com.<sup>9</sup> Audio files were uploaded to the website to create automatic transcriptions. These computer-generated transcriptions were reviewed manually and found to be quite accurate.

## Interviews

Interview participants were chosen based upon their response to a question on the baseline questionnaire as to whether they had a liberating experience they would like to speak of, and whether they were willing to be interviewed. If they wished to be

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<sup>7</sup> Nardi, *Doing Survey Research*, 16–17.

<sup>8</sup> NVivo, version 12 (QSR International), <https://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo/home>.

<sup>9</sup> "Transcribe - Online Transcription and Dictation Software," accessed April 5, 2019, <https://transcribe.wreally.com/app#>.



interviewed, they were given the opportunity to provide contact information. While planning the interviews, I reviewed a section in Charmaz regarding the number of interviews to conduct.<sup>10</sup> Excellence versus adequacy is a concern. Charmaz considers twelve a respectable number. Because I was using mixed methods, and interviews were not the sole source of data, I chose to conduct ten interviews. Of those interviews, two were with husband and wife couples, so twelve individuals were interviewed in total. I asked for volunteers to be interviewed on the baseline questionnaire and in our newsletter.<sup>11</sup> Charmaz writes,

Intensive interviewing allows you both to pursue new leads and to pace your queries about key theoretical concerns....The iterative process of grounded theory leads you to focus, write, reflect, and focus again while interviewing.<sup>12</sup>

Charmaz' method is not completely linear, but builds upon what has been completed to review, reflect, and revise. "From the start, careful word-by-word, line-by-line, or incident-with-incident coding moves you toward fulfilling two criteria for completing a grounded theory analysis: fit and relevance."<sup>13</sup> In the initial stage of coding, I used *in vivo* coding, line by line, in order to start develop codes. *In vivo* coding gives me the opportunity to honor the words of the participants and to stay close to the text and remain open to all possible directions. Charmaz recommends keeping "initial codes short, simple, spontaneous – and analytic. The rest will fall in place."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, Second Edition, Introducing Qualitative Methods (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014), 105.

<sup>11</sup> See appendices A and Q.

<sup>12</sup> Charmaz, 108.

<sup>13</sup> Charmaz, 132

<sup>14</sup> Charmaz, 161.

The focused coding phase selects the “most significant or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesize, integrate, and organize substantial amounts of data.”<sup>15</sup> This is the first filter in the process which helped to direct my research. Axial coding “specifies the properties and dimensions of a category and relates categories to subcategories. It also specifies the properties and dimensions of a category and reassembles the data that has been fractured during the initial coding to give coherence to the emerging analysis.”<sup>16</sup> Theoretical coding seeks to explain the relationship between axial codes.

**Table 12. Interview participant age, length of affiliation, formative faith tradition, and gender**

Participant #	Age	Length of time affiliated with GGLC	Formative Faith Tradition	Gender
1	27	27	ELCA	M
2	57	31	WELS	F
3	65	38	RC	M
4	58	7	Congregational	F
5	61	7	None before marriage	M
6	26	1	Evangelical	F
7	32	1	Evangelical	F
8	65	3	LCA/ELCA	F
9	57	2	RC	F
10	62	2	RC	M
11	67	28	LCMS	F
12	66	31	None before marriage	M
<b>Mean</b>	<b>53.6</b>	<b>14.8</b>		
<b>Median</b>	<b>59.5</b>	<b>7</b>		
<b>Mode</b>	<b>57, 65</b>	<b>1,2,7,31</b>		

The average age of interview participants was 53.6. The average time of affiliation with GGLC was 14.8 years, with only one of the participants (27-year-old) being a life-long member. Five of the participants had been affiliated with the

<sup>15</sup> Charmaz, 113.

<sup>16</sup> Charmaz, 147.

congregation three years or less. There were four modes identified in terms of length of affiliation. Three of the four were seven years and under.

The gender of the participants were five men and seven women. Two participants self-identified as members of the LGBT+ community. Participant formative faith traditions were varied. Only two were lifelong ELCA (and its predecessor, LCA, members.

### **Dwelling in the Word**

The invitations to these modified Dwelling in the Word events were published in the monthly and weekly newsletters and verbal announcements during worship. Any adult with an interest, whether member or non-member, was invited to participate. These six sessions were held at our faith formation time on the same Sundays as the sermon/worship interventions.

After worship on Sunday mornings, we enjoy a brief time of conversation and food, followed by our time of faith formation for all ages. We begin with the children, youth, and adults all together to share themes, song, prayer, and offering. The young ones go off and the adult learners are gathered in our congregation's learning space.

Before sharing the protocol (appendix E) with participants, I explained the purpose and process of this research and shared the informed consent forms (appendix F) with them. Participants were asked to sign informed consent forms. I also informed them that the events were to be audio recorded for reference.

The data were gathered from responses from adult volunteers who stayed after worship for the faith formation time. We used a modified Dwelling in the Word format for our time together. The text we used were the primary texts from worship the prior

hour. Participants answered questions for themselves in the group setting.<sup>18</sup> The participants helped gather data on newsprint. They were a convenience sampling of those most likely to be willing to explore the themes and offer input. This sampling included seventeen participants, four men and thirteen women. See table 13 for details. Participants ranged in age from 27 to 95. The mean age was 60. However, the fact that there were three participants in their 20s is important to this researcher because when I initially began this graduate program, there were no young adults actively involved in leadership or adult education/faith formation. These twenty-somethings represent a shift in age range participation. New and younger participants are finding their way into the ministries of GGLC.

**Table 13. Dwelling in the word participants**

Participant #	Age	Gender
1	91	F
2	79	F
3	81	M
4	81	F
5	40	F
6	78	F
7	44	F
8	57	F
9	57	F
10	51	F
11	28	F
12	57	M
13	65	M
14	95	F
15	27	F
16	29	M
17	58	F

This chapter was a summary of my research methods, methodology and design.

The results of my research are presented in chapter six.

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<sup>18</sup> See Appendix E for Dwelling protocol used.

## CHAPTER 6

### RESULTS OF RESEARCH AND INTERPRETATION

#### **Introduction**

In chapter five, I presented my research design, methodology, and rationale for choosing mixed methods modified AR as the framework for this research. Chapter six now presents research findings using descriptive statistics and reports results of in-depth analysis of quantitative data. Qualitative data were recorded, transcribed, and then coded to gather general and specific insights. Transcription services were provided by an online transcription service and reviewed by this researcher.<sup>2</sup>

My research question is “How might an AR intervention cultivate a hermeneutic of *missio Dei* as it relates to baptismal vocation?” GGLC is a congregation with a long history of growth in a community that has also historically known growth and abundance. However, as manufacturing, income, school closures, and other community health indicators show decline, the church is challenged to separate itself from earthly indicators of success. This gives the church fresh opportunity to rediscover its identity within their baptismal vocation and the mission of God.

In order to address my research question, I used mixed methods Action Research. This included mixed methods baseline and end line questionnaires and qualitative

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<sup>2</sup> “Transcribe - Online Transcription and Dictation Software.” Transcribe.wreally.com.

interview protocols. Interventions used were a sermon series consisting of six sermons with accompanying worship texts and hymns. Modified Dwelling in the Word sessions corresponding to and immediately following the sermon/worship series were also used as interventions. These interventions were the independent variables of my study.

Intervening variables included but were not limited to faith background, membership affiliation, length of affiliation with the congregation, age, and awareness of the ministries of the congregation. They created some insights worthy of exploration.

The dependent variables are the bulk of this chapter's work. The participants' responses to the variety of interventions over this period of time follow in my results and analysis.

The lenses I used to analyze my results are theoretical, theological, and biblical. My theoretical lenses included several specific elements of leadership theories, strengths and assets, and hospitality/radical hospitality, while the theological and biblical lenses are baptismal vocation, theology of the cross, and the liberating nature of God, all under the umbrella of *missio Dei*.

### **Operationalizing the Variables**

Peter Nardi writes, "Operationalizing the variables involves specifying *levels of measurement* and considers how reliable and valid the measures are"<sup>3</sup> (Emphasis Nardi). As I wrote in chapter five, I applied six interventions that included a sermon series, with accompanying hymns and worship texts. Six more interventions included the corresponding Dwelling in the Word Series, which followed worship on those Sundays. I

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<sup>3</sup> Nardi, *Doing Survey Research*, 55.

conducted baseline and end line questionnaires before and after this series. The majority of research used a Likert scale to measure participant levels of agreement with a variety of statements. There were also two open ended questions, which were analyzed qualitatively.

I further, conducted modified Dwelling in the Word sessions. These followed each worship service intervention in order to conduct qualitative research on data that emerged from dwelling in the texts from worship on those days. I also conducted interviews with twelve individuals. The data from these interviews were coded and analyzed using Charmaz' method of moving from *in vivo* coding, to focused coding, to axial coding, and finally theoretical coding.

#### Baseline Questionnaire/End Line Questionnaire Results

Participants completed forty baseline questionnaires. Twenty-three end line questionnaires were returned. I completed a paired t-test on responses of the baseline and end line questionnaire pairing dates of birth and length of time in congregation. In doing so, I was able to confirm that a total of thirteen individuals participated in both.

The questionnaires had three basic sections: demographics, baptismal vocation, and other questions about mission and ministry. Most of the data could be analyzed by quantitative methods. Two open-ended questions at the end of the provided qualitative data. The first question: What ministries of GGLC do you think are most God pleasing? The second was:

Can you think of a time when you have felt unburdened (for instance, a sense of unexplainable freedom, joy, loosed from fear or distress, an "aha" moment about the grace and love of God, etc.) by something you learned about or experience of God? Would you be interested in being contacted for an interview about this experience? If so, please provide some contact information. All identifying information will remain confidential.

The identifying information volunteered through this question gave me the sources for prospective interviewees. Quantitative questionnaire results for intervening variables are included in the tables 14-20.

### **Intervening Variables**

I asked questions on length of affiliation with the congregation, length of residency in the community, type of affiliation with the congregation, worship frequency, faith formation frequency, other types of service frequency, and formative faith tradition. These produced a great volume of data. There are likely more possible ways to analyze it than I have at this time. However, they gave me opportunity to discover which of these intervening variables would be most useful for discovering answers to my research question. Tables 14-20 provide data for baseline and end line intervening variables.

**Table 14. GGLC affiliation length**

Response	Baseline (N=40)		End Line (N=23)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
over seventy years	2	5.0	1	4.3
between fifty and sixty-nine years	8	20.0	2	8.7
between thirty and forty-nine years	7	17.5	3	13.0
between ten and twenty-nine years	4	10.0	2	8.7
more than five but less than ten years	2	5.0	1	4.3
less than five years	16	40.0	14	60.9
not affiliated	1	2.5		
Total N	40	100.0	23	100.0



The results shown in table 14 appear to reveal a most striking initial observation of these intervening variables: of those participating in the questionnaires, 40.0% of baseline and 60.9% of end line respondents had been affiliated with the congregation less than five years. There was also a sharp decline from baseline to end line of responses in the “between fifty and sixty-nine years” category. The percent went from 20.0% to 8.7%. I do not know how to account for that, so any answer I give would be merely speculative. In fact, all of the other affiliation groups declined in percentage of answers between baseline and end line *except* those here less than five years.

**Table 15. Residence length**

Response	Baseline (N=40)		End Line (N=23)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
over seventy years	3	7.5	2	8.7
between fifty and sixty-nine years	16	40.0	4	17.4
between thirty and forty-nine years	9	22.5	6	26.1
between ten and twenty-nine years	8	20.0	7	30.4
more than five but less than ten years	1	2.5	0	0.0
less than five years	3	7.5	4	17.4
Total	40	100.0	23	100.0

In contrast to table 14, table 15 shows the strong majority of those responding have lived in the community more than ten years. The sum of the percentage of those living in the community more than ten years shows the percent is 90.0% baseline and 82.6% end line. Those who have been in the community less than ten years comprise only is 10.0% in the baseline. No respondents in the end line answered, “more than five but less than ten years,” but 17.5% of end line respondents claim to have lived in the community less than five years.

My interpretation of this is that of those who responded, length of time in the congregation does not correspond to their length of time in the community. The numbers

seem to indicate that these newer participants have found their way to GGLC for reasons other than that they are new residents. It appears that GGLC is meeting a need or casting a vision that they were not finding elsewhere in the community. The fact that their participation in the end line questionnaire was greater than those who had been in the congregation helps to verify this observation.

**Table 16. GGLC affiliation type**

Response	Baseline (N=40)		End Line (N=23)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Member	33	82.5	17	73.9
not a member but worship regularly and participate	6	15.0	5	21.7
no affiliation	1	2.5	1	4.3
Total	40	100.0	23	100.0

In table 16, we see that participants were mostly members of the congregation, with an 82.5% baseline and 73.9% end line response. The number of members and actively participating non-members declined from baseline to end line. Yet, in both, the *percentage* of actively participating non-members increased. Because of the low overall population represented here, I do not place much weight on the differences. In my experience, it has been unusual for so many non-members to worship regularly and participate in the ministries of the congregation. Baseline results show 15.0% and end line shows 21.7% of participants in this category. I find it interesting that the non-member participation increased in the end line, while the member percentage decreased. From my memos and conversations, some of the non-members have felt alienated at other congregations and just are not willing to sign their names on to membership. For others, perhaps it feels too formal to be an actual member. The one major difference between members and non-members is their ability to vote in congregational meetings. All of the ministries are available to them and their participation rate is quite high. Yet, if

we had to take a vote on anything serious anytime soon, they would have voice but no vote.

**Table 17. Worship frequency**

Response	Baseline (N=40)	%	End Line (N=23)	%
	<i>n</i>		<i>n</i>	
weekly plus	20	50.0	11	47.8
weekly	9	22.5	6	26.1
2-3 times a month	9	22.5	6	26.1
a few times a year, less than 1x month	2	5.0	0	0.0
Total	40	100.0	23	100.0

Table 17 shows that a sum of 72.5% baseline and 73.9% of end line respondents reported worshipping weekly or more often. The participants in this questionnaire have a high rate of worship attendance. This is quite telling about the level of commitment of those who responded. If you add those who *merely* claim to worship two to three times a month, there is a 95% or more rate of frequency of attendance in the baseline and 100% in the end line. This leaves me with several questions, in particular, “were those who attended less frequently also less willing or engaged to participate in the questionnaire?”

**Table 18. Faith formation frequency**

Response	Baseline (N=40)		End Line (N=23)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Faith Formation Frequency				
weekly plus	9	22.5	8	34.8
Weekly	4	10.0	1	4.3
a few times a year	8	20.0	3	13.0
no faith formation participation	19	47.5	11	47.8
Total	40	100.0	23	100.0

Faith formation is our hour after worship. This is a time of learning, service, and growing as disciples. Table 18 reports how respondents reflect on their faith formation frequency. At nearly 50% in both baseline and end line results, the highest percentage of respondents claim not to participate in faith formation. That would correlate with my

experience. When I first arrived at GGLC, we had a group of about fifteen members who participated in what we called back then adult education. We read the Bible through in a calendar year and continued with studies over the next years. Since that time, many of that original group were no longer with us, mostly due to death. Some of those newer to the congregation's ministries participate in faith formation.

**Table 19. Other service frequency**

Response	Baseline (N=40)		End Line (N=23)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
weekly plus	9	22.5	7	30.4
Weekly	9	22.5	2	8.7
2-3 times a month	9	22.5	5	21.7
a few times a year	2	5.0	2	8.7
no participation	9	22.5	7	30.4
no response	2	5.0	0	0.0
Total	40	100.0	23	100.0

Other service was defined in the questionnaires as “volunteering your time for committee work, activities, events, congregation council, choir, lectoring, ushering and other ministries of the congregation.” There appears to be a four-way tie between respondent service frequency. In the baseline results, weekly plus, weekly, and two to three times a month each claims 22.5%, which indicates that 67.5%, more than two-thirds, indicate other service frequency of more than once a month. In the end line results, the distribution was not quite as evenly split. Weekly plus was 30.4%, an increase over the baseline. Weekly dropped to 8.4%. Two-three times a month stayed about the same at 21.7%. As there were thirteen less respondents in the end line questionnaire, it was possible for frequencies to go down while percentages rose. This makes analysis quite difficult. In the end, a sum of 67.5% of baseline and 60.8% of end line participants responded that they were active in some ministry other than worship and faith formation between twice a month, and more than weekly. This seems to indicate a high level of

participation among respondents. I have no quantitative comparison among those who did not participate in the questionnaires.

**Table 20 Formative faith tradition**

Response	Baseline (N=40)		End Line (N=23)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
ELCA Lutheran or predecessor	11	27.5	7	30.5
Other Lutheran Specify	5	12.5	5	21.7
Roman Catholic	5	12.5	2	8.7
Episcopal	1	2.5	0	0
Presbyterian	1	2.5	0	0.0
Methodist	2	5.0	2	8.7
Baptist	2	5.0	1	4.4
Disciples of Christ/Christian	2	5.0	0	0.0
Pentecostal/Holiness	1	2.5	0	0.0
Non-Denominational	1	2.5	3	13.0
None	1	2.5	0	0.0
Other	6	15.0	3	13.0
no response	2	5.0	0	0.0
Total	40	100.0	23	100.0

Table 20 shows that more than half of participants come from a church body with a strong liturgical and sacramental tradition. The sum of ELCA, other Lutherans, Roman Catholic and Episcopal traditions holds 55.0% of baseline and 60.9% of end responses. Beyond that, though, 45.0% of baseline respondents and 39.1% of end line respondents represent a wide variety of religious and non-religious backgrounds. This completes the results of the demographic data.

### **Baseline/End Line Baptismal Identity**

I included seven statements regarding baptismal identity and the promises of Holy Baptism. These seven statements are from the ELCA liturgy for Affirmation of Baptism

in the ELW.<sup>4</sup> They parallel the questions that parents and sponsors are asked on behalf of infants and small children who are baptized.<sup>5</sup> The responses were rated one to six on a Likert scale on participant level of meaning: 1=Has no meaning in my life. 2=Mostly indifferent. 3=Somewhat indifferent. 4=Somewhat meaningful. 5=Meaningful. 6=Deeply meaningful in my life. Because the mean for each of the seven questions was in the affirmative, I have compiled the means for all seven statements in one table. The statements follow this formula:

In baptism you are:

- Q1. Born again/born from above
- Q2. A child of God, baptized in God's name
- Q3. Forgiven of your sins
- Q4. Given the Holy Spirit, which will enable you to call upon Jesus as Lord and make you a joint heir with Jesus
- Q5. Promised new life
- Q6. A member of the body of Christ, the Church
- Q7. Freed from sin, death, and the powers that defy God.

**Table 21. Baptismal identity baseline (N=40) and end line (N=23)**

	Q1. Mean	Q2. Mean	Q3. Mean	Q4. Mean	Q5. Mean	Q6. Mean	Q7. Mean
Baseline	5.2	5.8	5.6	5.6	5.1	5.3	5.2
End Line	4.8	5.0	5.4	5.0	5.1	5.3	5.2

All of the mean responses in table 21 were in categories of agreement that these baptismal promises were on a scale between meaningful and deeply meaningful (4.8-5.8).

It is of interest to note that end line responses were equal to baseline on three of the

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<sup>4</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, 236.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 228. "As you bring your children to receive the gift of baptism, you are entrusted with responsibilities: to love with them among God's faithful people, bring them to the word of God and the holy supper, teach them the Lord's prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments, place in their hands the holy scriptures, and nurture them in faith and prayer, so that your children may learn to trust God, proclaim Christ through word and deed, care for others and the world God made, and work for justice and peace. Do you promise to help your children grow in the Christian faith and life?"

statements, but lower on all four remaining statements. The overall mean for baseline was 5.7 and end line was 5.2. Although all of the responses are generally affirmative, it appears for the end line respondents that they resonated least with the term “born again” or “born from above.” Again, as the frequency rates were generally lower and the overall population was not very high, I would not make any definitive conclusions about these responses.

### **Baseline/End Line Baptismal Promises**

In the ELCA, for those who use denominational resources, there are five questions asked of each person affirming their baptism, whether through confirmation, or receiving membership into the congregation. They reflect the questions asked of parents during baptism. These questions continue with a rejection of sin and profession of faith. They further continue with a primary question and five components (A-E): “do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in holy baptism:”

- A. To live among God’s faithful people?
- B. To hear the Word of God and Share in the Lord’s supper?
- C. To proclaim the Good News of God in Christ through word and deed?
- D. To serve all people following the example of Jesus?
- E. And to strive for Justice and peace in all the earth?<sup>6</sup>

To these questions, the respondent replies: “I do, and I ask God to help and guide me.” I have included five statements regarding baptismal affirmation promises. Each of the baptismal statements of promise have five identical statements below them regarding whether the participants (1) feel confident that they understand this faith practice, (2) have role models in this congregation who exemplify faithfulness to this faith practice,

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<sup>6</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, 236.

(3) have the opportunity and encouragement to live out this faith practice, (4) are encouraged to help others in this congregation grow into this faith practice, and (5) consider this faith practice as a priority in their lives. The responses were rated one to six on a Likert scale, one being strongest disagreement and six related to strongest agreement. The five tables that follow each report the means of each of the five statements (A-E) and each of the five numbered subsections of the statements as they are outlined in this paragraph. Tables and analysis follow.

#### A. Live Among God's Faithful People

This faith practice focuses on a commitment to surrounding oneself with Christian community. Table 22 shows the results. The mean response was above five in every section, indicating agreement or strong agreement. Though still in the affirmative, end line results were lower than baseline.

**Table 22. Live: baseline (N=40) and end line (N=23)**

	R1. Mean	R2. Mean	R3. Mean	R4. Mean	R5. Mean
Baseline	5.58	5.90	5.88	5.63	5.55
End Line	5.17	5.74	5.70	5.39	5.09

#### B. Hear the Word of God and Share in the Lord's Supper

This faith practice is about a commitment to participating in what Lutherans call the Means of Grace, Word and Sacrament. See more about this in chapter four regarding biblical and theological lenses. Table 23 presents the results. Like table 22, the mean response was above five in every section, indicating agreement or strong agreement. Though still in the affirmative, end line results were lower than baseline. This is true for tables 23-30 which follow.



**Table 23. Hear: baseline (N=40) and end line (N=23)**

	R1. Mean	R2. Mean	R3. Mean	R4. Mean	R5. Mean
Baseline	5.6	5.9	5.9	5.6	5.6
End Line	5.2	5.7	5.7	5.4	5.1

#### C. Proclaim the Good News of Christ through Word and Deed

Christianity is not a spectator sport. In baptism, we are called to share the good news that we ourselves have received. We are called to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ through our word and our actions. Table 23 shows the mean responses. Note two 6.0 means in the baseline and one in the end line. That is an indication that everyone who responded to the question, responded with the most affirmative choice given.

**Table 24. Proclaim: baseline (N=40) and end line (N=23)**

	R1. Mean	R2. Mean	R3. Mean	R4. Mean	R5. Mean
Baseline	5.7	6.0	6.0	5.8	5.6
End Line	5.3	5.7	6.0	5.2	5.2

#### D. Serve All People Following the Example of Jesus

This concerns our calling and commitment to serve all people. “When did we see you Lord” (Mt. 25), and what did we do about it is a question this congregation considers on a regular basis. There are three perfect mean scores of six for the baseline assessment. The numbers are slightly lower for the end line results for all questions.

**Table 25. Serve: baseline (N=40) and end line (N=23)**

	R1. Mean	R2. Mean	R3. Mean	R4. Mean	R5. Mean
Baseline	6.0	6.0	6.0	5.8	5.8
End Line	5.7	5.9	5.7	5.5	5.4

#### E. Strive for Justice and Peace in All the Earth

This is a big ask of anyone. Striving for justice and peace in all the Earth causes us to look outward, beyond our own wants and needs, and to speak and act on behalf of

others. The results shown in table 26 from GGLC do not surprise me, though in other congregations that I have served, justice and peace were not always high priorities.

**Table 26. Strive JP: baseline (N=40) and end line (N=23)**

	R1. Mean	R2. Mean	R3. Mean	R4. Mean	R5. Mean
Baseline	5.7	5.9	5.8	5.8	5.5
End Line	5.5	5.7	5.5	5.5	5.4

**Table 27. Summary of baseline and end line means A-E**

	A. Mean Live	B. Mean Hear	C. Mean Proclaim	D. Mean Serve	E. Mean Strive JP
Baseline	5.8	5.7	5.8	5.9	5.7
End Line	5.5	5.2	5.5	5.6	5.5

Table 27 is a summary of baseline and end line results for all five faith practices. Tables 22-27 have an average mean that is above 5 for both baseline and end line results. End line results were slightly lower than baseline. Nevertheless, all of the means were above 5, indicating that all of the participants agreed or agreed strongly with each of the statements. All five questions resulted in positive responses; but again, the end line showed slightly lower means than the baseline. Whether participants were more critical in their thinking as they completed the end line questionnaire I do not know. However, I do know that forty people completed the baseline questionnaire, twenty-three people completed the end line questionnaire, and paired t-tests indicate that there were only thirteen people who completed both. The small number of participants, the generally short time between baseline and end line, and the participants' general affinity toward agreement may all have had some effect on the responses.

Similarly, only a slight variance appears in the responses to the five sub-statements. Regarding the sub-statements of these faith practices noted above, participants claim to (1) understand them, (2) have role models and leaders in this

congregation, (3) have opportunity and encouragement to live it out in this congregation, (4) be encouraged to help others to grow into them, and (5) call it a priority in their daily lives.

### **Open Ended Questions**

Questions 52 and 53 in the baseline and end line questionnaires were open ended. They will be assessed as qualitative data.

Question 52 asked participants, “What ministries of GGLC do you think are most pleasing to God?” The intent of this question was to get them to think about this mission of God. The responses produced thirty-three baseline and twenty-three end line *in vivo* codes. Both the before and after produced such similar words that I combined them for the focus codes. These were:

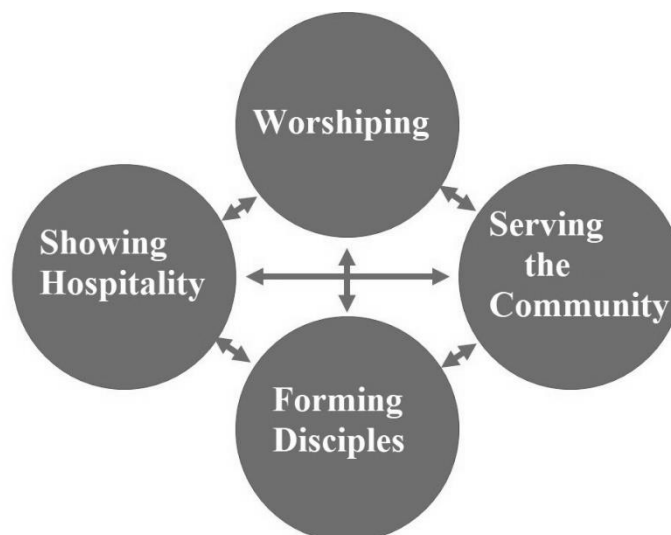
- Community
- Radical hospitality
- Food Pantry
- Music
- Many things
- Education/Faith Formation/Children
- Serving
- GHS Cakes
- Worship/Gospel

The relationship between these focused codes produced four axial codes. We can see in figure 9 the influence of the lenses of hospitality, worship (*lex orandi/lex credendi*), baptismal vocation (Mt. 18:18-20),<sup>7</sup> and service, which, in our setting relates to the lens of hospitality, and could indicate the congregation’s current focus on Matthew

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<sup>7</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

25, “When did we see/not see you Lord?” They show an awareness of clarity of mission which is a theoretical lens. The arrows show relationship and connectedness, another lens.



**Figure 6. God pleasing ministries**

These codes are all interrelated to each other as the whole of Christian life. Each code relates to the others. The image should be viewed as horizontal, on a level plain. Worship, showing hospitality, serving the community, and forming disciples each relate to one another in mutual directions. For instance, in worship, we relate to God and one another and are grounded to go out and serve, share hospitality, and help form and grow discipleship. Others find their entry point in service, which most often leads them to the other three circles. Young disciples learn that discipleship includes worship, showing hospitality, and serving our neighbors. I believe these responses to “God pleasing ministries at GGLC” begin to get at the question of how this congregation participates in the mission of God.

Question 53 asks,

Can you think of a time when you have felt unburdened (for instance: a sense of unexplainable freedom, joy, loosed from fear or distress, an ‘aha’ moment about the grace and love of God, etc.) by something you learned about or experienced of God? Please briefly describe it.

I included some lines for them to respond and then asked,

Would you be interested in being contacted for an interview about this experience? If so, please provide some contact information. All identifying information will remain confidential.”

The responses to this question provided the volunteer participants for the research interviews for this study. Results can be found in interview section of this chapter, particularly in the results under “liberating experience” and “God revealed in unexpected ways.” This question relates to the lenses of the liberating nature of God and theology of the cross.

### Sermon/Worship Series and Dwelling in the Word

This series of interventions encompassed six Sundays. They included the festival of the Baptism of Our Lord and the first five Sundays in the season of Lent. Themes and stories are in table 28. (Sermons can be found in appendices J-O.)

**Table 28. Intervention dates, themes, and stories**

Date	Theme	Scripture/Story
1/13/19	Baptized and Beloved	Baptism of our Lord
3/10/19	God Heard their Cries for Liberation	Exodus, call of Moses, God revealed as “I am”
3/17/19	Jesus: Anointed to Liberate	Jesus’ Inaugural Address
3/24/19	Greatness and the Cross	Passion Predictions 3x3, greatest and least
3/31/19	Liberated by Reconciliation	The end of the Joseph story, the prodigal story
4/7/19	Liberated by Participation with the Least	Matthew 25 - When did I see you, Jesus?

### Dwelling in the Word Results

There were six modified Dwelling in the Word sessions with seventeen overall participants, four men and thirteen women. Not all were present for every session. The texts we used for Dwelling were those used for preaching and worship themes the hour prior to our discussion. This activity was new to most of the participants and it took several weeks for them to appear comfortable with it. Participants spoke for themselves rather than partnering with another person. Several questions that I will report on in tables are verbatim responses to the questions:

- “Did God Show up in a Reversal of an Expectation of Someone Powerful and How? (Q3) Table 29
- Was someone challenged by God? (Q4) Table 30
- Was someone favored by God? (Q 5) Table 30
- “Did the scripture or sermon call you to be freed *from* something? (Q8) Table 32
- “Did the scripture or sermon call you to be freed *for* something? (Q9) Table 32
- “How does this scripture offer a liberating word for you?(Q10) Table 31

Because answers were most likely not verbally repeated once they were recorded, frequency of response is not recorded. Tables 29-32 are all *in vivo* codes. No records for March 31, 2019, exist because the group got distracted on a tangential issue and we did not complete the protocol.

#### **Did God Show up in a Reversal of an Expectation of Someone Powerful and How?**

An element of both the theology of the cross and the liberating nature of God show that God is often powerfully found in those places where we would not likely find a CEO or head of state. Our Dwelling in the Word session focused on the texts of the days. This question sought out perspective on Scripture by the participants on where they saw

God “show up.” *In vivo* coded results are in table 29. Participants articulated the reversals as they reflected on the texts.

**Table 29. Did God show up in a reversal?**

<i>In Vivo</i> Responses: Did God Show Up in a Reversal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• also, all the people were baptized then Jesus was too - like everyone else</li> <li>• Jesus doesn't portray himself as being above everyone else</li> <li>• Jesus was a pedestrian god (life of pi)</li> <li>• little fanfare "lowkey burning bush"</li> <li>• God had all of the answers, but they were simple</li> <li>• that is not what you would expect</li> <li>• Jesus shows up to the widow and leper</li> <li>• He is showing up to die</li> <li>• He said take up my cross and follow me instead of swords</li> <li>• The father didn't act like a ruler</li> <li>• powerful people often desire vengeance</li> </ul>

### **Who is Challenged/Favored by God?**

Questions regarding who is challenged or favored by God evolved a little over the course of the first a few weeks. My intent was to ask who was favored/challenged by God, but I initially did not specifically use the term, “by God.” Therefore, in the early weeks the group was discovering that everyone was challenging everyone else, and Jesus was also being challenged. After a few weeks of clarification, participants started looking more specifically for God’s place in these texts. Results are in table 30. Participants noticed that worldly norms are often turned upside down when we are considering the word of God and God’s ways. God’s liberating nature is lifted up. In essence, those with power are challenged and the lowly are favored. *In vivo* codes follow in table 30.

**Table 30. Who is challenged/favored by God?**

Challenged	Favored
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We are</li> <li>• Examine our priorities</li> <li>• Challenge to advocate for hungry, homeless, prisoners</li> <li>• Be a voice, advocate</li> <li>• Moses</li> <li>• Israelites</li> <li>• Pharaoh</li> <li>• The men in the synagogue</li> <li>• Prosperity Gospel</li> <li>• Powers that be</li> <li>• Chief priests, scribes</li> <li>• The older brother</li> <li>• Challenge to advocate for hungry, homeless, prisoner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jesus is begin favored</li> <li>• Moses</li> <li>• Israelites</li> <li>• the poor, captive, blind, oppressed, refugees, foreigners, lonely, those in debt</li> <li>• followers of Jesus</li> <li>• Jesus</li> <li>• Poor, outcasts</li> <li>• Those who forfeit their gain in this world</li> <li>• The younger son</li> <li>• The father</li> <li>• Sheep</li> <li>• Ones who showed kindness to the least among us</li> <li>• The least among us</li> <li>• Jesus sought the hungry, etc.</li> </ul>

### **Liberating Word for You**

The question of “a liberating word for you” is asking participants whether they can discover connecting points between the Scripture they have just heard and something that they are encountering in their daily lives, a word of liberation. The responses are *in vivo* codes and are listed in table 31. The *in vivo* codes indicate that participants connected their own experiences of (focused codes) liberation with the grace, welcome, and love which liberates them to serve. It was liberating for some to know that it was all right to not get it right all the time. Dates in the left column correspond to themes and Scriptures of the day.



**Table 31. Responses to dwelling question #7 "liberating word for you"**

Date	Response
1/13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• open, welcoming everyone</li> <li>• we are all in this together</li> <li>• Jesus can be baptized in the same water as everyone else.</li> <li>• Cleansing</li> </ul>
3/10/19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• we can freely serve Him not as slaves to sin</li> <li>• Die to live</li> </ul>
3/17/19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jesus did not just come for the people in charge - he came for the outsiders</li> <li>• Scripture trumps all</li> </ul>
3/24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• even an apostle gets rebuked – its ok if we don't get it right all the time</li> <li>• even the apostles didn't get it sometimes</li> <li>• to be a follower of Christ doesn't mean you get it right all the time</li> </ul>
4/7/19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• those who are suffering/different are blessed and loved by God</li> <li>• God put you on this earth to prepare you for a better place in heaven</li> <li>• comforting to think that people in desperate situations - God is with them</li> <li>• Grace</li> <li>• Love</li> <li>• God doesn't give us the consequences we deserve</li> <li>• Definite theme- what would be good for you to do? God placed you for a short time.</li> </ul>

**Freed From/Freed For**

Like table 30, the next questions were asked in pairs. They ask participants to consider the liberating nature of God. Their *in vivo* responses are in table 32. Focused codes for “freed from” would be free from worry, doubt, and distractions. We are “freed for” being the people God wants us to be, renouncing that which does not please God, being worthy in Christ.

**Table 32. *In vivo* responses to dwelling Questions 8, 9, “freed from/freed for”**

Date	Freed From	Freed For
1/13 Baptized and Beloved	freed from chaff freed from not knowing If you are freed, you are freed indeed doubt that we are worthy	renounce the devil and his ways renounce the chaff I am well pleased - a blessing for all of us. never took that personally that is God talking to Jesus we are worthy, Jesus died for us. We are worthy because of what Jesus did. It is a gift Grace is from God
3/10/19 Exodus	freed from any impediment we have the perfect model freed from worrying freed from any impediment	Freed to be the people God wants us to be freed to serve
3/17/19 Jesus Inaugural	responsibility of doing it all ourselves. God is going to work regardless God has the burden. God is doing it	Freed to love everyone regardless of who they are and where they are from
3/24 Greatness and Cross	fear because of grace We are told who ultimately wins. Free from worry	grace to follow Christ free to block family and friends on social media
4/7/19 Participating with the least	Free from judging others called to be free from fear very easy to judge those who do judge others people have trouble not judging prisoners Freed from fear free from judging others free to welcome all	Free for service advocacy, not need to "save them" just love them. meeting immediate physical needs

At first, these modified Dwelling in the Word sessions were difficult to facilitate. Most participants had no previous experience with this kind of approach to scripture. Instead, their approaches were more like those of a book club with the accompanying judging of the character depictions. This was particularly the case when we were discussing the prodigal son. Intense critique of the father's parenting steered the conversation away from the fact that a parable points to a larger reality. We did not get to all of the questions, but we did come to a better overall understanding of Dwelling, *lectio*

*Divina*, and Bible reading in general. Participants had come to, specifically start looking for God in scripture. I had made an error in assuming this critical detail.

In general, participants began over the course of these weeks to start looking forward to finding the grace, love, and liberating words in the scripture texts. These participants were mostly those who participate in faith formation time on a regular basis. Beyond the scope of this study, it is my hope that, with time, we will be able to listen to each other better and be able to partner up for this exercise in order to encounter the holy through scripture and each other.

### Interviews

I interviewed twelve individuals on questions relating to a variety of my lenses. Information about participation can be found in chapter four, table 12. Interview protocols can be found in appendix G.

This researcher explored several of the lenses through topical questions in the interview protocol. They all related to the *missio Dei*. Other lenses addressed by specific questions included the following:

1. Liberating experiences (liberating nature of God)
2. God revealed in unexpected ways (theology of the cross)
3. Ministries which reflect God's presence with the suffering (theology/cross)

### **Liberating Experience**

As the question on liberating experience appeared first, I checked in with each of the participants at the beginning of our interview time and offered a brief explanation of the format of the interviews and asked a few comfort questions about water and heat. I reminded them that I would be recording and had them sign the informed consent form. I began the first questions with a quote from our baptismal liturgy.

God who is rich in mercy and love, gives us a new birth into a living hope through the sacrament of baptism. By water and the Word God delivers us from sin and death and raises us to new life in Jesus Christ. We are united with all the baptized in the one body of Christ, anointed with the gift of the Holy Spirit, and joined in God's mission for the life of the world.<sup>8</sup>

The question was, "In our baptismal liturgy, we talk about being freed. Can you talk about experiencing a sense of how being connected to the Good News has been liberating for you?" Some highlighted *in vivo* responses from participants follow. They represent a depth of experiences and understanding of God's liberating nature in their lives.

- The liberating nature of Christ's sacrifice and that freedom allows us to no longer be solely concerned with our own concerns, but it frees us to care for the neighbor...through that service we witness to the love, light, freedom, open joy of Christ....I get to...
- The basis of my faith is that grace has given me the freedom to be the person that I think God wants me to be....
- When you invite us to communion as an open table. God's gift to us.
- Baptism you are a child of God- not our action or somehow all of a sudden being enlightened and saying 'yes.' God chose me.
- Grace. Grace really is sufficient, really is good news.
- ...learning about liberation theology. Eye opening idea of grace being purely unconditional. Free gift. "We get to" not we have to.
- Unburdened. Just because I haven't convinced these people to come to church or to accept Christ to get baptized doesn't mean that they are not covered by God's grace and that was the most freeing thing.
- Felt this bubbly joy. So excited, just wanted to share.
- I am able to be me. I am able to be myself fully completely and wholly, all under the full support and guidance of God.

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<sup>8</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, 227.

- I feel like the Holy Spirit could actually like burn within me and it does not feel like this suffocating feeling of “I can’t do this.” It becomes “I can do this.”
- Liberated from guilt, doubt, and pain.
- ...freedom to live with questions. I don’t need to figure out how or who goes to heaven. Jesus came for all of us.
- Intense spiritual life, closeness.
- I don’t have to worry so much about being perfect. God loves me and sees who I am. God does love me.
- Bible study on the book of Romans (with friends outside GGLC) at the same time GGLC was having conversations about being Reconciling in Christ. I felt liberated personally from sin. Less judgmental of others.

Responses to this question provided a total of 104 *in vivo* codes. These were clustered into the following focused codes in table 33. The numbers to the right represent the number of *in vivo* codes these represent. The numbers on the left indicate the rank from (1) most common to (11) least common.

**Table 33. Focused codes: liberating experience**

Focused Codes: Liberating Experience	
1. Experience –	24
2. Free/liberated –	21
3. Grace –	18
4. Affirm my neighbors’ worth –	11
5. Affirm my worth in God’s eyes –	9
6. God’s love –	7
7. All –	6
8. Joy –	4
9. Open Table/Invitation to Communion –	3
10. Creation –	3
11. Baptism –	3

It is interesting to note that as participants talked about liberating experiences, they did so from two basically different directions. One direction was from those who had (or knew friends or relatives who had) at one time been judged or perceived that they

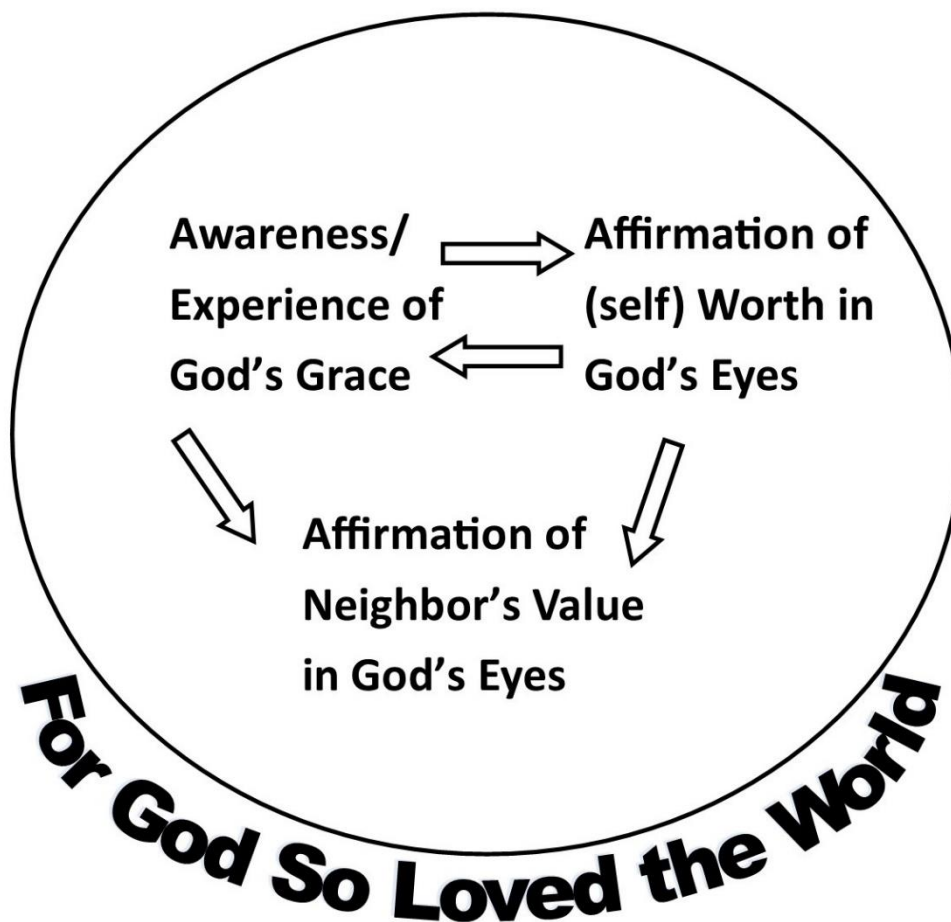
had been judged “not good enough” in the congregations or church settings they were in. The other direction was from those who had formerly been judgmental of those who did not fit their perception of Christian. Both discovered grace and worth in the Good News. Both found the grace of God to be profoundly freeing. See table 34 for axial code groupings from the focus codes. Note that the numbers to the right of the focus codes are the ranking numbers associated with the focused codes in table 33.

**Table 34. Axial codes from focus codes: liberating experience**

Axial Codes/Focus Codes
<b>AC1. Awareness/Experience of God’s Grace</b>
FC1. Experience
FC2. Free/liberate
FC11. Affirm my neighbor’s worth
FC4. Baptism
<b>AC2. Affirmation of worth in God’s eyes</b>
FC5. Affirm my worth in God’s eyes
FC8. Joy
<b>AC3. Affirmation of neighbor’s value in God’s eyes</b>
FC4. Affirm my neighbor’s worth
FC11. Baptism
FC8. Joy
<b>AC4. God so loved the world, the whole world</b>
FC3. Grace
FC6. All
FC7. Joy
FC8. Open Table/Invitation to Communion
FC9. Creation
FC10. Baptism

A visual that I have created to express these participant responses as they have been grouped into theoretical coding is in figure 7. Participants who chose to describe a liberating experience, do so with words describing God’s grace (AC1), with an affirmation of their own worth and their neighbors’ worth in God’s eyes (AC2/AC3), and an articulation of God’s love for the whole world (AC4). For the purpose of the

illustration, God's love (AC4) is holding the world. There is no way to adequately portray the infinite presence of this love in the universe.



**Figure 8. Liberating experience theoretical coding**

### **God Revealed in Unexpected Ways.**

The interview question was, “In the Bible, God is often revealed in unexpected ways. Could you share ways you might think of from your own experiences, that God was revealed in an unexpected way or time?” Participants were eager to share.

Some of the highlights of their stories fall into categories of an awareness of God's grace. One writes, “to be able to just to know that our own stories are not too much

to hold and that our stories are being held by more than just us.” Another, who has experienced exclusion in church and family for coming out LGBT+, says,

I found this church. In this congregation frankly through—I 'm not even going to call it coincidence when I will actually call it what it is and—just full-out *serendipity*. I wasn't expecting to find anything this accepting. I still am in awe. I'm shocked because I have never been as a part of a congregation that was accepting of people like me. I have never found a congregation that was loving and supportive in this way even regardless of my identity. It does feel like a miracle. It does feel like God showed up in one of the darkest points in my life and said, “here's your family.”

Others expressed their experiences as miracles. One person said, “Miracles, I’ve seen them over and over—you don’t really expect it to happen, and all of a sudden, wow, you did.” One participant had a son who drove off a cliff and walked away from the accident. Another survived a terrible collision while driving a Honda Civic and being hit by a semi-truck. “My car crumpled like a piece of paper.”<sup>9</sup> One was told as a child to pray for their deaf brother because “God listens to the prayers of children first because they are pure of heart.” Just before the brother was going to be fitted for hearing aids, he regained full hearing.

Several others sensed a presence or they “heard a voice” that brought them comfort, calm, and a feeling of God’s presence with them in difficult times, such as the death of a parent, waiting for results of family injuries and illness, or during cancer treatment. One summed these up quite well, “as horrible and scary as that was, I really felt God there with me.”

Others responded that God was revealed through scripture texts that had spoken directly to them at various time, or they heard and saw God in the stories of the lives of

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<sup>9</sup> For complete quotes, see appendix R: God revealed in unexpected ways.



people around them. One said, “I just see God in the least.” In that same vein another expressed God’s presence in the opportunity to witness God’s love and serve others in the presence of some Christians whose witness was “the hatred being spewed forth.”

Some spoke of their faith that God’s presence is always expected. “I have a hard time thinking of any unexpected time because I believe that God is constantly at work, so I don't feel like I'm ever surprised about God being at work. [God] is right there.” From all the *in vivo* quotes, I developed focused codes which are presented in table 35. The number of times the *in vivo* codes were referenced are the numbers at the right.

**Table 35. Focused codes: unexpected revelation of God**

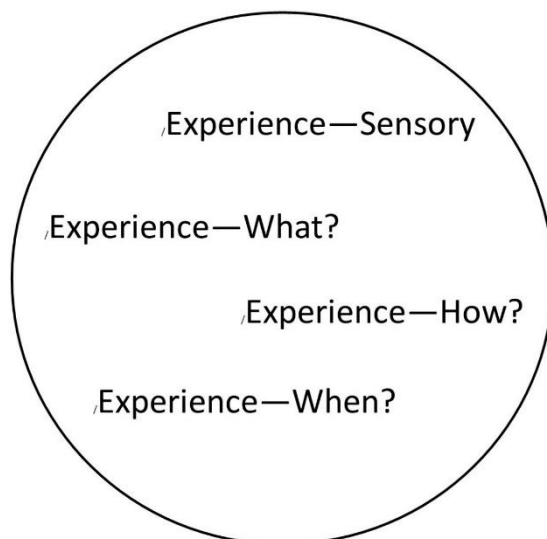
Focused Codes: Unexpected Revelation of God	
God –	19
Just –	15
Like –	8
Feel/felt –	8
Love –	6
Really –	6
Hearing –	6
Miracles –	5
People –	5
Directly –	5
Shows –	5
Expect –	4
Always –	4
Finding –	4
Giving –	4
Hard –	4
Right –	4
See –	4

From these focused codes, I developed axial codes (table 36). I utilized NVivo software to assist in this coding. Words that I excluded from coding were “just” and “really” as transcripts reveal these words, though frequently used, serve mostly as modifiers or placeholders.

**Table 36. Axial codes: unexpected revelation**

Axial Codes
AC1. Sensory Experience FC See, hearing, feel/felt, shows, finding
AC2. Experience What? FC Love, miracles, God, giving
AC3. Experience How? FC People, directly
AC4. Experiences When? FC Always

The overarching theme would be experiencing the very presence of God. For these participants, the responses were very personal experiences. Their experiences varied, but the presence of God was the common denominator. As they described them, they used experiential words which described the “what, how, and when” of those experiences. They describe these experiences through use of their senses. I believe the relationship between the axial codes suggests just one theoretical code, which is experiencing the very presence of God, usually in a time of great need.

**Figure 9. God revealed in unexpected ways**

### Ministries which reflect God's presence with suffering or oppressed

The third interview question was, "How do the ministries of this congregation reflect God's presence in the suffering or oppressed?" There were ninety *in vivo* codes drawn from the raw data. I utilized SPSS to help analyze the data. From the *in vivo* codes, I compiled eighteen focused codes. The focus codes are presented in table 37.

**Table 37. Ministries of this congregation reflecting God's presence with the suffering or oppressed**

Focused Codes	
1	People—26
2	Congregation—20
3	Food—11
4	Love—11
5	Specific—11
6	Community—10
7	Church—9
8	Ministry—8
9	space- safe, holding—8
10	Suffering—8
11	whole, wholly—8
12	Focused—7
13	Safe—7
14	Welcome—7
15	intention, intentional, intentionality—6
16	Standing—6
17	Stories—5
18	Tell—5

These focus codes were further grouped into four axial codes of Community, Ministry, Standing-with, and Intentionality. They appear in table 38.

**Table 38 God's presence with suffering or oppressed**

<b>Axial Codes</b>	<b>From these Focus Codes</b>
<b>FC1 Community</b>	people congregation community church
<b>FC2 Ministry</b>	ministry specific safe welcome love food
<b>FC3 Standing with</b>	standing suffering stories tell
<b>FC4 Intentionality</b>	intentional whole, wholly Space—safe, holding Focused

Community, Ministry, Standing-with, and Intentionality are axial codes drawn from the research. It is this researcher's experience that these are accurate depictions of the ministries of the congregation with and among the suffering and oppressed. Theoretical coding sees these four axial codes as relational and subject/subject in direction. In this congregation, those interviewed described ministries to those who are suffering or oppressed, not so much a sort of "doing for," as "standing with" or "holding space" (See focused and axial codes in tables 37 and 38.)

It is notable that one of the interviewees brought up the word "pruning." This person articulated the importance of direct conversations about the missional nature of

the church which, although potentially risky to the status quo, are nonetheless critical for missional leadership. “What does it mean to say that ‘all are welcome?’” was one such conversation that GGLC engaged its members. The risks that we took led to an initial drop in participation. The fruits of that conversation were expressed throughout the interview responses, Dwelling in the Word responses, and open-ended question responses in the baseline and end line questionnaires. The use of other leadership lenses helped GGLC find security in the midst of what some perceived as an unsettling period. But I would be remiss in this study to neglect to say that such leadership is risky.

There is much more that I could do with baseline, end line, Dwelling, and Interview results and analysis. For the scope of this thesis, I believe I have enough information to draw some conclusions. In chapter six, I presented an overview of my research process with results and analysis. In chapter seven I will share my conclusions and overall reflections on the meaning of this work and its implications for the future.

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## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

#### **Results and Lenses Summary**

I knew at the outset of this study that finding quantifiable data about experiencing a hidden God might be difficult work. That did prove to be the case. But the richness of experiences as told in stories and interviews brought light to the lenses. In chapter six, I presented the results of my research. In this chapter I present concluding reflections.

My research question was, “How might an Action Research (AR) intervention cultivate a hermeneutic of *missio Dei* as it relates to Baptismal Vocation?” My original title was “Renewed Hope: Theology of the Cross informing a Fresh Missional Imagination.” I have since changed “Renewed Hope” to “**Liberated for Mission.**” To renew something is to hang onto something for a little longer, like a library book. What I have discovered in my research and analysis are people who are telling stories of liberation, of being set free to do new things

My interventions were a series of six sermons with accompanying worship texts and hymns. They also included modified Dwelling in the Word sessions based on the texts of the day during our faith formation time following worship.

Quantitative data were gathered through the use of baseline and end line questionnaires. The most useful of these data came from results from demographic questions. In this process I discovered that, of those who answered the questionnaires,

40.0% of baseline and 60.9% of end line respondents had been affiliated with the congregation for less than five years. This did not correlate with the length of time participants lived in the community. Immediately, that gave me an indication that those people were not competing with the g-o-ds of past lore. The ministries of GGLC were a new thing for them. God was already doing a new thing in and with them and us. It is important to note that those who responded to the baseline and end line questionnaire, who claim to have been affiliated with the congregation less than five years, represent a new and active portion of our membership. They include congregation council members, choir members, and a twenty-something church treasurer. They have expressed a desire to be part of the liberating ministries of God. There are, of course, leadership challenges of serving a congregation where many of the members have no collective history, sharing ministry with those who do. I turn to my theoretical lenses to inform the choices I make in navigating these challenges. Given more time, I might like to compare some questions' responses between those affiliated less than five years and more than five years.

Most of the respondents were members of the congregation. They also typically worshiped between twice a month and more than once a week. 67.5% volunteered in some sort of ministry of the congregation between more than once a month and more than once a week. These people are using their strengths and assets. Respondents represent a broad variety of formative faith traditions, but the majority came from liturgical church backgrounds, Lutheran, Roman Catholic, and Episcopal.

Baseline and end line questionnaires asked a number of questions about participant understanding and importance of baptismal identity and baptismal vocation in their lives. Their responses on six-point Likert scales showed all of their responses to be

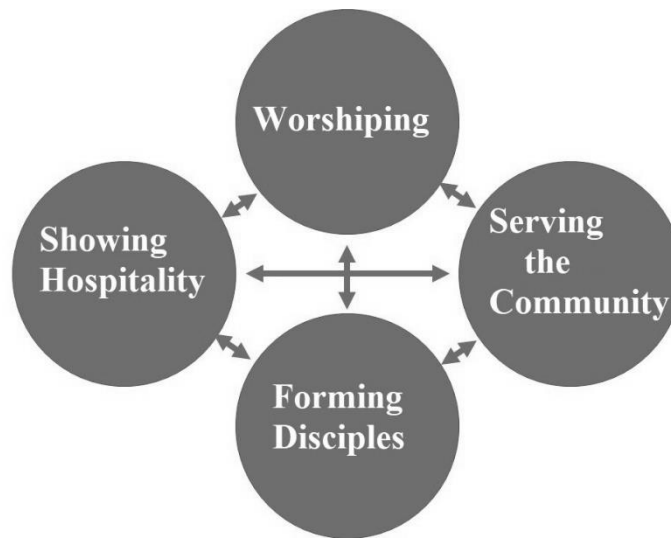
in the 5-6 range, which meant agree/strongly-agree or the faith practice was meaningful/deeply meaningful. The differences between these two affirmative responses in a short period with only thirteen respondents who participated in both questionnaires seemed not to be a tremendously important lead to follow. Clearly, baptismal identity and vocation were noted to be an important element in the lives of those who responded—both before and after the interventions. Baptismal identity and vocation are a grounding element, a foundation for those who participated. The sermon series presented things that were not new, only concentrated. The congregation has been deeply involved in this mission and ministry and with these teachings for at least the past seven years. Again, there was not much change between baseline and end line responses.

There was an open-ended question on the baseline and end line questionnaires that asked, “What ministries of GGLC do you think are most pleasing to God?” This was to invite participants to think about our congregation’s participation in the mission of God. We can see in figure 10 the influence of the lenses of hospitality, worship (*lex orandi/lex credendi*), baptismal vocation (Mt. 18:18-20),<sup>1</sup> and service, which, in our setting relates to the lens of hospitality, and could indicate the biblical lens of participating in the lives of the least. (See Matthew 25, “When did we see/not see you Lord?”) They show an awareness of clarity of mission which is a theoretical lens. The arrows which are all multi-directional reflect the lens of “imagination, improvisation, and dancing with the Trinity.” (See p. 75)

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<sup>1</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”





**Figure 10. God pleasing ministries conclusion**

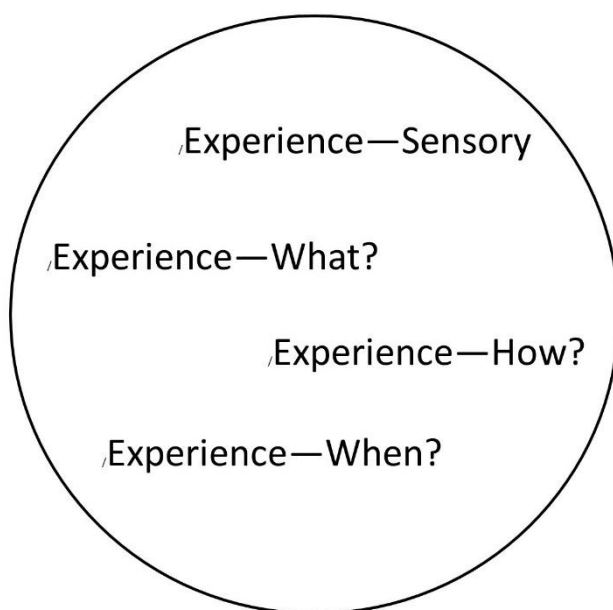
In relation to this, when asked how this congregation participates in the lives of the suffering and oppressed, the axial codes produced were: “**community, ministry, standing with, and intentionality.**” This question was intended to seek connections to baptismal vocation, and our participation in *missio Dei*, as it relates to baptismal vocation and theology of the cross. These axial codes would seem to relay a message that these participants understand that ministry has an intentionality to meet people where they are. It is relational, and I might even say relates to our place in the perichoretic dance into which the Trinity invites us.

At the time of this writing, I have officiated at 108 funerals as pastor of GGLC. Our worship service attendance averages about 75 people., certainly, the lowest it has been in decades. Yet, there is a vibrancy, vitality, and sense of commitment about the ministries here that is unique in my experience. In fact, our pledged offering has been going up for the past several years. Though not necessarily all from my academic

interventions, there has definitely been reframing going on in the hearts and minds of members.

Hospitality and radical hospitality are part of the nature of this community. It is not hospitality-industry hospitality. We share our building as stewards who were entrusted with something that needs to be shared. We share food because we are compelled by the gospel to do so. We share the gospel, as Luther is said to have written, “like beggars showing other beggars where to find bread.” People are articulating their liberation through the gospel and through their interactions with the baptized people of GGLC. Parallel to my academic work, the congregation has also been involved in many discussions about who our neighbor is and has had specific and ongoing conversations and actions regarding race, interfaith, and LGBT+ relationships. We show an interest and concern for our neighbors, the poor, and the homeless.

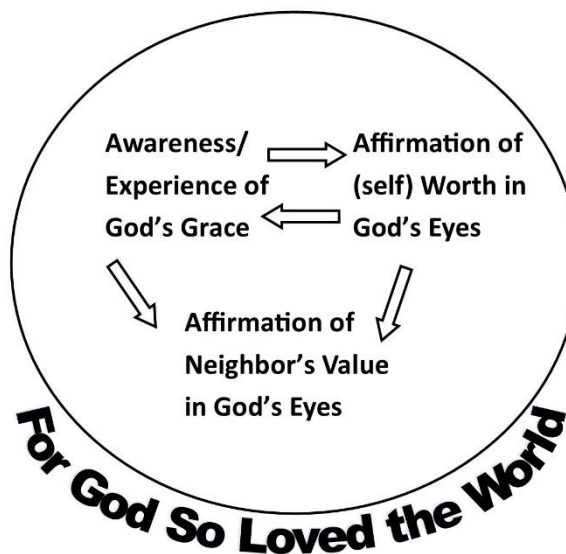
One question I asked was regarding how God was revealed to them in unexpected ways. Their responses revolved around the word “experience.” These experiences often



**Figure 11. God revealed in unexpected ways conclusion**

happened during times of great need or stress, but also in the beauty of creation such as childbirth.

When asked to share a liberating experience, twelve people responded to the invitation to interview. Their experiences are couched in terms of God's love, God's grace, and newfound worth for themselves or for others.



**Figure 12. Liberating experience conclusion**

These awarenesses of God's liberating nature came to individuals in ways that were often gradual, but sometimes also quite sudden. Their answers revolve around being in a relationship with God who loves them most. The directions they came at these experiences were not all the same, but they could perhaps be grouped into categories.

On one hand, the liberated ones were Christians who, at some point or points in their lives, had Epiphany experiences about the grace of God and that experience showed them their own value or the value of others who were made in God's image. Some were raised without any religious background and discovered an awareness of a greater presence that was both comforting and surprising.

Other respondents had been raised in churches that had condemned them for a variety of the many reasons that churches exclude people. One talked about being “indoctrinated that I was bad. I was going to hell.” This person likened their relationship with their former church family to that of “having a dog you love, and every time you walk into the room, the dog attacks you.”<sup>1</sup> It was not uncommon for these people to have been told by their own church, or even family of origin because of their church background, that they are going to hell.

Some had come from denominations with closed communion tables. Something as simple as a weekly reminder that Jesus is the host of the meal was a genuine, new light for them into the grace of God. Their experiences of liberation brought them, generally to a newfound awareness of God’s love for themselves, their neighbors, and the whole world.

One person, who has been wounded terribly by the defrocking of a beloved pastor because that pastor was outed, put their thoughts and feelings into art. As art, this illustration will speak to the viewer in all sorts of ways. In conversation with the artist, a few words confirm some of what we see together. We see, in the eyes of Jesus, compassion and more. The original depiction of Jesus was done on letter sized paper. The detailing of Jesus and his features were drawn with a .15 mm micro-line art pen. This was an act of devotion. The church is a digital insert. It is intended to be a non-specific building with thick, heavy walls. Jesus is God incarnate. When God wanted to reveal Godself to the world, it was through the incarnate son. In this image, Jesus lovingly holds

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<sup>1</sup> Angelo John Lewis, “A Transgender Journey,” accessed January 5, 2020, <https://open.spotify.com/episode/553xcX7xU6sIHTLLb6GMCX?si=gG8Gx2GqSJy9UMTqqPA--Q&fbclid=IwAR1vDiLk-SIk8FY3ZE-mQIrDEHByPPMK1FpPeiq0JHhuibxPves0-4u8K10>.

the church; but the bubble around the church is its own doing. Words of God's love and blessing bounce off the bubble. Nothing gets in. Nothing gets out. It is isolated, but visible, still, lovingly held by Jesus. The church can be liberated if the bubble can be burst. The image is figure 14. This illustration speaks volumes to me about the work of missional leadership within the church. Dancing with the Trinity, and lovingly held by God, we are ever encouraged to pop that bubble and let love and grace flow freely into and out from us.

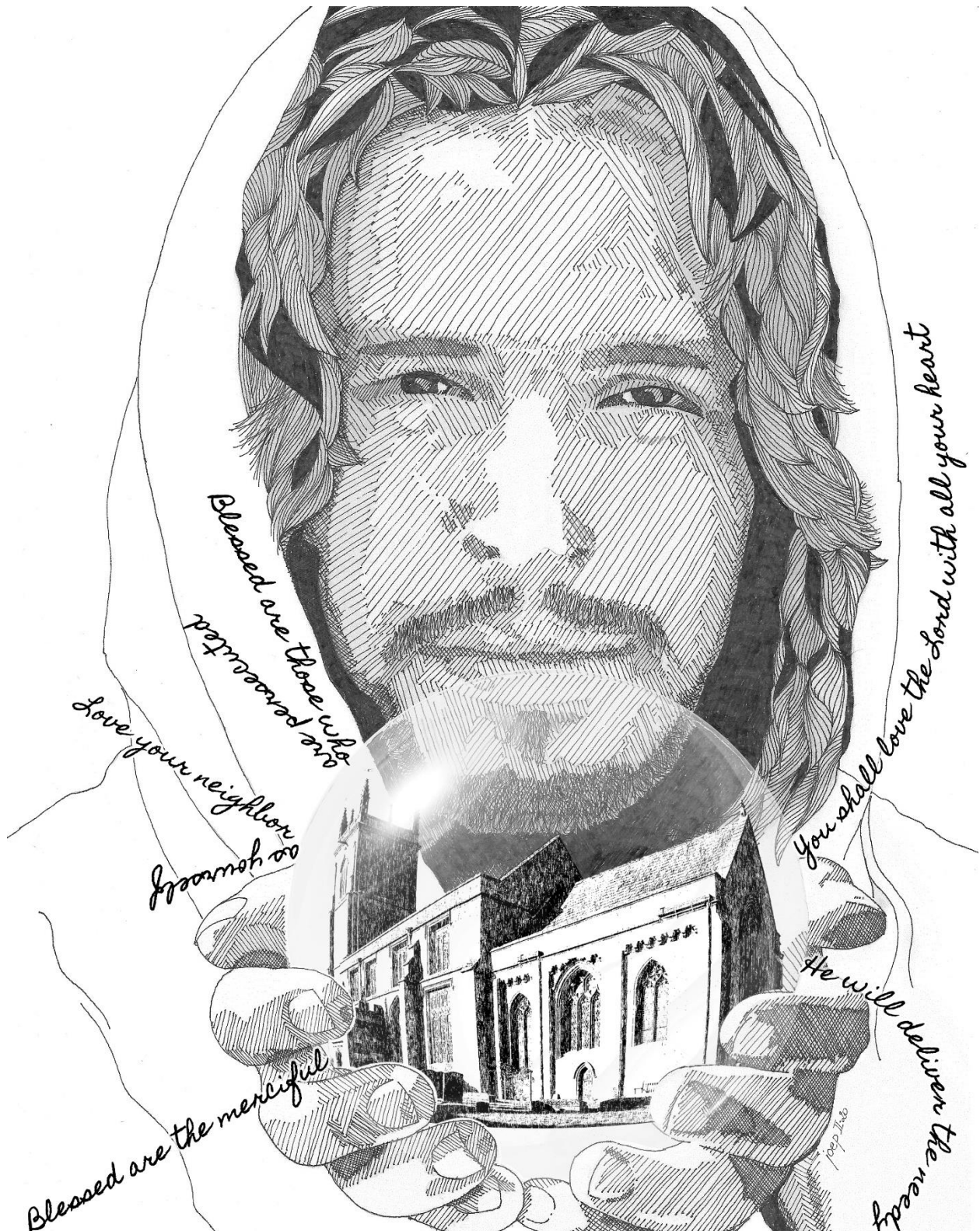


Figure 14. Jesus and the church

In Luther's theology of the cross, there is an awareness of the grace of God that brings us to an understanding that we bring nothing to our own salvation or God's love. It is all the work of Christ incarnate, who was poured out for us on the cross. We claim no merit or achievement. It is all a free gift. It is a liberating gift. For those who have had to struggle to earn love or acceptance in home or church, this can be radical and life changing.

As I have mentioned before, but is worth noting again, we believe that we are called, gathered, enlightened, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit through no understanding or effort of our own. As we continue the work of communal discernment in this place it is always good to begin grounded in an awareness of our place in the Dance of the Trinity, and with theological and theoretical frames, immersed in communal discernment, and pointing toward strategic action. God is about doing a New Thing and that New Thing is always liberating. Truly, the church throughout history has been pointing to Jesus, Savior of the world. I believe it is time to reconnect the word *salvation* to *liberation*. In baptism, we proclaim that we are liberated from sin and death, not just set apart for heaven, but to be "joined in God's mission for the life of the world."<sup>3</sup>

In chapter seven I shared the results and interpretation of my research. In summary, I sought places of intersection among the participants, between their sense of *missio Dei*, baptismal vocation, theology of the cross, and the liberating nature of God, through these various theological and biblical lenses. In part, I did this to replace the old narrative of "success is size" (or g-o-d) with something more in line with being a

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<sup>3</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, 227.

follower of the Galilean rabbi who turned the world upside down by bringing good news to those who least expected it. God is doing a “new thing,” liberating us to pull us into a future. How we respond to God’s pull will affect our present.

Could future researchers duplicate this work and results? I believe there are elements that could be useful for others to use. Certainly, the six-week intervention or a study on the texts chosen for those weeks would be quite adaptable to other congregation settings.

It has been most enlightening to be observant of the difference in length of time of affiliation with the congregation and to take note of ways to bring long time and newer participants together in meaningful ways for mission.

However, there are perhaps limits of generalizing from these findings. Perhaps foremost is that this is a very specific group of individuals that God has called together in this place. I say this not to say they are better than other groups of people that God has put together; but this congregation, and individuals who find their way to be part of this congregation, have a sense that God had something in mind by bringing us all together.

I recall one of our most recent new members was invited by one of our other newer members who is a retired pastor. This retired pastor and a few other members were playing in a polka band at an outdoor event. She, new to the community, and also a brass player, came up to talk to the band. He asked if she had a faith community yet. She responded that she had not. Another member of the band (and church) pulled one of my business cards out of his pocket and gave it to her. She saw the RIC logo and responded, “I was warned about this church.” She grinned. She was there the next Sunday and has



become an integral part of our ministries. She learned about liberation theology in Costa Rica. She just had not found a congregation that believed in it until now.

### Questions for Future Researchers

I know that I will continue to ask people about their liberating experiences and hope that future researches will as well. It just will not do to continue to ask, “How can we do the past better?” God is in the present and future, from the next minute, to the world without end. Keep asking where God is and what God is up to and make sure it does not sound like a rhetorical question. Expect answers.

As I have participated in this research, I have come to an awareness that soteriology has occupied such a large place in Christianity for so many generations, (and my own formative years), that missiology has often taken a back seat. “Are you saved?” This was the overarching question within a great many Christian circles, and still is in many. I am aware of groups of Christian women that get together for ecumenical worship, and as often as they gather, they wring their hands together in worry over whether their children or grandchildren are saved. Would it not be more fruitful to ask if they have been liberated? By working with GGLC toward a clearer sense of participation in *missio Dei*, I believe we have discovered a new and liberating sense of joy and purpose in ministry. My intent with this project was that our congregation members would be empowered to participate in this research in such a way as to bring fresh new perspectives on their place in the *missio Dei* in this particular time in the life of our congregation and community. My hope, through doing this work, was to see members come to a more joyful awareness of their baptismal identity which calls and compels

them to discern and join in God's liberating work in the world. Though this is a lifetime process for all of us, I believe the results have been fruitful to their intent.

## EPILOGUE

This research and the entire D. Min. process has stretched me in so many ways. It has increased my ability to read and digest academic writings, learn about research and data analysis, and take in modern technology. It has provided the incentive to read in depth in these areas of interest, of mission, and ministry.

I can only begin to describe what a joy it has been for me to discover technology that has not been available to me in previous degree programs. Zotero allows me to maintain a database of source materials that I can utilize to footnote with a quick keyboard shortcut. By setting up a macro, Ctr+^ + author and page number give me an instant footnote. SPSS gives me ways to analyze data that would otherwise take serious amounts of time. Templates from Luther Seminary, MS Word assistance like navigation, style, spelling, grammar check. A Pomodoro timer kept me from drifting off into distraction. In the early months of this program, I was able to use a pen-sized highlighter/scanner that allowed me to highlight notes from sources directly into MS Word, so I could save notes by author and topic and recover them when needed to write. Kindle also allowed me to collect and store my highlights so they could be searched and retrieved as needed. Evernote helped me collect, tag, and store online sources and resources. These are all things that will continue to be useful for me in the future.

Attending to the work of this program has helped me to prioritize what I need to accomplish in a day. The studies we have done on leadership and mission have given me tools which I use very deliberately in leadership and ministry.

I have learned to observe timing of leadership issues. Too cold or too hot? Where are the leaders? How can I relate to the laggards? These questions and more are an intentional way to read consensus and learn where I need to be in more conversation. The balcony/dance floor image is one that frequently comes to mind. The question of how this situation looks from someone sitting in the back pew becomes more important.

I believe an especially important part of what this program has helped to accomplish is a forward momentum for GGLC. We are looking around to see how we can utilize our strengths and assets to the glory of God and for God's mission. I think, in a less than intentional way, we have shifted the congregation's imagination from soteriology to missiology.

### **Final Comments**

When I began this doctoral program some four years ago, my prayer for GGLC was "Dear Lord, please do not let me screw this up." This was a shorthand version of my awareness that this congregation had many gifts, passions, and abilities for mission and ministry. A leader could help them see these things and go further, or they could get caught up in all sorts of things not related to participating in the *missio Dei*. We have had challenging conversations, we have seen difficult days, and we continue to find joy and purpose. My intentions for this study were for participants to come to a more joyful awareness of their baptismal identity as it calls and compels them to discern and join in God's liberating work in the world. I believe that, in this simple intent, God has allowed

it to be. Let me finish with a story that played out on February 17, 2020 (yesterday as I write this).

A woman came to church looking specifically for me by name. She showed up about five minutes before the service. One of our members came to bring me to her. She indicated that she spoke only Spanish but that she needed to speak to me. I haven't been immersed in Spanish for a long time, so it took me a minute to slowly say, "*Puede converse en una hora?*" (Can we talk in an hour?) She nodded happily. (I am not accustomed to someone being happy to be asked to wait.) Before worship, I found the one member I knew who was fluent in Spanish and asked if she would sit with her and help her feel comfortable here as our service is only in English. This twenty-something-year-old member said, "Of course. Our anthem today is all about using our gifts, right?" By the time I wrapped up the service, greeted people on the way out, took prayer requests, and answered questions, our young member pretty much had the whole story.

The woman was in a domestic violence situation and needed some very specific help that we were able to offer. But she wanted to make sure our young interpreter told me this story.

The woman had had a dream about our church the night before. She had never been here before, and in the dream, she was very confused because our building had so many doors. But she was shown in the dream to come to our huge twenty-four-foot-tall, solid oak bi-fold doors between our nave and Parish Hall. In the dream I came and talked to her and very specifically said, "*Puede converse en una hora?*" That is why she was so happy when I asked if she could wait for an hour. That was the confirmation of her dream.

My young translator friend and I praised God together for bringing this woman to this place and time. (Yes, the translator is the young woman who learned about liberation theology in Costa Rica.) We saw God work and were joyful to have the opportunity to witness and participate. In this woman who came to us so sad, we were all able to see the presence of God incarnate. She will no longer walk unaccompanied. She never did. To God alone be the glory.

*Therefore, prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. (1 Peter 1:13)*

## APPENDIX A. BASELINE QUESTIONNAIRE

### Part I. Background Information and Activity

Thank you for participating in this survey. Please check just one box per questions.

Q 1. How long have you been affiliated with Grace of God Lutheran Church? (Any type of affiliation, member, frequent visitor, non-member participant, etc.)

- ☐ Over seventy years
- ☐ Between fifty and sixty-nine years
- ☐ Between thirty and forty-nine years
- ☐ Between ten and twenty-nine years
- ☐ More than five but less than ten years
- ☐ Less than five years
- ☐ I am not affiliated

Q 2 How long have you lived in the Prairieville area?

- ☐ Over seventy years
- ☐ Between fifty and sixty-nine years
- ☐ Between thirty and forty-nine years
- ☐ Between ten and twenty-nine years
- ☐ More than five but less than ten years
- ☐ Less than five years
- ☐ I do not live in the area

Q 3 What is your birthday? \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Month/day/year

Q 4 What is your affiliation with GGLC

- ☐ Member
- ☐ Not formally a member, but worship and regularly participate in at least one other ministry of the congregation such as (but not limited to) choir, food pantry, faith formation, volunteer in other ministries here.
- ☐ Not formally a member, but worship here regularly.
- ☐ Loosely affiliated, worship here occasionally
- ☐ I do not have any affiliation with GGLC
- ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

Q 5 How often do you participate in worship

- ☐ Once a week plus additional services as they are offered (Advent/Lent)
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ Two or three times a month
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ A few times a year, but less than once a month



Q 11 Forgiven your sin (Acts 2:38-39; 22:16)	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 12 Given the Holy Spirit, which will enable you to call upon Jesus as Lord and make you a joint heir with Jesus Christ (Titus 3:5; Acts 2:38; Romans 8:14-17)	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 13 Promised new life (Peter 3:21-22; Romans 6:3-7)	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 14. a member of the body of Christ, the Church (1 Cor. 12:12-13)	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 15. Freed from sin, death and the powers that defy God? (...By water and the Word God delivers us from sin and death and raises us to new life in Jesus Christ. We are united with all the baptized in the one body of Christ, anointed with the gift of the Holy Spirit and joined in God's mission for the life of the world. ELW, p. 227)	1	2	3	4	5	6

When a baptized Christian affirms their faith, the presiding minister asks the question:

***Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in holy baptism?*** (ELW p. 237)

- live among God's faithful people;
- hear the word of God and share in the Lord's Supper;
- proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed;
- serve all people following the example of Jesus; and
- strive for justice and peace in all the earth?

Response: We do and ask God to help and guide us.

*Our five-fold responses are actually five gifts from God—Spirit-filled gifts given to guide our walk in the newness of life in Christ. (see ELCA.org) They are also referred to as faith practices.*

Please take a few minutes and answer the following survey questions about each of the five faith practices. Your responses are anonymous. Your honesty is welcome. Please circle only one number per question.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Disagree Strongly	Disagree Moderately	Disagree Mildly	Agree Mildly	Agree Moderately	Agree Strongly

### 1. Live among God's Faithful People

Q 16 I feel confident that I understand this faith practice.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 17 In this congregation, I have role models and leaders who exemplify faithfulness to this faith practice.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 18 In this congregation, I have opportunities and encouragement to live out this faith practice.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 19 In this congregation, I am encouraged to help others to grow into this faith practice.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 20 This faith practice is a priority in my daily life.	1	2	3	4	5	6

1	2	3	4	5	6
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<b>Disagree Strongly</b>	<b>Disagree Moderately</b>	<b>Disagree Mildly</b>	<b>Agree Mildly</b>	<b>Agree Moderately</b>	<b>Agree Strongly</b>
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## 2. Hear the Word of God and Share in the Lord's Supper

Q 21 I feel confident that I understand this faith practice.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 22 In this congregation, I have role models and leaders who exemplify faithfulness to this faith practice.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 23 In this congregation, I have opportunities and encouragement to live out this faith practice.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 24 In this congregation, I am encouraged to help others to grow into this faith practice.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 25 This faith practice is a priority in my daily life.	1	2	3	4	5	6

<b>1 Disagree Strongly</b>	<b>2 Disagree Moderately</b>	<b>3 Disagree Mildly</b>	<b>4 Agree Mildly</b>	<b>5 Agree Moderately</b>	<b>6 Agree Strongly</b>
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## 3. Proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed

Q 26 I feel confident that I understand this faith practice.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 27 In this congregation, I have role models and leaders who exemplify faithfulness to this faith practice.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 28 In this congregation, I have opportunities and encouragement to live out this faith practice.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 29 In this congregation, I am encouraged to help others to grow into this faith practice.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 30 This faith practice is a priority in my daily life.	1	2	3	4	5	6

<b>1 Disagree Strongly</b>	<b>2 Disagree Moderately</b>	<b>3 Disagree Mildly</b>	<b>4 Agree Mildly</b>	<b>5 Agree Moderately</b>	<b>6 Agree Strongly</b>
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## 4. Serve all people following the example of Jesus

Q 31 I feel confident that I understand this faith practice.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 32 In this congregation, I have role models and leaders who exemplify faithfulness to this faith practice.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Q 33 In this congregation, I have opportunities and encouragement to live out this faith practice. 1 2 3 4 5 6

Q 34 In this congregation, I am encouraged to help others to grow into this faith practice. 1 2 3 4 5 6

Q 35 This faith practice is a priority in my daily life. 1 2 3 4 5 6

1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>Disagree Strongly</b>	<b>Disagree Moderately</b>	<b>Disagree Mildly</b>	<b>Agree Mildly</b>	<b>Agree Moderately</b>	<b>Agree Strongly</b>

### 5. Strive for justice and peace in all the earth

Q 36 I feel confident that I understand this faith practice. 1 2 3 4 5 6

Q 37 In this congregation, I have role models and leaders who exemplify faithfulness to this faith practice. 1 2 3 4 5 6

Q 38 In this congregation, I have opportunities and encouragement to live out this faith practice. 1 2 3 4 5 6

Q 39 In this congregation, I am encouraged to help others to grow into this faith practice. 1 2 3 4 5 6

Q 40 This faith practice is a priority in my daily life. 1 2 3 4 5 6

## Part III. Other Questions about Mission and Ministry

1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>Disagree Strongly</b>	<b>Disagree Moderately</b>	<b>Disagree Mildly</b>	<b>Agree Mildly</b>	<b>Agree Moderately</b>	<b>Agree Strongly</b>

Q 41 I believe this congregation seeks God's direction and purpose. 1 2 3 4 5 6

Q 42 A successful church is a full church. 1 2 3 4 5 6

Q 43 When I think about this church, I think mostly about memories of past times here. 1 2 3 4 5 6

Q 44 God is doing new things in this congregation. 1 2 3 4 5 6

Q 45 I believe affluence/wealth is a sign of God's favor.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 46 Suffering is caused by God's anger.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 47 If I do not feel God's presence, God is absent.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 48 I am most aware of God's presence when things are going well.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 49 Natural Disasters are God's will.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 50 This congregation takes risks to be more like Jesus.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 51 I believe that God has a purpose for this congregation.	1	2	3	4	5	6

### Open Ended Question

Q 52 What ministries of GGLC do you think are most pleasing to God?

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Q 53 Can you think of a time when you have felt unburdened (for instance: a sense of unexplainable freedom, joy, loosed from fear or distress, an "aha" moment about the grace and love of God, etc.) by something you learned about or experienced of God? Please briefly describe it.

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Would you be interested in being contacted for an interview about this experience? If so, please provide some contact information. All identifying information will remain confidential.

## APPENDIX B. IMPLIED CONSENT LETTER FOR BASELINE SURVEY

January 6, 2019

Dear Worshiper,

You are invited to participate in a study of  
Liberated for Mission: Theology of the Cross Informing a Fresh Missional Imagination  
A Doctoral Research Project

I hope to learn more about how this congregation views God's activities in our congregation and community through themes of hope, mission, freedom, and baptism. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a participant in worship and/or other ministries of Grace of God Lutheran Church, Prairieville, USA. Your insights are important to me.

If you decide to participate, please complete the attached survey. Your return of this survey is implied consent. The survey is designed to establish a baseline for measuring change in our congregation's beliefs and behaviors. It will take about five minutes. Most questions are multiple choice. Please complete and return the survey **before January 21**. Ideally, if you could stay after worship and finish it today before you leave, that would be greatly appreciated and potentially positively affect the number of surveys returned. Surveys may be returned in the basket provided at the front of the church or returned to the church office.

No benefits accrue to you for answering the survey, but your responses will be used to inform my research of our congregation. Any discomfort or inconvenience to you derives only from the amount of time taken to complete the survey.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will not be disclosed.

Your decision whether to participate will not prejudice your future relationships with Grace of God Church or Luther Seminary. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice.

If you have any questions, please ask. If you have additional questions later, contact Pastor Pam Marolla,

You may also contact my advisors with any questions or concerns.

Dr Daniel Anderson

Dr. Alvin Luedke

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,  
Pastor Pamela Marolla

## APPENDIX C. END LINE QUESTIONNAIRE

**Pre-Questions****May 12, 2019**PQ 1 Did you participate in a survey like this in January? ☐ Yes ☐ No

PQ 2 Did you attend or participate in worship or faith formation on any of the following dates? Please check all that apply.

1/13/19	Baptism of our Lord	<input type="checkbox"/> worship	<input type="checkbox"/> faith formation
	<b><u>Sundays in Lent 2019</u></b>		
3/10/19	Exodus	<input type="checkbox"/> worship	<input type="checkbox"/> faith formation
3/17/19	Jesus' Inaugural	<input type="checkbox"/> worship	<input type="checkbox"/> faith formation
3/24/19	Greatness and the Cross	<input type="checkbox"/> worship	<input type="checkbox"/> faith formation
3/31/19	Liberated by Reconciliation	<input type="checkbox"/> worship	<input type="checkbox"/> faith formation
4/7/17	Liberated by "the Least"	<input type="checkbox"/> worship	<input type="checkbox"/> faith formation

PQ 4 Have you, through your participation in these worship or faith formation events, come to any new insight about baptism, liberation, God's mission, or faith concepts in general? Circle

**Yes,****Not Applicable****No**

If yes, Please describe

---



---



---

PQ 3 Have you done (or plan to be part of a) formal interview for this research? ☐ Yes  
☐ No**Part I. Background Information and Activity**

Thank you for participating in this survey. Please check just one box per questions.

Q 1. How long have you been affiliated with Grace of God Lutheran Church? (Any type of affiliation, member, frequent visitor, non-member participant, etc.)

- ☐ Over seventy years  
☐ Between fifty and sixty-nine years  
☐ Between thirty and forty-nine years  
☐ Between ten and twenty-nine years  
☐ More than five but less than ten years  
☐ Less than five years

☐ I am not affiliated

Q 2 How long have you lived in the Prairieville area?

- ☐ Over seventy years
- ☐ Between fifty and sixty-nine years
- ☐ Between thirty and forty-nine years
- ☐ Between ten and twenty-nine years
- ☐ More than five but less than ten years
- ☐ Less than five years
- ☐ I do not live in the area

Q 3 What is your affiliation with GGLC?

- ☐ Member
- ☐ Not formally a member, but worship and regularly participate in at least one other ministry of the congregation such as (but not limited to) choir, food pantry, faith formation, volunteer in other ministries here.
- ☐ Not formally a member, but worship here regularly.
- ☐ Loosely affiliated, worship here occasionally
- ☐ I do not have any affiliation with GGLC
- ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

Q 4 How often do you participate in worship

- ☐ Once a week plus additional services as they are offered (Advent/Lent)
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ Two or three times a month
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ A few times a year, but less than once a month
- ☐ I am visiting today

Q 5 How often do you participate in faith formation activities such as Sunday adult Bible studies, Kid Connection or Friday conversation groups?

- ☐ Once or more a week
- ☐ Two or three times a month
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ A few times a year
- ☐ I have not participated in faith formation activities.

Q 6 Other than attending worship, how often are you involved in serving the congregation through volunteering your time for committee work, activities, events, congregation council, choir, lectoring, ushering and other ministries of the congregation?

- ☐ More than once a week
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ Two or three times a month
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ A few times a year
- ☐ I have not participated.

Q 7 In what faith tradition did you spend your most formative years?

- ☐ ELCA Lutheran or its predecessors
- ☐ Other Lutheran, specify \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Roman Catholic
- ☐ Episcopal
- ☐ Presbyterian

- ☐ Methodist  
☐ Baptist \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ Disciples of Christ/Christian  
☐ Pentecostal/Holiness  
☐ Non-denominational Christian  
☐ None  
☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

Q 8 What is your birthday? \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ data used for research and statistics, and not for identification.

Month/day/year

## Part II. Mission and Ministry – Baptismal Identity

In Holy Baptism, we are given promises and assurances from Holy Scripture. Read the following statements from our baptismal liturgy and from Holy Scripture and give your feedback. Your honesty is welcome. Please circle only one number per question.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Has no meaning in my life	Mostly Indifferent	Somewhat Indifferent	Somewhat meaningful	Meaningful	Deeply Meaningful in my life

**In Baptism, you are –**

Q 9. Born again/born from above (John 3:3-8)	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 10 A child of God, baptized in God's name (Matthew 28:19; Galatians 3:26-29)	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 11 Forgiven your sin (Acts 2:38-39; 22:16)	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 12 Given the gift of the Holy Spirit, which will enable you to call upon Jesus as Lord and make you a joint heir with Jesus Christ (Titus 3:5; Acts 2:38; Romans 8:14-17)	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 13 Promised new life (Peter 3:21-22; Romans 6:3-7)	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 14. Made a member of the body of Christ, the Church (1 Cor. 12:12-13)	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 15. By water and the Word, delivered from sin and death and raised us to new life in Jesus Christ. (Baptismal Liturgy, ELW, p. 227)	1	2	3	4	5	6

***When a baptized Christian affirms their faith, the presiding minister asks the question:***

***Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in holy baptism? (ELW p. 237)***

- live among God's faithful people;
- hear the word of God and share in the Lord's Supper;
- proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed;

- serve all people following the example of Jesus; and
- strive for justice and peace in all the earth?

Response: We do and ask God to help and guide us.

*Our five-fold responses are five gifts from God—Spirit-filled gifts given to guide our walk in the newness of life in Christ. (see ELCA.org) They are also referred to as faith practices.*

1	2	3	4	5	6
Disagree Strongly	Disagree Moderately	Disagree Mildly	Agree Mildly	Agree Moderately	Agree Strongly

### 1. Live among God's Faithful People

Q 16 I feel confident that I understand this faith practice.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 17 In this congregation, I have role models and leaders who exemplify faithfulness to this faith practice.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 18 In this congregation, I have opportunities and encouragement to live out this faith practice.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 19 In this congregation, I am encouraged to help others to grow into this faith practice.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 20 This faith practice is a priority in my daily life.	1	2	3	4	5	6

### 2. Hear the Word of God and Share in the Lord's Supper

Q 21 I feel confident that I understand this faith practice.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 22 In this congregation, I have role models and leaders who exemplify faithfulness to this faith practice.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 23 In this congregation, I have opportunities and encouragement to live out this faith practice.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 24 In this congregation, I am encouraged to help others to grow into this faith practice.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 25 This faith practice is a priority in my daily life.	1	2	3	4	5	6

### 3. Proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed

Q 26 I feel confident that I understand this faith practice.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 27 In this congregation, I have role models and leaders who exemplify faithfulness to this faith practice.	1	2	3	4	5	6



Q 28 In this congregation, I have opportunities and encouragement to live out this faith practice.      1      2      3      4      5      6

Q 29 In this congregation, I am encouraged to help others to grow into this faith practice.      1      2      3      4      5      6

Q 30 This faith practice is a priority in my daily life.      1      2      3      4      5      6

---

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Disagree Strongly</b>	<b>Disagree Moderately</b>	<b>Disagree Mildly</b>	<b>Agree Mildly</b>	<b>Agree Moderately</b>	<b>Agree Strongly</b>

#### 4. Serve all people following the example of Jesus

Q 31 I feel confident that I understand this faith practice.      1      2      3      4      5      6

Q 32 In this congregation, I have role models and leaders who exemplify faithfulness to this faith practice.      1      2      3      4      5      6

Q 33 In this congregation, I have opportunities and encouragement to live out this faith practice.      1      2      3      4      5      6

Q 34 In this congregation, I am encouraged to help others to grow into this faith practice.      1      2      3      4      5      6

Q 35 This faith practice is a priority in my daily life.      1      2      3      4      5      6

#### 5. Strive for justice and peace in all the earth

Q 36 I feel confident that I understand this faith practice.      1      2      3      4      5      6

Q 37 In this congregation, I have role models and leaders who exemplify faithfulness to this faith practice.      1      2      3      4      5      6

Q 38 In this congregation, I have opportunities and encouragement to live out this faith practice.      1      2      3      4      5      6

Q 39 In this congregation, I am encouraged to help others to grow into this faith practice.      1      2      3      4      5      6

Q 40 This faith practice is a priority in my daily life.      1      2      3      4      5      6

### Part III. Other Questions about Mission and Ministry

	1 Disagree Strongly	2 Disagree Moderately	3 Disagree Mildly	4 Agree Mildly	5 Agree Moderately	6 Agree Strongly
Q 41 I believe this congregation seeks God's direction and purpose.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 42 Numbers of participants is the greatest factor in identifying a church's strength	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 43 When I think about this church, I think mostly about memories of past times here.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 44 God is doing new things in this congregation.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 45 I believe affluence/wealth is a sign of God's favor.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 46 Suffering is caused by God's anger.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 47 If I do not feel God's presence, God is absent.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 48 I am most aware of God's presence when things are going well.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 49 Natural Disasters are God's will.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 50 This congregation takes risks to be more like Jesus.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q 51 I believe that God has a purpose for this congregation.	1	2	3	4	5	6

#### Open Ended Question

Q 52 What ministries of Grace of God Church do you think are most pleasing to God?

Q 53 Can you think of a time when you have felt unburdened (for instance: a sense of unexplainable freedom, joy, openness, forgiveness, loosed from fear or distress, an "aha" moment about the grace and love of God, etc.) by something you learned about or experienced of God? Please briefly describe it.

*Please return this questionnaire to the church office by May 28. Thank you for your participation!*

## APPENDIX D. IMPLIED CONSENT LETTER FOR END LINE SURVEY

April 21, 2019

Dear Worshiper,

You are invited to participate in a study of  
Liberated for Mission: Theology of the Cross Informing a Fresh Missional Imagination  
Doctoral Research Project

I hope to learn more about how this congregation views God's activities in our congregation and community through themes of hope, mission, freedom, and baptism. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a participant in worship and/or other ministries of Grace of God Lutheran Church, Prairieville, USA. Your insights are important to me.

If you decide to participate, please complete the enclosed survey. Your return of this survey is implied consent. The survey is designed to measure changes in our congregation's beliefs and behaviors since January 6, 2019. It will take about five minutes. No benefits accrue to you for answering the survey, but your responses will be used to inform my research of our congregation. Any discomfort or inconvenience to you derives only from the amount of time taken to complete the survey.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will not be disclosed.

Your decision whether to participate will not prejudice your future relationships with Grace of God Lutheran Church or Luther Seminary. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice.

If you have any questions, please ask. If you have additional questions later, contact Pastor Pam Marolla,

You may also contact my advisors with any questions or concerns.

Dr Daniel Anderson

Dr. Alvin Luedke

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

## APPENDIX E. DWELLING IN THE WORD GROUP PROTOCOL

**Date:***Bible Story/Focus Text:*

Let's hear the text again and pause for a brief time of silence, prayer, and reflection.

Invite the Holy Spirit to open our hearts to God's word.

*Text is read*

1. What word or phrase caught your attention?
2. How did something in that reading connect/intersection with something happening in your life?
3. Did God (Father, Holy Spirit, Jesus) show up in a reversal of what we might expect of someone powerful?

How?

4. Who (character or group of people) is favored (by God) in this reading and how?
5. Who (character or group of people) is challenged (by God) in this reading and how?
6. What, if any insights would you like to share about the themes, scriptures, sermon, your own thoughts, reflections, about this Bible text.

7. How does this scripture offer a liberating word for you?

8. Did the scripture or sermon call you to be freed *from* something?

Describe -

9. Did the scripture or sermon call you to be freed *for* something?

Describe -

7. How does this scripture offer a liberating word for you?

8. Did the scripture or sermon call you to be freed from something?

Describe -

9. Did the scripture or sermon call you to be freed for something?

Describe –

## APPENDIX F. INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR DWELLING IN THE WORD

### Theology of the Cross Informing a Fresh Missional Imagination

You are invited to be in a research study how we view God's activities in our congregation, community, and our own lives. You were selected as a possible participant because you regularly and actively participate in one or more ministries of the congregation. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

I am conducting this study as part of my doctoral thesis project in Congregational Mission and Leadership at Luther Seminary.

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to explore of the hope given to us through the intersections of baptismal vocation, theology of the cross, and liberation theology through lenses of congregational mission and leadership.

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to participate in an interview or focus group discussion about your experience of the congregation event, and the impact that event had on your faith. The discussion will last no longer than an hour.

#### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

There are no direct benefits or risks of participating in this research.

Indirect benefits to yourself/or the general public of participation are your contribution to this field of study.

#### **Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept confidential. If I publish any type of report, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. All data will be kept in a locked file in my home office; only my advisors (named below) and I will have access to the data and, if applicable, any tape or video recording. If the research is terminated for any reason, all data and recordings will be destroyed. While I will make every effort to ensure confidentiality, anonymity cannot be guaranteed (due to the small number to be studied).

a. Raw data will be destroyed after June 1, 2023. (Federal guidelines specify a minimum of 3 years for retention of data.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Luther Seminary and/ or with Grace of God Lutheran Church. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is Pamela Marolla. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me/us at Grace of God Lutheran Church

You may also contact my advisors with any questions or concerns:

Dr Daniel Anderson, Professor  
Luedke

Dr. Alvin

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information or have had it read to me. I have received answers to questions asked. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of investigator \_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_

I consent to be audiotaped (or videotaped):

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_

I consent to allow use of my direct quotations in the published thesis document. Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX G. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

*Welcome, settle in, offer water, explain informed consent, receive signature, explain recording, and turn on equipment.*

*Read from Baptismal Liturgy, 227 ELW*

*God, who is rich in mercy and love, gives us a new birth into a living hope through the sacrament of baptism. By water and the Word God delivers us from sin and death and raises us to new life in Jesus Christ. We are united with all the baptized in the one body of Christ, anointed with the gift of the Holy Spirit, and joined in God's mission for the life of the world.*

1. In our baptismal liturgy, we talk about being freed. Can you talk about experiencing a sense of how being connected to the Good News has been liberating for you personally?
2. In the Bible, God is often revealed in unexpected ways. Could you share ways might you think of from your own experiences that God was revealed in an unexpected circumstance or time?

I'm going to shift to some questions about the church, but if you want to come back to these first two at a time, please do.

3. How do the ministries of this congregation reflect God's presence in the suffering or oppressed?
4. If you were to talk to someone who does not know anything about this congregation, what would you want them to know?
5. If God is leading this congregation, how do you see the congregation following?
6. If God has dreams for this congregation, what do you think they might be?
7. Where are you seeing signs of new life through the ministries of this congregation?
8. What have we not talked about that you think is important for me to know/note?

## APPENDIX H. INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEWS

### Theology of the Cross Informing a Fresh Missional Imagination

You are invited to be in a research study how we view God's activities in our congregation, community, and our own lives. You were selected as a possible participant because you regularly and actively participate in one or more ministries of the congregation. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

I am conducting this study as part of my doctoral thesis project in Congregational Mission and Leadership at Luther Seminary.

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to explore of the hope given to us through the intersections of baptismal vocation, theology of the cross, and liberation theology through lenses of congregational mission and leadership.

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to participate in an interview or focus group discussion about your experience of the congregation event, and the impact that event had on your faith. The discussion will last no longer than an hour.

#### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

There are no direct benefits or risks of participating in this research.

Indirect benefits to yourself/or the general public of participation are your contribution to this field of study.

#### **Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept confidential. If I publish any type of report, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. All data will be kept in a locked file in my home office; only my advisors (named below) and I will have access to the data and, if applicable, any tape or video recording. If the research is terminated for any reason, all data and recordings will be destroyed. While I will make every effort to ensure confidentiality, anonymity cannot be guaranteed (due to the small number to be studied).

a. Raw data will be destroyed after June 1, 2023. (Federal guidelines specify a minimum of 3 years for retention of data.)

#### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Luther Seminary and/ or with Grace of God Lutheran Church. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

#### **Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is Pamela Marolla. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me/us at \_\_\_\_ You may also contact my advisors with any questions or concerns:

Dr Daniel Anderson, Professor

Dr. Alvin Luedke

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

#### **Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information or have had it read to me. I have received answers to questions asked. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of investigator \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I consent to be audiotaped (or videotaped):

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I consent to allow use of my direct quotations in the published thesis document.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



**APPENDIX I. BASELINE AND END LINE FREQUENCIES QUESTIONS 1-7 ON  
BAPTISMAL ID**

**Table 39. Baseline frequencies baptismal identity**

	Q1	Q1	Q2	Q2	Q3	Q3	Q4	Q4	Q5	Q5	Q6	Q6	Q7	Q7
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
no meaning	1	2.5	0	0	1	2.5	1	2.5	1	2.5	0	0	0	0
somewhat indifferent	5	12.5	0		0	0.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
somewhat meaningful	2	5.0	3	7.5	3	7.5	4	10.0	3	7.5	4	10.0	4	10.0
meaningful	14	35.0	8	20.0	10	25.0	10	25.0	6	15.0	7	17.5	7	17.5
deeply meaningful	17	42.5	28	70.0	25	62.5	24	60.0	29	72.5	28	70.0	28	70.0
no response	1	2.5	1	2.5	1	2.5	1	2.5	1	2.5	1	2.5	1	2.5
Total N	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0

**Table 40. End line frequencies baptismal identity**

	Q1	Q1	Q2	Q2	Q3	Q3	Q4	Q4	Q5	Q5	Q6	Q6	Q7	Q7
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
No meaning	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0					
Mostly indifferent	3	13.0	0	0	0	0	0	0			1	4.3		
somewhat indifferent	1	4.3	1	4.3	1	4.3	3	13.0	3	13.0	0	0	2	8.7
somewhat meaningful	4	17.4	3	13.0	4	17.4	3	13.0	2	8.7	5	21.7	3	13.0
meaningful	5	21.7	6	26.1	4	17.4	8	34.8	7	30.4	3	13.0	6	26.1
deeply meaningful	10	43.5	13	56.5	14	60.9	9	39.1	11	47.8	14	60.9	12	52.2
no response	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	23	100.0	23	100.0	23	100.0	23	100	23	100	23	100	23	100

## APPENDIX J. INTERVENTION 1. BAPTISM OF JESUS- TEXTS

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

<sup>15</sup>As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, <sup>16</sup>John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup>His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

<sup>21</sup>Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, <sup>22</sup>and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

**Matthew 3**

<sup>16</sup>And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. <sup>17</sup>And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved,<sup>[d]</sup> with whom I am well pleased.”

**Mark 1**

<sup>9</sup>In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup>And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. <sup>11</sup>And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved;<sup>[h]</sup>with you I am well pleased.”

**John 1**

<sup>29</sup>The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! <sup>30</sup>This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ <sup>31</sup>I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.” <sup>32</sup>And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. <sup>33</sup>I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ <sup>34</sup>And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.”

## APPENDIX K. INTERVENTION 2. EXODUS – GOD HEARD THEIR CRIES AND SET THEM FREE

3/10/19 Lent 1 – short sermon – I had laryngitis

[00:00:00] Brothers and Sisters in Christ grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Our Gospel reading this morning is not the one that is in the lectionary book

We're going to take a little turn in this season of Lent because that's kind of what life is all about is redirecting our hearts and our minds to the cross of Jesus.

So, for this morning instead of hearing about the temptation of Jesus which you will hear later in these weeks of Lent.

You heard how God Called Moses?

Because God heard the cries of the people.

And you heard this gospel [00:01:00] John 8.

Which is used once a year in another context?

Would you like to take a guess?

Reformation Sunday

Every year you will hear this text and the paraments will be red and we will be celebrating Martin Luther and the reformation

But I wanted us to hear these words in the season of lent in this season of turning toward the cross.

This is the season when things take on little bit more somber tone. You noticed we sing Kyrie during the season of Lent not the hymn of praise.

We sing Return to the Lord before the Gospel reading and we put the Alleluias away for a season.

Just to focus [00:02:00] ourselves on Christ and his cross

So here we have it in John, chapter 8, we have heard Jesus is having a conversation with the Jews who believed in him.

And he says if you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free.

They answered him, we are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone?

Really?

Either they didn't take their history classes very seriously.

Or they were suffering from amnesia.

But you all know about how long it takes to read the book of Exodus. Every Jewish man, woman, and child from that time to our own, was steeped in the story of Exodus.

We've never been slaves to anybody?

[00:03:03] not true

And then of course there was Babylon Assyria Rome and a few that probably aren't even recorded.

I don't know why they would have responded to Jesus like this. We've never been slaves to anyone!

Unless they were just arrogance.

And maybe, that's a place to start.

We have never been slaves to anyone

Can you recognize at some point? How difficult it is to see that we are slaves to something?

I know recovering addicts know this if you don't recognize that you are enslaved by something you can't get free. Some people are slaves to debt, or abusive relationships or clutter – people are slaves to all sorts of stuff. No matter how hard we try, we can't shake it off. We cannot make ourselves free.

**[00:04:06] the Israelites were miserable in Egypt. They were slaves.**

And they were crying out to God their life was horrible and when they complain to the Pharaoh about how horrible their life was. He said let's use some less straw in your brickmaking and see if you get any better with harder work.

Less \_\_\_\_\_

It was a cruel livelihood that the Israelites had. And they cried out.

**God heard their cry.**

I want you to hear those words as clearly as you can **God heard their cry.**

[00:05:09] Because I know the people in this congregation or your friends or your family?

Have had a reason to cry out.

God, where are you?

God why is this happening?

God is there no relief?

Perhaps it's an illness. Perhaps it's a grief.

Some other situation in your life.

God free us! Set us free!

God hears.

That is the good news.

Old Testament or new.

[00:06:09] God hears the cries of the oppressed.

**That's good news.to the oppressed**

**That's bad news if we ever side with the oppressors.**

**Because God sides with the oppressed.**

**every time**

So, Jesus says

Very truly I tell you everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.

How do we jump from being free?

To being disciples.

to sin?

well, [00:07:09] the truth is as our Lutheran theology points out, that we are in bondage to sin.

No matter how much we try to do the most loving thing, be the most loving person do God's will every day.

We end up hurting someone.

We end up putting some kind of a roadblock or a wall between ourselves and God.

Or ourselves and other people

we say we are in bondage to sin.

But there is  
 a remedy to that bondage  
 the remedy that puts  
 Jesus  
 between our [00:08:09] sins  
 and ourselves  
 Jesus who took up the cross on our behalf.  
 To set us free.

If you are my disciples, you will know the truth and the truth will make you free.  
 Now this is interesting because you it come because it comes from the Gospel of John.  
 And in this chapter, Jesus says you will know the truth and the truth will make you free.  
 It's not too far away in this gospel where Jesus says **I am the truth**  
 I am the way the truth and the life. Now what's fun here is that in the Gospel of John?  
 Jesus has all [00:09:09] these wonderful. I am statements. I look light of the world. I am  
 the bread of life. I am I am.  
 You know where else we heard some of these words.  
 back at the very beginning  
 when God was calling Moses.  
 from a burning bush  
 and Moses is arguing with God. I'm not your guy. I have a speech impediment. I'd say I  
 have laryngitis. I'm not your gal.  
 Then Moses says what should even I say when they ask who sent me because I'm  
 nobody. You know people are going to ask who sent you. Who said  
 you're going to set us free?  
 And God said, "here's my name.  
 [00:10:10] I am."  
 a college professor that called that the *verbiness* of God  
 when God names God self  
 It's not a noun. It's not proper name.  
 It's an on the go verb I am  
 and you know that you want to fill in the blank after that right? You can't just say I am

---

Who are you? I am. What? I am!  
 because the dot-dot-dot after that is infinite  
 That's what the church came up with words like omnipotent omniscient.  
**You can fill in the rest of the Omni's. God is omni-whatever. But God named  
 Godself I am**  
**[00:11:10].**  
**and Jesus**  
**filled in the rest of the blanks**  
 Jesus the light of the world  
 bread of life  
 the way the truth the life  
 the resurrection and the life.  
 Names himself. But names himself only in relationship.

**And praise be to God he names himself in relationship to us for us.**

**The great I am.**

comes to us

in the form of Jesus

[00:12:10] he knows all of the things that have us in shackles and says I am here to liberate us

I am here I am.

So, if you are seeking Liberation from anything.

Cry out to The Great. I Am.

The Great I Am promises

to hear you

And the Peace of Christ that passes all understanding will keep your hearts and Minds in Christ, Jesus our lord.

## APPENDIX L. INTERVENTION 3. JESUS IS ANOINTED TO LIBERATE

He stood up to read and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written. The spirit of the Lord is upon me.

Because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to Proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind to let the oppressed Go free to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

And he rolled up the scroll gave it back to the attendant and sat down.

The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them today.

This scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.

They said is not [00:00:59] this Joseph's son.

He said to them doubtless, you will quote to me this proverb doctor cure yourself and he will say do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.

And he said truly I tell you no Prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown.

But the truth is there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah when the heaven was shut up three years and six months and there was a severe famine over all the land yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the Prophet Elisha and none of them were cleansed except Naaman the Syrian

When they heard this all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They [00:01:58] got up drove him out of the town and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built so that they might hurl him off a cliff.

But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

the gospel of the Lord

Your siblings in Christ grace to you and peace.

From God the father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

It's been almost seven years now.

When someone in this congregation asked this prospective Pastor, so what's your favorite gospel?

Do [00:02:58] you remember my answer?

Bob wasn't even here, and he notice it is the Gospel of Luke.

Luke

As you may recall is one of the most poetic of the gospels perhaps also prophetic.

Let me back you up to the place Our Gospel reading is today because today's Gospel is both Jesus inaugural address.

Then within a matter of moments is the first time in the Gospel of Luke.

Were the people in well, it is not the first there was Harry, but that was Matthew want Jesus dead?

[00:03:57] So let's go back.

to the beginning to the introduction

of Jesus. It's when the angel Gabriel comes to Mary says Mary you are going to Bear a child.

Don't be afraid.

And Mary's response was The Magnificat?

This beautiful song of remembrance my soul magnifies the Lord my spirit rejoices in God my savior for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Shirley from now on Generations will call me blessed for the mighty one has done great things for me and holy [00:04:56] is his name.

His Mercy is for those who fear Him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their Thrones and lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the Hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel to remember in remembrance of his Mercy according to the promises he made to our ancestors to Abraham and to his descendants forever.

So, before Jesus is even born.

Mary is singing about the great reversal.

[00:05:55] Where the high will be brought low the low will be lifted up?  
because God remembered

last week we talked about God hearing the cries.

God remembered

and so, we continue Jesus is born we've gone from admin to Christmas.  
the Incarnation

God made flesh God Emmanuel God announced as an infant.

announced first two Shepherds

But announced with a whole choir of angels of the multitude of angels singing Glory to God this little [00:06:54] baby. This helpless baby is your answer.

the great reversal

God didn't come as a mighty king with a mighty Army. God came as a helpless infant.

To be one of us.

Now we don't have much about Jesus childhood.

What we hear next?

It's about his baptism.

We celebrate the baptism of Jesus on January 13th this year.

But this is another event where the holy spirit is present. God is present. God is vocal.

God says this is my beloved Son listen to him.

As he comes up and out of the Waters of his baptism.

[00:07:57] And here's where some of the story gets condensed. Jesus comes up and out of his baptism, but his immediately driven into the Wilderness by the spirit for testing for fasting.

for prayer

and after 40 days in the wilderness after his baptism Jesus comes out.

And he's tempted by none other.

Than the Devil Himself.

singing On Eagle's Wings in a rich voice

and Jesus avoids Temptation. Jesus knows the word of God. The Holy Spirit accompany Jesus.

And he conquers temptation.

[00:08:59] And so the next step.

Is to go to his hometown and that's where our gospel today picks up.

Came back to his hometown. We don't know how big Nazareth was back then but



probably not a booming Metropolis.

Everybody knows everybody you know how that goes *Prairieville*, right?

And he picks up the school and reads from the prophet Isaiah and right here. He sounds so much like his mom.

This reads almost like The Magnificat.

The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor Proclaim release to the captives recovery of sight to the blind. Let the [00:09:58] oppressed Go free and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

This is good news.

For those who have always had some buddies from on their back.

And the people rejoiced he rolled up the scroll.

From the Isaiah reading we just read that as Isaiah reading today.

Imagine someone sitting right up front reading the lessons like we always do on a Sunday morning.

And then the reader getting up and saying today.

Today this scripture has been fulfilled.

[00:10:59] in your hearing

would it be a Goosebumps moment?

Or would you think he was crazy?

Well initially apparently it was a Goosebumps moment all spoke. Well of him the text says they were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.

And they said wait, isn't this Joseph's son?

That was his Swedish name, you know, Josephson.

But then Jesus has to push it just a little bit further.

And you start talking about foreigners getting God's favor.

[00:12:01] The truth is he says there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, but Elijah was sent to none of them except the Widow of Zarephath.

There were many lepers in Israel at the time of Elijah. None of them were cleansed except Naaman.

the center again

and when they heard this all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got out drove him out of town and let him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built so that they might hurl him off a cliff.

If I lift this up to you today.

Because our lectionary isn't always fair to us listeners.

We [00:13:00] hear the stories of Triumph and they are compacted and compartmentalized.

But we don't very often hear the next sentence afterward.

Do you know what happened after?

Jesus brought Lazarus back from the dead

It was a great thing, wasn't it?

Lazarus come out Lazarus is alive. The next sentence says so from that day on.

They plan to put Jesus to death.

It happened at that pool, the healing pool where the [00:13:59] people who were able to get to the edge of the pool when the water bubbled up were healed.

And there was one man who was there for so long? Jesus says, “do you want to be made well?” and he says “yes, but there's nobody to help me to the pool.” So, Jesus says get up and walk to the pool and he did.

And in all of our children's storybooks, that's where it ends.

and even in our lectionary texts, that's where it ends but the next sentence is always “and then the people in power wanted to put Jesus to death.”

Even the feeding of 5000 after Jesus fed everybody. They wanted [00:14:58] to keep him for their own purposes. They were thinking, “MAN, we would never have to go out for food again!”

And Jesus said “That's not what I'm about. That's not what I'm about.”

///

**What is Jesus about?**

**“The spirit of the Lord,” Jesus said,**

**“is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.”**

**“Release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind to let the oppressed Go free to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor” and it is not just for insiders.**

**Jesus goes so far out of his way.**

[00:15:58] to talk about people

and to talk about their nationalities in ways that other people would just **spit** those words.

**Syro-Phoenicians**

**Canaanite**

**Samaritan**

people in our country spit words, too.

Jesus says I came for them to the spirit of the Lord is upon me to set them free.

and so, Jesus loved

the Canaanite

the Syrophoenician the tax collectors and the Sinners and the prostitutes

Jesus lifted up the Samaritan [00:16:57] as the one who was the Good Neighbor.

I did not have killed.

Lent is a time when we look toward the cross.

It's not an easy story. The cross. It's not.

Where it ends in the children's Bibles?

That's the story that saves us.

the story

the choir sang at this morning without even singing the story the more light we give the more love will know.

[00:17:56] We are light bring us into a world that wants to close its eyes.

We are love Bringers.

In a world that wants to pick and choose who God loves.

Nobody has that, right?

For God so loved the whole. World

there are, I imagine, churches in America this morning.

that will say

It's okay for us to stay among we and Ours.

It's okay if we Proclaim that Jesus loves [00:18:55] one people more than other people, but that's not what Jesus ever came to Proclaim

if he were wishy-washy and if he had played into the hands of the religious leaders and the government leaders of his time. He never would have been crucified.  
 but he was  
 for the sake  
 of us  
 and the world

There will be churches this morning where the pastors are afraid of the people in their pews?

Afraid to speak a word of Truth. [00:19:55] Afraid to say that white supremacy is a sin. We know otherwise.

And I'm grateful to God for all of you.

Who welcome and embrace all people because we've got work to do.

Shining God's light into this Dark World.

There's a vigil tonight at the Islamic Center in XXXX.

My friend Rabbi XXXXXinvited me to go.

We can understand that better because we had the Three Amigos here.

We're not separate.

We are humans all [00:20:54] of us created in the image of God.

All of us just looking to be free to worship God without fear.

So, I'll be at the XXXX mosque tonight. If you want to ride along, I can take extra passengers.

And if you're not at the place, I don't judge you.

**But** to follow Jesus our call is to remember our baptism to remember that we are anointed to join God in God's mission.

Not to join the world and whatever's easiest but to join God in job and God's mission. to shine a light into the shady places of the world [00:21:53] and we all know it.

You know, my life is not all that big a deal. I'm nobody of any importance on my own

But my light is charged by the Light of Christ.

And it's joined by your lights that are charged by the Light of Christ. And when we start lifting up all of our lights together hate losses.

Is that what we want?

I hope so.

Jesus came, as Philippians said, Jesus came and did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited.

But emptied himself taking the form of a slave being born in human likeness.

Being found in human form. He humbled himself. And became obedient to the [00:22:52] point of death even death on the cross.

**therefore**

and here's the big therefore that points us from the cross to Easter

**THEREFORE**, God highly exalted him.

And gave him the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend in heaven and on Earth and under Earth and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the father.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, in letting that light shine, the peace of God that passes all understanding will keep your hearts and Minds in Christ Jesus.

## APPENDIX M. INTERVENTION 4. PASSION AND GREATNESS: TAKE UP YOUR CROSS

[00:00:00] The holy Gospel According to St. Mark the 8th chapter.

Then he began to teach them that the son of man must undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders the chief priests and the scribes and be killed.

And after three days rise again.

He said all this quite openly and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

But turning and looking at his disciples he rebuked Peter and said get behind me Satan.

For you are setting your mind not on Divine things, but on human things.

He called The Crowd with his disciples and said to them if any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow [00:01:01] me.

For those who want to save their life will lose it and those who lose their life for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel will save it for what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life indeed.

Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?

Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation of them. The son of man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his father with the Holy Angels the gospel of the Lord.

Please be seated.

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ Amen.

Anybody recognize this sound? (bounce bounce bounce laughter)

That's right – it's a kickball

I was a fourth-grade nerd. And so was my best friend. And this is how we learned the multiplication table.

[00:02:21] One of us would say two times two is four and we'd bounce the ball to the other one and in rhythm they would have to say two times 3 is 6, 2 x 4 is 8, 2x 5 is 10, 2x6 is 12

3x1 is... 3 see if you slowed down and lost the rhythm you lost

3x2 is 6

3x3 is 9

It was a good memory device, but I'm going to stop at 3x3 is 9 today

3 times

Remember the old game of Hollywood squares. I remember the strategy. Get the nine celebrities to answer questions and try to win a game of tic tac toe. If you could get Paul Lynd in the center box to answer the right question you could win from just about any direction.

[00:03:28]

If you've ever played tic-tac-toe, it's addicting right, you know what squares you need takes to win but there's something about those 9 squares that just kind of draws you in.

Jesus Passion prediction when he said I need to go to Jerusalem.

And the chief priests and the scribes and the elders are going to persecute me and put me to death.

three days later I'm going to rise again.

Happens three times three [00:04:29] times in the gospel of Mark and three times in the Gospel of Luke.

It's a perfect nine square – like blackout tic-tac-toe

think about your favorite Bible verse. How often is it repeated in the Bible? Does it show up nine times>

Yes. But this. Jesus' Passion prediction.

It shows up in the Bible nine times.

but this

Nine square in the documents is emphasizing something so important.

about Jesus

that appears nine times.

the chief priests the scribes and the elders

[00:05:32] are going to arrest me.

They're going to punish him; they are going to kill him and three days later he will rise again

(move back to pulpit.) I'm going to move back up here and put this away. Sorry I want to bounce it.

Not only do these words appear nine times in the Gospels?

But in each of the three gospels that they appear there are the same things that precede them in the same things that come after them.

You will hear people spout Bible verses **at you** about all sorts of stuff. You know, you do, right? Have [00:06:32] you ever heard anybody?

Tell you this.

This is the Heart of Jesus' ministry. So, the first time in each of these three gospels that he predicts his passion.

It happens after the mass feedings.

In Matthew, it is 4,000 and Mark.

It's 4,000 in Luke. It's 5,000 and there's Peter's great declaration. You know, Jesus says who do people say that I am, and others say blah blah blah and Peter says you're the Messiah.

And Jesus is like yes, and then Jesus says I need to go to Jerusalem.

I'm going to suffer and die, and Peter says NOOOOOO! Every single time [00:07:32] do you see how important these stories are to the gospels that they each stack them up the same way?

Peter rebukes Jesus. Jesus rebukes Peter and **then Jesus says take up your cross.**

**And follow me.**

The second appearance each time in Matthew Mark and Luke comes right after the Transfiguration Peter James and John **have seen the glory of God on the mountain.**

And they come down the mountain.

And Jesus talks about faith, faith of a mustard seed.

And then he says it again. **I'm going to Jerusalem.**

**I'm going to be arrested. [00:08:32] I'm going to suffer I'm going to die. I'm gonna rise again.**

And then the disciples get into arguments about who's the greatest **like they didn't hear a thing.** He said and Jesus talks about true greatness.

He talks about children.

Whoever receives a little child whoever gives a little child of drink of water.

This is what the greatest and the least is about those who are the greatest in this world will be the least in the Kingdom.

**and then the third time**

Again, He blesses children.

And he talks about fairness. He talks about the laborers [00:09:32] in the vineyard the ones who come late and get a full day's pay and people are outraged because Jesus is generous.

And he says **I'm going to Jerusalem.**

**I'll be arrested. I will suffer I will die. I will rise again.** You know what happens after that the third time? James and John and apparently their mother too are arguing about which one of the boys gets to sit at Jesus right and left hand in the kingdom of God. **Like did they not just hear that he's going to die.**

nine times

and Jesus says the first will be the last the last will be first.

Whoever [00:10:32] wants to be great among you must be servant of all.

greatness

in the kingdom of God is tied to servanthood.

It's nine square.

You win if you get any three of them, or maybe you could play blackout tic-tac-toe with it.

**But it shows up nine times in the gospels 3 and 3 and 3 + it's the same every time you don't Matthew and Mark couldn't even get a straight if they feed 5,000 4,000.**

**But Jesus predictions of his passion were at the center of his story.**

[00:11:33] There's no way that I can say this clearly enough.

This is his mission.

And our mission he tells us to deny ourselves.

To take up the cross.

To look for Greatness by looking at the least Among Us.

to be servants

of all

that's not going to sell anything in the Church Gift Shop, you know those big Mega churches and their preachers and their gift shops.

This doesn't sell.

This [00:12:33] is why after the feeding of the 5000 the crowds were trying to use Jesus by trying to Market Jesus. Like do you have some more signs for us? They asked that?

And Jesus said sure Here's your sign. **I'm going to Jerusalem you want to come with me.**

They were like, "I'm good."

all but the few the closest disciples

and that's where Jesus asked them. Who do you say that I am?

And every day of Our Lives we have to step back too.

And say who do we say Jesus is?

Who do we say? Jesus is?

If [00:13:33] he says I'm going to Jerusalem, I'm going to suffer and die and Rise Again.

Do we say yes? I want to follow you

Romans chapter 6

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus?

Were baptized into his death.

Therefore, we have been buried with him by baptism into death. So that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the father. So, we too might walk in newness of life.

You've heard that before haven't you it's in our funeral liturgy.

for if [00:14:33] we have been United with him in a death like his we will certainly be United with him in a resurrection like his

We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again. Death. No longer has dominion over him the death. He died. He died to sin once for all but the life he lives he lives to God. So, you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ

[00:15:35] This is the good news.

Being dead to sin, Luther says, when you wake up in the morning remind yourselves. I am baptized I have died to sin and I Rise with Christ by the grace of God.

Jesus wins

the message of the Cross is foolishness.

To those who don't understand.

To those who think the ways of the world and the greatness of the world.

Are how the story ends?

But that's not how it works in the kingdom of God.

If anyone to become [00:16:35] my followers, Jesus said,

Let them deny themselves and take up the cross.

And follow me.

The irony is it's a joyous Journey.

It sounds awful. I'm not going to lie. Do we go out to evangelize and say hey you want to die?

No.

But we do say do you want to live fully and abundantly?

And in a liberated way, liberated from sin death and the devil.

then follow Jesus

and live

[00:17:39] May the peace of God that transcends

words and understanding keep your hearts and Minds in Christ. Jesus our lord. Amen.

## APPENDIX N. INTERVENTION 5. LIBERATED BY RECONCILIATION: JOSEPH AND THE PRODIGAL

[00:00:00] the holy Gospel According to Luke chapter 15

Then Jesus said 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, the father divided his property between them.

A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travel to a distant country and there he squandered his property in dissolute living.

When he has spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country.

And he began to be in need. So, he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs.

He would gladly have filled himself with [00:01:00] the pods that the pigs were eating, and no one gave him anything.

But when he came to himself, he said how many of my father's Hired Hands have bread enough and to spare but here I am dying of hunger. I will get up and go to my father and I will say to him father. I have sinned against heaven. And before you I am no longer worthy to be called your son.

Treat me like one of your Hired Hands.

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 and the son said to him father. I have sinned against heaven. And before you I am no longer worthy to be called your son.

[00:02:00] 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.

And they began to celebrate.

Now his Elder son was in the field and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing.

He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied your brother has come and your father has killed the fatted calf because he has gotten him back safe and sound.

Then he became angry and refused to go in his father [00:03:00] came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father. Listen for all these years. I have been working like a slave for you and I have never disobeyed your command.

You have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends.

But when this son of yours came back who has devoured your property with prostitutes.

You killed the fatted calf for him.

Then the father said to him son. You are always with me and all that is mine is yours, but we had to celebrate and rejoice.

Because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life. He was lost and has been found the gospel of the Lord.

[00:04:03] Dear siblings in Christ grace to you and peace.

From God the father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

amen

During the season of Lent.

I've been sort of putting together my own lectionary and this is the first time in 25 some years of ministry that I haven't followed the lectionary exactly.

So, this is the only time you will ever hear the story of the reconciliation of Joseph and his brothers.

In the same morning, you hear the story of The Prodigal Son.

There's something interesting and maybe it happens in your own hearing but in the Bible.

[00:05:04] When you hear the words there was a man who had two sons.

What do you think?

There's going to be some tension.

You know siblings

In our generation and at least the generation past if you put two children from the same parents in the backseat of a car without electronics or a book.

There's going to be tension.

And so, it is in the Bible So Adam and Eve had two sons.

two sons of the first created humans

and before the world even had words for sibling rivalry.

Cain killed Abel

[00:06:04] Abel was a Shepherd came was a farmer. They both offered a sacrifice to

God. Abel's was accepted for some reason Keynes was not

Cain wasn't happy so he rose up against his brother, which is where the phrase Raising Cain comes from.

Rose up against his brother and killed him.

And the Lord said to Cain where is your brother?

Just like when the Lord said to Adam and Eve.

After they sinned, where are you?

As if God did not know.

Where's Abel?

God knew.

But Cain says, "I don't know. Am I My Brother's Keeper?"

This [00:07:04] sassiness in the face.

of the Divine

and then there was

Isaac and Rebekah

they had Jacob and Esau Rebecca knew she was in trouble while she was already pregnant because she could feel these twins. Just fighting away in her womb.

Esau was the first born.

But Jacob was already grabbing his brother's ankle on the way out.



You know the rest of the story you learned it in Sunday school, most likely.  
 Jacob stole Esau's Birthright  
 all the promises that God made to Abraham and Sarah and to Isaac and Rebecca went to Jacob.  
 [00:08:05] Not you. Saw how many times in the Bible do you hear the words the god of Abraham Isaac and Jacob the god of Abraham Isaac and Jacob. It should have been Abraham Isaac and he saw  
 Jacob stole that Birthright that rat  
 but the blessing went to him because you cannot take a blessing back.  
 and Jacob  
 became the father of course of the 12 tribes of Israel.  
 We won't even talk about how many mothers those 12 boys had  
 but the promise that carried through to Abraham Isaac and Jacob then went to Judah [00:09:05] the fourth born  
 So, the Bible isn't as tied up and logical as it might seem, and the endings of these stories aren't always Fair.  
 And so today we have this sibling rivalry a father had two sons.  
 One was always home always obedient the other let's just say to the detour with his life.  
 He went out to find himself.  
 He had money. He was young. He blew it on stupid stuff.  
 And then the money ran out.  
 And he figured you know, [00:10:05] even my father's slaves.  
 get to eat  
 And so, he worked out the speech in his head father. Could I just be one of your slaves?  
 I've done stupid stuff. Can I come back and just be one of your slaves?  
 But that's not how the story ends.  
 Just like Joseph.  
 Whose brothers planned and did come crawling back to him. Will you please forgive us?  
 And Joseph said not only will I forgive you but I'm not in the place of God to forgive you only God can do that.  
 Joseph said even though you intended to harm me God intended it [00:11:05] for good in order to preserve a numerous people as he's doing today. So have no fear I myself will provide for you.  
 And your little ones?  
 Joseph got handed really raw deal from his brothers.  
 They sold him into slavery told his father. He'd been murdered.  
 And lived with that.  
 It's all in the end of Genesis if you want to go back and read it.  
 But Joseph chose the way.  
 of Grace  
 and mercy  
 as [00:12:05] does this father in the story of the prodigal.  
 So, while the sun is working up the nerve to go home and gravel. Yeah, that's when the musical.  
 Grovel and his father's feet.  
 His father sees him at a distance.

And his father comes running.  
 Running to embrace him because it doesn't matter what he did. He is the son of the father.  
 This may be one of Jesus most important Parables ever.  
 Because we have all run away from our heavenly father at some point in some way,  
 shape, or form.  
 [00:13:06] Maybe we've said you want me to love that neighbor.  
 or God says  
 be generous here be kind here be loving here and we say nope.  
 Nobody else is doing that. Nobody else is living like that. Nobody else loves them.  
 That's us wandering away from God.  
 But God provides for our hearts to turn around.  
 The Greek word for that is metanoia repent.  
 Repent I'm not a Pulpit pounding Pastor. So, I'm not going to stand here and go repent,  
 repent. I'm going to say we have an opportunity to turn around.  
 [00:14:07] Because every day many times over the course of everyday we have a choice.  
 We have a choice.  
 To be aiming our eyes on God and neighbor.  
 And doing what is best and most loving.  
 Or we have a choice.  
 to turn away  
 the gospel invites us  
 Doesn't demand, doesn't shout, but invites us to remember who loves you most.  
 It's God.  
 the gospel invites us  
 [00:15:09] to remember  
 Who has sacrificed more than anything for us?  
 It's Jesus.  
 You heard sending read it in Romans, but God proves his love for us in that while we  
 were still sinners.  
 Christ died for us  
 much more surely than now that we have been justified by his blood.  
 We will be saved through him from the wrath of God for if while we were enemies. We  
 were reconciled to God through the death of his son much more surely having been  
 reconciled.  
 We will be saved by his life.  
 But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus [00:16:09] Christ  
 through whom we have now received.  
 reconciliation  
 we are liberated.  
 by reconciliation liberated  
 because we are so secure in God's love for us.  
 But we know we have nothing to lose.  
 by loving others  
 by self-giving  
 we have been reconciled.  
 To our loving father. It's not something we did.

You know.

We didn't have to work up the right prayer The Prodigal was trying [00:17:09] to work on all the right words to go back to his father and get the father too agreed to take him back.

He didn't have to have the right words. He just needed to be going in the right direction.

Because the father was already waiting.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ. Do you know how much God loves you?

People try to make it more complicated than it is.

But the Romans reading tells us.

While we were still sinners.

Christ died for us

that's sacrificial love.

Intended [00:18:09] to set us free from all those things that hold us back.

That make us fearful of change.

Make us fearful of being vulnerable.

Make us fearful of living abundantly.

Embrace and love

Brothers and Sisters in Christ you are reconciled.

to your heavenly father

Who comes from running to embrace you to tell you all is well?

I have a feast already prepared for you.

Let's celebrate.

[00:19:09] Let's celebrate.

I know it's Lent.

But let's celebrate.

amen

## APPENDIX O. INTERVENTION 6. LIBERATED BY PARTICIPATING IN THE LIVES OF THE LEAST OF THESE

*[00:00:00] The holy Gospel According to St. Matthew the 25th chapter.*

*When the son of man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of Glory all the nations will be gathered before him and he will separate people one from another as a Shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.*

*And he will put the Sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.*

*Then the king will say to those on his right hand come you that are blessed by my father inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world for I was hungry, and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you gave me clothing. I was sick and you took care of [00:01:00] me. I was in prison and you visited me.*

*Then the righteous will answer him Lord. When was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink?*

*And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcome to you or naked and gave you clothing.*

*And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?*

*And the King will answer them truly. I tell you just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family.*

*You did it to me.*

*Then he will say to those on his left hand you that our accursed depart from me into the Eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels for I was hungry, and you gave me no food. I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink. I was a stranger and you did not [00:02:00] welcome me naked and you did not give me clothing sick and in prison and you did not visit me.*

*Then they also will answer Lord. When was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not take care of you?*

*Then he will answer them. Truly. I tell you just as you did not do it to one of the least of these you did not do it to me.*

*And these will go away into Eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*

*The gospel of Our Lord, please be seated.*

Dear siblings and Christ's grace to you and peace.

From [00:03:00] God the father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

If you've been following along over these past 5 weeks.

You know that we've been embracing some of the great biblical texts.

about the liberating nature of God

first the story of The Exodus

of God hearing the cries of the Israelites.

And God calling Moses through that burning bush and saying I have heard the cries of my people.

I will set them free.

And then we heard about how Jesus came onto the scene in The Gospel of Luke in his what [00:04:00] they call the inaugural address.

In Luke, you see we have all these great texts of reversal. We have Mary's Magnificat where the rich will be sent away empty in the poor lift it up.

We have the birth of Christ in Luke 2 where Jesus shows up where no one would expect God to send God's son to make an arrival.

as an infant

in a feed trough  
 announced to Shepherds  
 By Angels by hosts of angels this story gets Wilder and Wilder, so Jesus is baptized and  
 announced to be the precious son of God.  
 And then Jesus is sent into the Wilderness 40 [00:05:01] days and 40 nights and then  
 tempted by none other than the Devil Himself and when Jesus comes away Victorious  
 from that temptation.  
 He goes to his hometown Temple.  
 And he reads.  
 from the book of Isaiah  
 The spirit of the Lord has anointed me.  
 To bring good news to the poor.  
 Jesus connects to the prophet Isaiah from 700 some years prior and connects really to that  
 Exodus story of God hearing the cries of the people and setting them free.  
 And then we heard about Jesus passion predictions.  
 three [00:06:01] times and three Gospels  
 Jesus announces to the disciples that he is going to go to Jerusalem. He's going to suffer  
 at the hands of the chief priests' Chief priests the religious Elders describes.  
 He is going to be put to death.  
 And in three days he is going to rise again.  
 three times in three Gospels  
 Jesus is trying to get the point across that he is headed to Jerusalem and it's not going to  
 be pleasant. Will you be my follower?  
**If so, then the first need to be last and the last need to be first.**  
 We are liberated by the cross of Jesus Christ.  
 Last week we heard about being [00:07:01] liberated by reconciliation first Joseph and  
 his brothers.  
 His brothers who've treated him so terribly come groveling back.  
 Dad said, dad said, now dad's dead, but they claim dad said don't hurt us. Take good care  
 of us.  
 And Joseph says and I in the place of God.  
 Of course, I will take care of you. You meant it for evil God intended it for good.  
 And the story of The Prodigal and his father.  
 And the resentful brother.  
 The prodigal son was set free liberated by reconciliation with the father.  
 [00:08:04] as we are  
 when we ask God to receive us back after we've strayed.  
 After we've wandered and squandered.  
 And our heavenly father comes running back to greet us.  
 God is so good.  
 And so today we wrap this up with Matthew 25.  
 God liberates us  
 When we participate in the lives of the least.  
 Bev that Anthem was so perfect for today. You would think Bev and I spend [00:09:04] a  
 lot of time together planning these things more. So, it's Bev and I in the Holy Spirit  
 cooking up. What God's got going next for us, but God of the least indeed.

God sees his dear children  
 through Merciful eyes. You don't see a lot of Mercy show up on the television news. Do  
 you?  
 it's almost like human beings are portrayed without Mercy in their character.

And certainly, even leaders.

But this chapter from Matthew.

[00:10:04] That asks us pleads us to seek out the hungry the Thirsty the stranger the  
 naked the sick or in prison and participate in their lives.

This is a big deal.

And there are Christians all over the world particularly in the wealthiest countries of the  
 world that ignore this text. They said well that doesn't really pertain to us or they find  
 loopholes to say. Well not those sick or hungry or naked or in prison.

Do you know when this text shows up in our lectionary?

Remember when I said John ape [00:11:04] is Reformation Sunday where we celebrate  
 the freedom of Christ. Will this text show up on Christ the King Sunday?

This Sunday. We celebrate Jesus is exalted ruler of Heaven and Earth.

It brings us back down to this.

Have you participated in the lives of the least?

Christian's for Generations

have tried to find loopholes in this text.

Did you know?

in the early 1800s

There was a Bible published.

It was [00:12:04] called the slave Bible.

And the title page read parts of the Holy Bible selected.

for those of the Negro slaves in the British West India Islands

because of course slave owners care deeply about the spiritual Affairs of their slaves.

What does this bible contain?

Well, it does not contain 90% of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament.

It does not contain 50%

of our new testament

It includes versus like servants be obedient to your masters.

But does not include.

There is neither slave nor [00:13:04] free.

It excludes all of the Psalms because certainly you don't want to be giving people hope  
 and situations of Oppression. It leaves out the whole story of Exodus but includes the law  
 given on the mountain.

Do you see?

The Bible is the most outrageously liberating texts on Earth.

And you have to Chisel out a lot of it to make it not be so.

Christ comes to set us free.

But it's not just us like me and my salvation.

[00:14:09] This text in Matthew 25 is translated in a very individualistic way.

But when you see the word people in that text.

Bruce, Vince, Bob you can attest to this. (three clergy in the pews)

It means the Nations.

It's not just individuals who turn their back on the poor the hungry the naked the sick the imprisonment.

But the nation's themselves will be judged.

On how they view these people.

We have a lot of repenting to do.

[00:15:09] And we need to call each other to repentance.

Because in this text when G when the people say, when did we see you a stranger? Not welcome you naked and not give you clothe me sick and in prison and not visit you.

Jesus says when you didn't do it to the least of these.

This is the clearest boldest Judgment of Jesus.

in the Gospels

I can't say it any more clearly.

But when did we see you Jesus?

When you served the least of these my [00:16:09] brothers and sisters.

Those of you who've been in this congregation for a long time.

Or at least the last six years.

Know that I didn't serve a church for two years before I came here.

I sold insurance and I work for OfficeMax.

Because I was waiting to serve a church that took Matthew 25 seriously.

I worked minimum wage.

Because I didn't want to serve one more Clubhouse.

Church you are a Matthew 25 Church.

You feed the hungry.

Some of you even know the names of [00:17:09] the homeless.

This morning. We have an ingathering of gifts our own Connie Wessels who works over at OSF arranged an ingathering their staff all brought items for our homeless bags. We make up homeless kits that was a one-time thing around Christmas and then we discovered the real need.

So those homeless kits that have protein bars and salty things and things to wash yourself and hats and mittens this season. Those are going out in our community.

all the GHAS ambulances have them

the both the hospitals have them Kelly Cheeseman's taking them to the courthouse for folks on parole and things like that.

We're starting to see.

We're starting to see our [00:18:09] Quilters make quilts every Tuesday when it's not storming (laughter) and I see they don't know exactly where those quilts are going.

You know, you have a quilter in your family.

They make quilts for specific people that they love very much, and they like I got this plan for this person's quilt like this grandchild is getting this your baby have quilts. Yeah, because people love that baby, and I love you.

Our Quilters make quilts for people They don't even know?

Because they know somebody needs to be warm.

every Stitch every knot

Is made with love?

And quite a bit of coffee.

Friends in Christ. This is what it is though [00:19:09] to serve Jesus to see Jesus. When did we see you Jesus?

Homeless people that come to our church office

You know once I started looking at those visits as not an interruption in the day but “wow, Jesus was just here!” my Ministry changed.

Jesus is in you.

In your lowest days, it's not just out there. It's not just waiting for encounters with others. But Jesus is in you.

Carl Jung once said that “I feed the hungry, forgive an insult, and Love My Enemy.

These are great virtues, but [00:20:09] what if I should discover that the poorest of Beggars and most impudent of offenders are all within me.

And that I stand in need of the alms of my own kindness.

That I myself am the enemy who must be loved.

What then?

Jesus is *an austere to*

be gentle with yourselves be forgiven of yourselves be merciful with yourselves as well.

Because in doing so it expands our ability to love and show Mercy.

And allows us to better love our neighbors as well.

[00:21:09] our God

is a liberating God.

To heal the oppressed to set the captive free, feed the hungry.

To come to you in your place of distress.

That you might serve others.

in theirs

you are a Matthew 25 Church.

And God loves you.

Keep looking for Jesus.

In all those places that the world thinks he's not.

And the joy of God will [00:22:09] keep you in the peace that passes all understanding.

amen



## APPENDIX P. LITURGICAL TEXTS TO ACCOMPANY INTERVENTIONS

### \*CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God,  
who gathers us in the wilderness to redeem us,  
anoint us,  
and make us new.  
Amen.

In these forty days, let us be honest, confess our sin,  
And receive God's promise of mercy.  
God at the margins,  
We have wandered far from your home;  
again and again, we lose our way.  
We turn inward, afraid of the world around us.  
We forget that you have saved your people before  
and promise to do so again.  
Do not remember the deeds of our past,  
but turn our faces toward the future,  
where your forgiveness is sure,  
your welcome is clear,  
and your love overflows.  
Amen.

Like a hen who gathers her chicks,  
God embraces you in tender care.  
Like manna in the desert,  
God feeds you with surprising mercy.  
Like a loving parent,  
God runs to meet you again this day,  
forgiving your sins for the sake of † Christ,  
leading you from death into life.  
Amen.

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### INTRODUCTION TO APOSTLES' CREED

P: God, who is rich in mercy and love, gives us a new birth into a living hope through the sacrament of baptism. By water and the Word God delivers us from sin and death and raises us to new life in Jesus Christ. We are united with all the baptized in the one body of Christ, anointed with the gift of the Holy Spirit, and joined in God's mission for the life of the world.<sup>1</sup>

A: Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, we profess our Christian faith through the words of our baptismal creed.

### \*APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.  
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,

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<sup>1</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, 227.  
These are the introductory words to the liturgy for the Sacrament of Holy Baptism

was crucified, died, and was buried;  
 he descended to the dead.  
 On the third day he rose again;  
 he ascended into heaven,  
 he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
 and he will come to judge the living and the dead.  
 I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
 the holy catholic church,  
 the communion of saints,  
 the forgiveness of sins,  
 the resurrection of the body,  
 and the life everlasting. Amen.

### **EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER**

Holy, mighty, and merciful Lord,  
 heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
 In great love you sent to us Jesus, your Son,  
 who reached out to heal the sick and suffering,  
 who preached good news to the poor,  
 and who, on the cross, opened his arms to all.  
 In the night in which he was betrayed...<sup>2</sup>

### **PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

Tender and merciful one,  
 at your feast, you fed us who brought nothing,  
 turning our emptiness into joy.  
 Filled with your abundant grace,  
 send us now to be ministers of reconciliation,  
 mending broken hearts, working for justice,  
 and striving for peace among all people,  
 In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. © Augsburg Fortress. All rights reserved

### **Bulletin Back Cover – Luther’s Small Catechism Section on Baptism**

#### **Baptism**

*During this Season of Lent, we will be exploring themes of God’s liberating work in the world. From liberating the Hebrews in the Exodus, to liberating all of us through the mission, ministry and cross of Jesus. We are connected to this liberating work of God through our baptism into the body of Christ. Following, is the section on THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY BAPTISM from Luther’s Small Catechism. If you would like a copy of the catechism, contact Pastor Pam.*

#### **I**

#### ***What is baptism?***

Baptism is not simply plain water. Instead, it is water used according to God’s command and connected with God’s word.

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<sup>2</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. 65. These are the words of “Thanksgiving at the Table V.”

***What then is this word of God?***

Where our Lord Christ says in Matthew 28, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

**II**

***What gifts or benefits does baptism grant?***

It brings about forgiveness of sins, redeems from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe it, as the words and promise of God declare.

***What are these words and promise of God?***

Where our Lord Christ says in Mark 16, “The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned.”

**III**

***How can water do such great things?***

Clearly the water does not do it, but the word of God, which is with and alongside the water, and faith, which trusts this word of God in the water. For without the word of God the water is plain water and not a baptism, but with the word of God it is a baptism, that is, a grace-filled water of life and a “bath of the new birth in the Holy Spirit,” as St. Paul says to Titus in chapter 3, “through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is sure.”

**IV**

***What then is the significance of such a baptism with water?***

It signifies that the old person in us with all sins and evil desires is to be drowned and die through daily sorrow for sin and through repentance, and on the other hand that daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

***Where is this written?***

St. Paul says in Romans 6, “We were buried with Christ through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”

## APPENDIX Q. INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

### Pastor's Column – Monthly Newsletter

You are going to think your pastor has gone and lost her mind, but I am so excited about the season of Lent starting with Ash Wednesday, March 6! I am grateful that Lent does not start until March because I have had more time to put thought into the season. Last year, Ash Wednesday was on Valentine's Day! This year during Lent, we will have a special emphasis on the liberating nature of God.

This season, our Sunday texts will focus on the liberating nature of God. Our midweek services will emphasize the role of water in our salvation story. Come soak up some good news. Invite friends.

#### **Our Sunday Morning Themes will be:**

- **God Hears Their Cries and Liberates**
- **Jesus. Called to Liberate**
- **Greatness and the Cross**
- **Liberated by Reconciliation**
- **Liberated by Recognizing Jesus**

Please join us for adult faith formation following the Sunday services. Our reflection time will inform my doctoral program. I want to hear about your experiences and thoughts about liberation.

### Sunday Bulletins

#### **ADULT FAITH FORMATION**

*Please join us for adult faith formation following the Sunday services. Our reflection time will inform my doctoral program. I want to hear about your experiences and thoughts about the Sunday lessons*  
-Pastor Pam

Our Sunday Morning Themes will be:

- God Hears Their Cries and Liberates
- Jesus. Anointed to Liberate
- Greatness and the Cross
- Liberated by Reconciliation
- Liberated by Recognizing Jesus

## APPENDIX R. INTERVIEW RESULTS: GOD REVEALED/UNEXPECTED WAYS

The interview question was, “In the Bible, God is often revealed in unexpected ways. Could you share ways you might think of from your own experiences, that God was revealed in an unexpected way or time?” Some initial quotes follow.

- R1 I'm like, oh, yeah, of course God shows up in that way. I feel like that is a testament to the love of God being shown to showing up in the midst of that space in the midst of those people to be able to just to know that Our own stories are not too much To hold and that our stories are being held by more than just us
- R2 I have a hard time thinking of any unexpected time because I believe that God is constantly at work, so I don't feel like I'm ever surprised about God being at work.
- R3 I try to listen more but, it seems like almost every day people come in and tell me their stories. I tend to let them talk more and I've always been amazed at what people will open and share with me. Hearing and seeing God in those stories is and it usually doesn't happen right then. I have these aha moments later on when I think about experiencing that person and I think to myself wow
- R4 He's right there
- R5 I just see. God in the least
- R6 I felt like God gave me an opportunity to show someone what God's people actually look like instead of just the hatred being spewed forth
- R7 I found this church in this congregation frankly through. I'm not even going to call it coincidence when I will actually call it what it is and just full-out Serendipity. I wasn't expecting to find anything this accepting. I still am in awe. I'm shocked because I have never been as a part of a congregation that was accepting of people like me. I have never found a congregation that was um loving and supportive in this way even regardless of my identity. It does feel like a miracle. It does feel like God showed up in one of the darkest points in my life and said, “here's your family.”
- R8 That's really hard because I always expect him to be there.
- R9 That's really hard because I always expect him to be there. Right before I had my cancer surgery. I think that was a moment where as horrible and scary as that was, I really felt God there with me. Sometimes it's almost like a whisper of God's voice with you know a small piece of scripture or just a kind of something that will bring me up short. I've tried to learn to pay closer attention to those.
- R10 Events surrounding surviving a car accident in a Honda Civic hit by a semi-trailer. “Car crumpled like a piece of paper.”
- R11 I'm definitely a big believer that God. provides: Miracles I've seen it over and over. Brother suddenly regained hearing, son drove off a cliff with only minor scratches, reunited with other son put up for adoption as an infant.
- R12 I remember like hearing this voice say it's okay (to let father die).

## APPENDIX S. INTERVIEW RESULTS: LIBERATING EXPERIENCE

Questions 1: “In our baptismal liturgy, we talk about being freed. Can you talk about experiencing a sense of how being connected to the Good News has been liberating for you personally? I will highlight quotes first and then key words from among responses from each of the interviewees below.

- R1 The liberating nature of Christ’s sacrifice and that freedom allows us to no longer be solely concerned with our own concerns, but it frees us to care for the neighbor...through that service we witness to the love, light, freedom, open joy of Christ....I get to...
- R2 “Hard to believe it is a free gift when it is for a lot of people.”
- R3 “the basis of my faith is that grace has given me the freedom to be the person that I think God wants me to be.... When you invite us to communion as an open table. God’s gift to us. Baptism you are a child of God- not our action or somehow all of a sudden being enlightened and saying ‘yes.’ God chose me.”
- R4 “not a specific time, but gradual, with age and experience.”
- R5 “no exact time. A journey of growth. Grace. Grace really is sufficient, really is good news.”
- R6 “realization in Costa Rica learning about liberation theology. Eye opening idea of grace being purely unconditional. Free gift. “We get to” not we have to. Unburdened. “Just because I haven’t convinced these people to come to church or to accept Christ to get baptized doesn’t mean that they are not covered by God’s grace and that was the most freeing thing. Felt this bubbly joy. So excited, just wanted to share.
- R7 “I am able to be me. I am able to be myself fully completely and wholly, all under the full support and guidance of God. I feel like the Holy Spirit could actually like burn within me and it does not feel like this suffocating feeling of “I can’t do this.” It becomes “I can do this.” Liberated from guilt, doubt, and pain.
- R8 ...freedom to live with questions. I don’t need to figure out how or who goes to heaven. Jesus came for all of us.
- R9 Birth of both of my children. Huge draw to God. Turning point. Sense of honor, appreciation, and love.
- R10 experience with Christian cycling group. Intense spiritual life, closeness.
- R11 I don’t have to worry so much about being perfect. God loves me and sees who I am. God does love me.

R12 Bible study on the book of Romans (with friends outside GGLC) at the same time GGLC was having conversations about being Reconciling in Christ. I felt liberated personally from sin. Less judgmental of others.

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