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BETHEL UNIVERSITY  
BETHEL SEMINARY ST. PAUL

RECONCILING THE BODY:  
WORKING TOWARD ECCLESIAL UNITY

A THESIS PROJECT REPORT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY IN  
CHURCH LEADERSHIP

BY  
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ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA  
MAY 2015



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## ABSTRACT

In this project the researcher studied the similarities and differences of the United Church of Christ and the Emerging church. In Christianity, Christians should be unified in goal and mission in the Kingdom of God. The researcher explored the faith streams of the UCC and the Emerging church. The goal of this project was to find if the UCC and the Emerging church are similar in thought or different. Scripture makes it clear that Christians are mandated to work together for peace and unity to create a reconciled church.

The researcher first examined important voices in Christianity that have spoken on reconciliation and unity. This research to the consideration of what leaders in the United Church of Christ and the Emerging church say about these issues. The researcher explored important theological thoughts and insights in both the UCC and the Emerging traditions. Five theological issues were researched in this project: Sin, Salvation, Eucharist, Prayer, and Eschatology. These five issues were chosen by the researcher to be compared and contrasted by both the UCC and the Emerging church. It was the hope of the researcher that both of these traditions are similar in thought and theology, therefore working toward reconciliation within the church.

The researcher interviewed four pastors, two from the United Church of Christ and two from the Emerging stream. A series of questions were asked to understand the pastors opinions on the trajectory of the church and if their churches had similar insights

into issues like Eucharist and Salvation. The researcher wanted to explore and examine if these two faith streams were similar or different in theological ideas.

The researcher has found after completing this project that both the United Church of Christ and the Emerging church are in fact similar in thought and theological method. Therefore both of these traditions can work together toward reconciliation and unity for a Kingdom of God that is unified in mission and outreach.

CHAPTER ONE:  
THE PROBLEM AND RESEARCH DESIGN

**Statement of the Problem**

The problem this project addressed is whether the theologies of Emerging/Emergent tradition and the United Church of Christ are similar. In response to this the researcher, a) studied the theology of the Emerging/Emergent movement, (b) studied the theology of the United Church of Christ, (c) reviewed relevant literature concerning both of these Christian movements, (d) interviewed members from both the emerging/emergent churches as well as some UCC churches, and (e) identified similarities between the two church traditions bridging the gap between Emerging/Emergent and UCC theologies. Many denominations are unwilling to cooperate with other churches or other Christians. The researcher is striving to show the theological similarities of these two denominations for the advancement of the Kingdom of God.

**Glossary**

UCC: United Church of Christ.

Emerging/Emergent: A movement within Christianity, predominantly within evangelicalism that is progressively minded in theology and is social justice driven.

Unchurched: Individuals who have never been part of church or those who now have no connection to any church.

Postmodern: The rejection of the modern era worldview.



Post-Christian: The rejection of a Christian worldview in favor of another worldview.

LGBTQ: The acronym for: Lesbians, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, And Questioning.

### **Delimitations of the Problem**

The research was limited to St. Paul's United Church of Christ, Union Congregational United Church of Christ, Revolution Minneapolis, and House of Mercy.

The research was limited to a study of literature solely regarding the theology of the United Church of Christ here in America and Emerging/Emergent theology.

### **Assumptions**

The first assumption is that positive ecumenical dialogue can take place.

The second assumption is that ecumenical dialogue between the two differing traditions offers positive growth both spiritually and ecclesial.

The third assumption is that ecumenical dialogue is crucial for spiritual growth and the vitality of the church.

### **Setting of the Project**

The setting of the project was St. Paul's United Church of Christ in St. Paul, Minnesota. The church has an active membership of 400 congregants with an average Sunday morning attendance of 100. In 2008 the board voted to close its doors and cease operations as a congregation. The current pastor is, Norma Rae Hunt, and with the

approval of the congregation has helped the church rebound to a prosperous congregation. During the researcher's involvement at this church many younger unchurched people have come to investigate St. Paul's UCC. This is significant because the average age of a member in the UCC is seventy years old. The presence of younger unchurched people in the congregation helps revitalize the church and encourages our God- is-still speaking theology. St. Paul's UCC has a very old and rich history in the Twin Cities community. St. Paul's has long been involved in the community and is striving to be a place of hospitality and inclusion for all. Officially the UCC are open and affirming and of all LGBTQ people. St. Paul's UCC has been transitioning, from an older congregation to a multigenerational as well as multicultural church. This researcher is a member at St. Paul's UCC where he is actively involved in the 20's/30's group, Middle School Youth programming, and sits on the Spiritual Life committee.

The second UCC church will be Union Congregational United Church of Christ in St. Louis Park, Minnesota. The Pastor at this church is Bob Griggs.

The two Emerging churches that will be studied are Revolution, in Minneapolis, and House of Mercy, in St. Paul. Revolution is an emerging type church that meets in a bar/bowling alley. The church service is informal with the speaker sitting on a bar stool giving a brief message. The congregants can choose to have food brought in or have a drink while listening to the message. The pastor is Jay Bakker.

House of Mercy is a church that has been in the Hamline/Snelling area in St. Paul since the mid-1990's. The church rents space from a Methodist church and the services

contain liturgy, communion, and a blue-grass band. The two pastors at this church are Debbie Blue and Russell Rathbun.

## **The Importance of the Project**

### *The Importance of the Project to the Researcher*

Throughout his life the researcher has been deeply devoted to theology and to the church. He has had a journey of sorts in regard to what Christian tradition to adhere to. In the researcher's life he has seen a radical shift from modernism to a more postmodern worldview. After feeling quite burnt out with traditional Christianity he found his way into the Emerging type of Christianity.

Being a part of this Emerging type of Christianity was quite rewarding, but after a while the researcher found hollowness. The Emerging Christianity he was involved in became a lot like the Christianity the researcher was trying to escape. The progressive theology and openness was what drew him in to a new way of practicing Christianity.

After a yearlong hiatus from church the researcher found a home within mainline Christianity, specifically the United Church of Christ. He was not ready for what God had in store for him. God showed him everything that the Emerging church was teaching and preaching at this church, St. Paul's United Church of Christ, were already doing. In fact, while the researcher was speaking at St. Paul's about Emerging Christianity and the importance it plays in the rest of Christendom, a member of the church stated, "Everything you have said thus far about the Emerging church and Christianity this church is already doing, or is working on." These statements lead the researcher to comparing the theology of the two traditions. It is the hope of the researcher to show that

the theology of Emerging Christianity and that of the UCC are similar and therefore work together.

*The Importance of the Project to the Immediate Ministry Context*

The researcher expects this project to show that the theology of the UCC and the Emerging/Emergent theology are similar and in many ways harmonious. In his brief time as a member at St. Paul's UCC he has shown the importance of studying a variety of theologies within Christianity. The researcher has lead a few Wednesday evening services entitled; "Journey of Faith." In these few years he has been open to exploring other theological traditions within Christianity and studying the emerging church more favorably. St. Paul's UCC has made it clear to the researcher that many of them do not understand the Emerging church movement. Many individuals in this congregation see the Emerging church as evangelicals who are burnt out with traditional church and want to re-imagine church and Christianity. The researcher has found that in many ways the United Church of Christ denomination lives out the theology they preach, and the practices that the Emerging church implores us to do, the UCC is already doing. The aim of this project is to show how much differing traditions are actually alike. Their theologies are quite similar, and both of these traditions can work together toward ecclesial unity.

*The Importance of the Project to the Church at Large*

Within Christianity there are thousands of different denominations or theologies from which one can choose on his/her spiritual journey. This spiritual journey can get quite muddled and sometimes confusing. Often times within Christian traditions there is an "us versus them" mentality, where one group is right and the rest of them are all

wrong. This type of thinking and ideology is quite toxic and really has no place within Christianity.

The object of this project is to show that even though United Church of Christ theology and Emerging/Emergent theology are different and come from differing religious streams they have commonalities. For far too long churches' have been unwilling to work side by side with other traditions that do not believe the same way they do. The researcher is confident that this project will bring dialogue between the UCC and Emerging church to have a more robust theological outlook and their faith journey.

### *Project Overview*

The first step will be to study the various churches and their theologies to determine if they are similar. This will be done by deeply researching the theology of both the UCC and Emerging/Emergent traditions. The end goal is to find similar theology that can build church unity.

The second step in the research will be to review the current literature related to the study. Research will focus on the theologies of both the United Church of Christ and Emerging/Emergent. Within these theologies what similarities do they share and how can the church progress towards unity.

The third step will be to meet with key leaders and pastors of these four churches. The researcher will interview the pastors of these four churches and see what they believe the theology of their respective tradition is. As a result of these interviews the researcher will be able to provide valuable insights to see if these two traditions are in fact similar in theology, and to see if they can move toward unity.

The fourth step will be to collect, analyze, and synthesize the data from the previous sources to see if in fact these two church traditions have enough similarities theologically to practice the scriptural mandate of ecclesial unity.

CHAPTER TWO:  
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

**Introduction**

This cultural landscape in which Christians live is an ever changing one. One can be in any denomination or group one wants to be in from Catholicism to Pentecostal. It is totally acceptable to affiliate with whatever group of Christianity with which one chooses. Gone are the days of families being strictly Lutheran or Catholic, now families are meshed in different denominations. It is entirely possible for a parent to be Lutheran, another parent to be Catholic, and the children to be Baptist. Christians live in a culture where they need to find out how God speaks to their hearts. The church is a plurality of meanings for Christians. Some Christians have theological leanings one way, and some another. The church is pluralistic in that it speaks to humans in different ways. God reveals himself to a person in the way he or she will understand and communicate. God reveals himself to the church, and his revelation is at work in all of humanity.

Church is a very multi-cultural, multi-ethnic community of believers. It is no wonder that within all of our churches and denominations Christians might have differing theologies and doctrines. This chapter will look at what reconciliation is. The researcher will also look at some leading voices that have or currently encompassed the spectrum of reconciliation. These voices are Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King. Jr.,

Curtiss DeYoung, Christine D. Pohl, and Shane Claiborne. After presenting these thoughts on reconciliation this chapter will focus on being a more unified body of Christ. At the close of this chapter the author will look at three portions of scripture; Psalm 133:1, 1 Corinthians 12:12, and Ephesians 4:3-6. These three portions of scripture explain to Christians the foundation for believing and creating unity and reconciliation within Christianity and the world.

### **Reconciliation**

As the researcher has stated, reconciliation is imperative if Christians are to be a useful and transformative force in our society and world. Reconciliation is often something many Christians talk about but most never fully understand or try to incorporate into their lives or churches. Reconciliation can be hard to comprehend. The researcher will briefly investigate a few leaders who have shaped or are shaping reconciliation. These voices are Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King Jr., Curtiss DeYoung, Christine D. Pohl, and Shane Claiborne. This is not an exhaustive list; rather, it is a sampling of those who have shown an understanding of reconciliation.

#### *Karl Barth*

Karl Barth was a theological giant in the twentieth century. Many of our doctrines in the church have in some way been influenced by Barth in some capacity. Countless theologians and scholars have been touched by his theological fortitude, including this author. Barth has influenced many in the UCC as well as in the Emerging/ Emergent streams. Barth's theology and legacy is well respected in both traditions. Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones, who are leaders in the Emerging Church movement, wrote a book entitled,



*An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*. In this text there is a chapter that lists Barth as a friend to the Emerging church.<sup>1</sup>

Walter Brueggemann is a retired United Church of Christ minister and educator. Brueggemann preaches and teaches on a plethora of issues within Christianity. Brueggemann highly emphasizes Christians need to be unified. Brueggemann and Barth both believe that unity is essential in Christianity. Barth wrote extensively on a wide range of theological and biblical topics in his magnum opus, (Church Dogmatics). Out of the thirteen church dogmatics sections, five of them had to do with reconciliation.<sup>2</sup> Reconciliation was in many ways the culmination of Barth's theology and thought. Reconciliation was the heartbeat of Christ. According to Barth scholar Eberhard Busch, reconciliation played a vital role in Barth's life and works as seen in (Dogmatics).<sup>3</sup> In the researcher's opinion reconciliation was the crux of Barth's theology. He dedicated substantial time and energy writing five out of thirteen volumes on this issue.

A brief description of Barth's view of reconciliation is needed for a grounding of his understanding of what reconciliation is. Barth suggests,

“Reconciliation is restitution, the resumption of a fellowship which once existed but was then threatened by dissolution. It is the maintaining, restoring and upholding of that fellowship in face of an element which disturbs and disrupts and breaks it. It is the realization of the original purpose which underlay and controlled it in defiance and be the

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<sup>1</sup> Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones, *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> IV.1, IV.2, IV.3, IV.3.2, IV.4, These five sections of Barth's dogmatics specifically deal with Reconciliation.

<sup>3</sup> Eberhard Busch, *Barth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 17-18.

removal of this obstruction. The fellowship which originally existed between God and humanity, which was then disturbed and jeopardized, the purpose of which is now fulfilled in Jesus Christ and in the work of reconciliation, we describe as the covenant.”<sup>4</sup> For Barth reconciliation is the coming together of humanity and God. In this we have ultimate reconciliation. No longer are we fragmented or splintered away from God, we are together in him. Sin once took residence in us and jeopardized our relationship with God. Now due to reconciliation through Christ on the cross, we can be reconciled to God. “The foundation, center and goal of Barth’s thought is the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ as creator, reconciler, and redeemer of humanity.”<sup>5</sup>

As the researcher can see, in Barth’s view of covenant plays a huge role in what reconciliation is. Barth scholar John Webster gives this idea about Barth’s view of covenant: “Covenant means that the God encountered in the gospel is (and does not merely represent) the one true God; there is no other – hidden, fleshless of God behind the anthropological corollary: because covenant means ‘God with us’ it also means we with God.”<sup>6</sup> Covenant means God with humanity, and in turn, humanity with God. God does not want to be separated from his people. Rather, God wants to be with humanity, reconciling himself and his creation. Barth describes covenant, “Jesus Christ is God, God as man, and therefore God with us, God in the work of reconciliation. But reconciliation

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<sup>4</sup> G.W. Bromiley, and T.F. Torrance, *Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics IV.I: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* (London: T and T Clark, 2009), 19.

<sup>5</sup> Alasdair, Heron, “The Theme of Salvation in Karl Barth’s Doctrine of Reconciliation,” *Ex Auditu* 1989, (accessed March 20, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> John Webster, *Karl Barth: Second Edition*. (London: Continuum, 2000), 119.

is the fulfillment of covenant between God and humanity.”<sup>7</sup> If God wants to be reconciled to his people, one must comprehend that Christians must be reconciled to one another. Ecclesialogically speaking, the United Church of Christ and the Emerging denominations do not need to agree on everything however it is imperative that Christians reconcile themselves for their communities and connect to their congregations and to God. We must look at how reconciliation correlates between spirit, church and faith. “Barth’s progress along the first trajectory of his theology of reconciliation draws to a close with a more direct consideration of the subjective realization of the work of reconciliation in church and faith.”<sup>8</sup> For Barth, how reconciliation impacts the church and faith is of vital importance. If humans are to be reconciled to God, humans must be reconciled to each other. Barth further suggests,

If reconciliation is to take place in the Christian community and Christian faith, if humanity is to will what if he or she they cannot will and do what he or she cannot do, then it must be on the basis of a particular address and gift, in virtue of a particular awakening power of God by which he is born again under the lordship and impulse of which he or she is another human, in defiance of their status as being a sinner. God in particular address and gift, God in this awakening power God as the creator of this other man, is the Holy Spirit. (IV/1, 645).<sup>9</sup>

Humanity cannot change without the help of God and the Holy Spirit; this is evident in the words of Barth. How are they to interact with one another to build community with each other? This is only done through the power and help of the Holy Spirit. God gives humanity this power through his Spirit. Transformation and reconciliation happen when

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<sup>7</sup> Bromiley and Torrance, *Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics: IV.I: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* (London: Tandt Clark, 2009), 19.

<sup>8</sup> John Webster, *Karl Barth: Second Edition*, 129.

<sup>9</sup> Webster, *Karl Barth: Second Edition*, 129. The above quote was taken from Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*.

humanity recognizes that they cannot do it alone. Humanity needs the help of God and his Spirit to bring harmonious reconciliation.

Barth's reconciliation cannot be divorced from his ideas on Christology, Soteriology, and even creation. For Barth, reconciliation is interwoven within all of these. Reconciliation is to be understood within the context of these ideas, not alone by itself.<sup>10</sup> Reconciliation is something God wants for his people not just for oneself, but for the whole church body. The world will know we are followers of God by how we act and care for others. The United Church of Christ and Emerging churches are, in the researcher's opinion, doing the groundwork for reconciliation within the larger societal context.

*Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

Much like Barth, Bonhoeffer was an influential theologian in the Twentieth Century. Much of what Bonhoeffer wrote about is widely respected and accepted in many denominations, including the United Church of Christ and Emerging/Emergent. Bonhoeffer's view of reconciliation is much like Barth's in that they both look at reconciliation through a lens that includes Christology and Soteriology.

“The church is the place where it is proclaimed and taken seriously that God has reconciled the world to himself in Christ, that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son for it. The space of the church is not there in order to fight with the world for a piece of its territory, but precisely to testify to the world that it is still the world, namely, the world that is loved and reconciled by God. It is not true that the church intends to or must spread its space out over the space of the world. It desires no more space than it needs to serve the world with its witness to Jesus Christ and to the world's reconciliation to God through Jesus

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<sup>10</sup>For further understanding of how Barth's view of reconciliation is interwoven between Christology and Soteriology read Barth's, *“The Humanity of God,”* pages 46-47.

Christ. The church can only defend its own space by fighting, not for space, but for salvation of the world.”<sup>11</sup>

Reconciliation cannot occur with others, until the world is reconciled to God through his Son Jesus.

Bonhoeffer’s understanding of reconciliation is formed in the understanding of Christology,

Reconciliation with the world cost God so dearly. Only executing God’s judgment on God can peace grow between God and the world, between human and human. The secret however, of this judgment, this suffering and this dying, is the love of God for the world, for human beings. What happened to and in Christ has happened to us all us. Only as judged by God can human beings live before God; only the crucified, human beings is at peace with God. In the figure of the crucified, human beings recognize and find themselves. To be taken up by God, to be judged and reconciled by God on the cross, that is the reality of humanity. The figure of the judged and the crucified one.<sup>12</sup>

Bonhoeffer’s view of reconciliation is Christological. Humanity is reconciled to God by his love and peace. Bonhoeffer is stating that Christians need to reconcile with one another by putting our hurts and pain on the cross like Christ did. “What reconciliation and redemption mean, rebirth, and Holy Spirit, love for one’s enemies, cross and resurrection, this is what it means to follow Christ. Christians can only do these two ways, through prayer, and doing justice between human beings.”<sup>13</sup> It is God’s love for this world that he gave his Son for us, died, and rose again, that we may now have peace and reconciliation with others. The United Church of Christ and Emerging church can build a reconciled and unified church. With Christ as the guide. Unity and reconciliation can happen when Christ is the center and the church is a place where peace and love are present.

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<sup>11</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 63-4.

<sup>12</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 88.

<sup>13</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 389.

The researcher grappled with how to encompass Bonhoeffer's thought on reconciliation to how it interweaves God and humanity. The author's friend and Bonhoeffer scholar stated this, "In short, Bonhoeffer's view of reconciliation within humanity is this, and it is restoring oneself to the other." If we take this quote and dissect it we can see the nuggets of truth in it. Just as with love and peace Christ reconciled the world to himself through the crucifixion, humanity must therefore reconcile with one another. Regardless of race, creed, or gender, humanity needs to reconcile with one another. Whether this reconciliation takes place in the world or not, it remains that God so loved this world, he reconciled it with the giving of his Son. Humanity must therefore now reconcile between each other to grow in peace.

Some scholars have described Bonhoeffer's reconciliation as revelation. "Reconciliation gives humanity the knowledge of God. It used to be said that it was from our worship we learned to do theology, on the assumption that worship always precedes theology. Likewise, I think it can be said that from reconciliation we learn the identity of Christ."<sup>14</sup> Even though the aforementioned quote is not by Bonhoeffer, as the reader and Christian one can see that reconciliation is the identity of Christ. Obviously, Christians should not mistake this quote to mean that we have the true ultimate knowledge of God. However, Christians are assured that once humanity is reconciled, first to Christ, then to one another, they will receive the knowledge of God. In essence this is the identity of Christ. As Christians, regardless of our differences, similarities, or anything that may put

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<sup>14</sup> Willis Jenkins, and Jennifer M. McBride, eds. *Bonhoeffer and King: Their Legacies and Importance for Christian Social Thought*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 234.

a wedge between one another, Christians must build and work towards reconciliation with one another. This exemplifies the true mind and knowledge of Christ.

*Martin Luther King Jr.*

Martin Luther King Jr. was by all accounts a theologian, philosopher, social reformer, civil rights advocate, and one must not forget, pastor. King changed the landscape of America if not the world with his stand against racial inequality and other civil issues. King was not afraid to speak up when many today would shy away. It is truly a shame that this wonderful person was barbarically taken from the world so quickly. King spoke with such tenacity, vigor, and passion that many joined his ethic of love and peace. King also preached and spoke on the non-violence of God and his Kingdom ethic. In the researcher's opinion the world, much less America, was not ready to hear these radical yet common sense ideas. The ethics that King preached and lived by is still very alive and well in seminaries and churches across America. King would be proud that there are people living his message. Theologians like Cornel West and Shane Claiborne are putting Martin Luther King, Jr's vision into practice with their teaching and ministry.

King's view of reconciliation was born out of a world that had no racial equality, a world where black men, women and children could not eat and drink with people of the opposite race. King knew this was an injustice, and he was moved to make something happen. King could be silent no longer. King insisted "that enemies should become friends and that black and white people should put differences aside and move from

protest to reconciliation.”<sup>15</sup> In King’s view humanity was interrelated. Humans may look different, and come from different places, but the core of who we are, we are the same. For King, humans need to put differences behind us and move to a more peaceable life with one another where all of humanity can be equal. This is what Christ wants from all of humanity.

Reconciliation for King was not just about racial equality but also about ending poverty, homelessness and putting an end to inequalities that ail the American people. “Reconciliation for Martin Luther King is between equals, not between an inferior and superior. In order that all people may have dignity in their living circumstances, he calls for the destruction of slums and for the providing of jobs for everyone.”<sup>16</sup> King was right that humans must not view each other as inferior or superior. Humans are all equals and in this equality humans must end homelessness and the ills that ravish our humanity.

For King, “The vision of the restored and reconciled community makes it impossible to accept reality as it is. With passion, King underscores his commitment to work for the restored and reconciled community I cannot forget that the Nobel Peace Prize was also a commission a commission to work harder for the brotherhood of man. This is a calling which takes me beyond national allegiances, but even if it were not present, I would live with the meaning of my commitment to the ministry of Jesus Christ. We are called to speak for the voiceless, and the weak, for the victims of our nation, and for those it calls enemy, for no document from human hands can make these humans any

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<sup>15</sup> Noel Leo Erskine, *King among the Theologians* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1994), 140.

<sup>16</sup> Erskine, *King Among the Theologians*, 153.



less our brothers.”<sup>17</sup> King rallies all to understand that everyone is our brother and sister. Regardless if all agree with everything one does is beside the point, everyone has worth, everyone needs love and shelter and food. Even if our country says that a person is not worth saving or valuable, our God says differently, this is what Christ teaches us. Within the United Church of Christ and Emergent/Emerging streams of faith both do a good job including the ‘other’ but could do better. If King were here today he would implore Christians as well to do more, to go that extra mile.

King not only wanted to transform the world, he wanted to transform society. According to King scholar Noel Erskine, “Nonviolence was a logical obligation that King felt regarding reconciliation as a goal for the building of community. According to King, destructive means cannot portend toward constructive ends.”<sup>18</sup> For King, being countercultural and doing things that were not popular or even accepted at the time was transformative not only in the civil rights movement but across America. With grace and courage King often stood up in the face of evil and lovingly confronted the societal ills that affected this country so much. Humanity needs to break down the barriers that hold us back. Humanity needs to tear down the oppressive ideologies that linger in our society and form a new society. Authors Willis Jenkins and Jennifer M. McBride use a metaphor that is attributed to King. “It is a house where humanity lives, a house where Black and

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<sup>17</sup> Erskine, *King Among the Theologians*, 153.

<sup>18</sup> Erskine, *King Among the Theologians*, 141.

Whites, Easterner, Jew, Gentile, Catholic and Protestant, live together. In this house, humanity must learn how to live with one another, humanity must live in peace.”<sup>19</sup>

This metaphor that King used is a perfect example of how people are supposed to live together. Even though people may have differences humans need to somehow set them aside and live together. Humans need to put down our weapons, and use love and reconciliation to grow as God wants humanity to grow.

Martin Luther King, Jr. ’s vision and passion for humanity will never be forgotten. King’s call for all humanity to live together in harmony and peace maybe foreign to many, but this is how we are supposed to live. God loves all of his creation and humanity needs to take care of each other. God reconciled his Son for humanity, humanity must reconcile ourselves to one another so that people can live and love in a much safer world.

### *Curtiss DeYoung*

Curtiss DeYoung is also a voice in the field of reconciliation. DeYoung weaves and articulates well what it means to practice reconciliation. DeYoung has traveled all over the world teaching and writing about reconciliation and how we as Christians need to bridge the gap of indifference and be reconciled to one another. DeYoung has taught at Bethel University in Arden Hills, Minnesota for the last number of years. DeYoung recently has accepted a non-profit job in Chicago. DeYoung gives Christians clear and precise guidelines on how they are to practice and participate in reconciliation. Let’s study his points.

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<sup>19</sup> Willis Jenkins and Jennifer M McBride. *Bonhoeffer and King: Their Legacies and Importance for Christian Social Thought*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 239.

DeYoung first stresses that reconciliation begins with self-examination. “Simply believing that reconciliation is possible is not enough. As God’s instruments for creating unity, we must examine ourselves to discover if anything within us inhibits reconciliation. Some of us may see no bigotry in our lives.”<sup>20</sup> DeYoung asks Christians to reflect on our lives to see if Christians have bigotry or anything that hinders our intention to create reconciliation. Christians must first and foremost come to the table of reconciliation with a clear mind and conscience so that the path toward reconciliation is possible.

Next, DeYoung explains how as reconcilers we must have persistent resolve. DeYoung says, that, “reconciliation takes patience.”<sup>21</sup> This is so very true; reconciliation does not come to fruition overnight, it may take weeks, months or even years. DeYoung also contends that it took a long time for humanity to get into this mess, therefore it will probably take humanity just as long to exit it.<sup>22</sup> This does not mean one abandons the cause. The true-hearted reconciler is one who even in the midst of frustration or heartache never gives up and never loses sight of the fight. DeYoung is correct when he tells Christians that being and practicing reconciliation will take time. One cannot expect it to happen overnight. Reconciliation is a process that can take years. As Christians and as humans all are needed to practice reconciliation with a patient heart.

Finally, reconciliation is centered in relationships. “Reconciliation is accomplished when humans live it in relation to one another. Humanity must never

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<sup>20</sup> Curtiss Paul DeYoung, *Reconciliation: Our Greatest Challenge, Our Only Hope* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1997), 62-3.

<sup>21</sup> DeYoung, *Reconciliation: Our Greatest Challenge, Our Only Hope*, 66.

<sup>22</sup> DeYoung, *Reconciliation: Our Greatest Challenge, Our Only Hope*, 66.

underestimate the power of reconciled relationships. Strong relationships can be forged through honest dialogue.”<sup>23</sup> As Christians we must take the words of DeYoung and pursue these honest dialogues. Certain people and groups are actively engaging in these conversations already. This must happen within our churches, institutions of higher learning, and even in the workplace. Much like Bonhoeffer, and King, DeYoung tells Christians one must be in relation to one another. If humans in other denominations, religions or races do not have a shared understanding of worldviews and theology, reconciliation cannot happen. This does not mean these groups agree it simply means that they honor and respect other’s position or understanding without putting their own convictions or ideologies by the wayside. Bonhoeffer viewed reconciliation as coexisting with one another. King understood reconciliation to mean similarly, DeYoung is telling Christians to do the same.

Reconciliation does not just have to do with race, class, gender, and sexual issues, it encompasses everything including denominations. As Christians all are supposed to be reconcilers to the world, yet Christians have a hard time reconciling among ourselves.

How can Christians reconcile with one another to build a better church body?

The first-century church struggled to keep its Christ-inspired unity movement intact in the midst of such a wide diversity. The idea that Gentile and Jews could or should worship and socialize together in the same congregation was foreign to the worldviews of most people. There were many challenges in crossing this cultural divide. Paul often reminded his congregations that there was no Jew or Gentile in Christ. Some early church leaders did not easily grasp what developed in Antioch and in other congregations.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> DeYoung, *Reconciliation: Our Greatest Challenge, Our Only Hope*, 69.

<sup>24</sup> Curtiss Paul DeYoung, Michael O. Emerson, Karen Chai Kim, and George Yancey, eds. *United By Faith: The Multiracial Congregation As An Answer to the Problem of Race* ( New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 33.

There is no Jew or Gentile in Christ; all are made one with Christ. However, many Christians act like such divisions remain. Not only is the church the most racially diverse place in America, but with regard to theological stances, hospitality, and the inclusiveness Christians are required to perform, Christians are a very un-reconciled group. Within Christianity the United Church of Christ and Emerging/Emergent streams are leading the way in explaining why reconciliation is so badly needed. Much more time and energy is required for reconciliation to grow, but like every living thing, it starts with a seed. Barth, Bonhoeffer, King and DeYoung have already given good directions on how this is possible.

*Christine D. Pohl*

One aspect of reconciliation many are often ignorant about is hospitality. If Christians are supposed to be an inclusive and loving community, then hospitality is imperative. Christine D. Pohl is a professor at Asbury Theological Seminary. Pohl explains why hospitality is such an important piece of Christian life and practice. When thinking of hospitality one thinks of a place where he or she is welcomed. Hospitality is often given to someone when that person feels there is nowhere to go. When all the doors in life are closing fast, hospitality is required. When people think of hospitality one thinks of our homes or friends' homes. Within Christianity Christians equate it with the church, and monasteries, places of refuge and acceptance. Hospitality is where one feels welcomed, no strings attached.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 39.

As Pohl has described, hospitality is first associated with household, but also with church. The researcher will focus on the aspect of hospitality in the church. It is of utmost importance for Christians to accept one another into our churches our homes. The stranger will not enter into our homes or churches if they do not feel welcome. Hospitality plays a vital role in church life. As a church and as Christians we must show one another the love and inclusiveness of Christ. As Bonhoeffer told Christians, one needs to reconcile with others. What better way to do this then by giving them the gift of hospitality?

If one takes a look at how hospitality took shape in the New Testament one can see a blueprint for how Christians need to strive to be. “For Greeks and Jews, the household was a very important place and served as a basis for social, political, and religious identity and cohesion. For the early Christians, rooted in both Hebrew and Greek traditions, the household of God was a powerful theological and social reality.”<sup>26</sup> The church is now our household. There is neither Jew nor Greek, but everyone. Christ turned the understanding of hospitality and household from being tight-knit and local, to broadening the scope to everyone, regardless of culture, religion, or anything else that hinders. God is calling his community to reconcile itself to all humanity by way of being hospitable to all.

As the researcher moves on to the next voice in reconciliation the researcher must conclude with a final thought that will push Christians to practice hospitality. Hosts are in some way, marginal to the larger society. Households, churches, and intentional

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<sup>26</sup> Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as Christian Tradition*, 41-2.

communities can cultivate a countercultural identity that nurtures a distinct way of life, a vibrant and welcoming environment, and clear reasons for welcoming strangers.

Transformative hospitality still finds its most effective location on the edges of society, where it is offered by hosts who have a sense of their own alien status.<sup>27</sup> If the church practices hospitality, this may push Christians to the fringes of society. God sent his Son to die on the cross for humanity, to bring his creation into communion with him. Christians need to be hospitable to all, even the stranger, to bring all of humanity together for the glory of God. This is what it means to be reconciled to God and to one other.

*Shane Claiborne*

Much like Christine Pohl, Shane Claiborne is a visionary when it comes to hospitality. Shane has written and spoken to many on the importance of why Christians must practice hospitality. It is a form of reconciliation and unity. People who practice hospitality are in many ways on the fringe of society, not because they are weird or bizarre but because much of the world refuses to live in such a way.

“The body of Christ was alive, no longer trapped in stained glass windows or books of systematic theology. The body of Christ was literal, living, hungry, thirsty, bleeding. Church was no longer something we did for an hour on Sunday, and church was not a building with a steeple.”<sup>28</sup> Claiborne realized that church was not just within the four walls of the building, it was much more than this. There is nothing wrong with going to church every Sunday, but there is so much more. Claiborne realized that the

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<sup>27</sup> Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as Christian Tradition*, 124.

<sup>28</sup> Shane Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 62.

body of Christ was alive, and much like every living body, it needs to be taken care of. Claiborne realized that he could no longer stay on the sidelines, he must take action, and Claiborne must be the church. Claiborne, in the researcher's opinion, described what happens to many Christians when they feel the call to action. When the Spirit gets a hold of someone, it does not let go.

Claiborne did what so many of us don't do, he took the calling to do something and he forged new ground, got out of his comfort zone and started an intentional community. "We dreamed ancient visions of a church like the one in Acts, in which there were no needy persons among them. Everyone shared their possessions, not claiming anything as their own but sharing everything they had. We knew we could end poverty. The early church did, and the homeless families were doing it."<sup>29</sup>

These powerful words by Claiborne, explain to Christians that he took the calling of radical hospitality and intentional community to a whole new level. Claiborne did not do this for selfish or personal gain. Claiborne did this because the Scriptures tell all Christians to do this. Claiborne in essence was bringing a little bit of heaven down to the earthly level, so that people's basic needs were met. In Claiborne's opinion Christians do not need to wait for the government or other institutions to take the lead to end poverty, Christians can end poverty. If the early church accomplished this, Christians now can do so too. Claiborne passionately engages with Christians on why and how Christians need to represent Christ and his Kingdom to the world. Claiborne does this by practicing radical hospitality, by accepting and befriending everyone.

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<sup>29</sup> Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical*, 64.



Shane Claiborne's intentional community is called the Simple Way. This community is in the very poor part of Philadelphia. In this community all eat and pray together, they have communal chores, they grow their own food in a community garden and they even make their own clothes sometimes. At the Simple Way people are shown how the early church practiced radical hospitality and this can become a reality in communities such as Claiborne's. The Simple Way is one of many intentional communities around America and the world. Many Christians are answering the call to be more hospitable to one another, to reconcile themselves to the stranger, to give food, shelter, and clothing. Hospitality is a form of reconciliation. It brings fractured and fragmented people together for the Kingdom of God, sharing God's love and grace with everyone.

### **Toward a More Unified Church**

These six leaders of reconciliation have impacted how humanity, as well as Christians, needs to understand and practice it. Scripture makes it clear that Christians must be a unified body. Christians must be a bridge of grace and inclusion for the Kingdom. Hospitality is of utmost importance as well since it is very closely intertwined with reconciliation. Reconciliation and hospitality are not just suggestions for Christians to discuss or read about. Reconciliation and hospitality are commands for all Christians. The Scriptures make it very clear that as Christians we are to be a unified body of believers regardless of our denominational lines or our theological leanings. All of humanity and all of creation is made in the *imago dei*. God desires for all of his creation to be unified to Himself. Scripture makes a very convincing and sound argument for this case.

***Psalm 133:1***

Scripture plays a vital part in our Christian faith. Scripture is the bedrock on which our faith is grounded. It has a lot to say about unity and the reconciliation among believers. The first scripture the researcher will look at is Psalm 133:1 which states, “*How lovely it is when sisters and brothers are living as one.*” It is important to understand how this verse is in the original context. Psalm scholar Leslie Allen comments, “The opening verse of this song of Zion may originally have been a wisdom saying commending the continuance of married brothers in the family homestead. If this is so, it was evidently put to new use, to celebrate the gathering of Judean pilgrims Jerusalem to worship at festival time. The crowds in the holy city were a beautiful perspective of Israelite community, bound together not only by nationhood but by covenant relationship to God’s family.”<sup>30</sup> The original context of this verse is for married brothers in family homesteads as well as Judean pilgrims in the Holy City. However, as Christians it is imperative to understand that in our present context covenant with God is key. This Old Testament scripture gives Christians a clear message that they need to be in unity with each other. What does it mean and what does it look like for all of us to live in unity with one another? Early church father Peter Chrysologues writes on the importance of ecclesial unity. “The law was given not for one, but for all. So, too, Christ came not for one or two but to all and for all. He desired to bring all things

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<sup>30</sup> Leslie C. Allen, *Word Biblical Commentary: Psalms 101-150* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002), 279.

together into a unity that alone is good and pleasant. For not singularity but unity is acceptable to God.”<sup>31</sup>

According to Chrysologues, Christians need to understand that Christ did not just come for us or our denomination. Christ came so that his Kingdom, love and grace is open to all, regardless of denomination. To some extent the United Church of Christ and Emerging/Emergent churches are accomplishing this, however more improvement is needed. Christians need to look at Chrysologues words and see more ecumenical dialogue and acceptance within Christendom.

Augustine was a very prominent theologian in early Christianity. Scholar Tremper Longmann gives voice to Augustine’s thought. “This little psalm begat the monasteries whose members are not merely ‘monos’ in being isolated ‘monos’ in the sense of one.”<sup>32</sup> The early monasteries inhabited by Christians Psalm 133:1 to show the importance of unity. Even though this verse was used by earlier Christians to promote the monasteries, Christians today need to take it to an even deeper level. Christians need to reconcile with one another, across denominational lines and theologies. Longmann again gives voice to some thoughts by early church theologians Jerome and Cassiodorus. Jerome comments, “It may even be applied to the churches, although, because of great diversity in personal interests on the part of the members, there does not in the Christian assembly appear to be the same degree of harmony. Cassiodorus notes, however, that nevertheless the church

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<sup>31</sup>Quentin F. Wesselschmidt, ed. *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament VIII: Psalms 51-150* (Downer’s Grove: IVP, 2007), 370.

<sup>32</sup> Tremper Longman III, ed. *Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and the Psalms: Psalms Volume 3: Psalms 90-150* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 569.

should not evade its vision.”<sup>33</sup> According to Psalm scholar James L. Mays, “In services of Christian unity, this psalm is a witness that God is at work building a family that transcends all the given and instituted barriers that separate and diminish life.”<sup>34</sup> It is clear to see that there are many differing voices in regard to what exactly unity amongst others means. I would implore and exegete that Psalm 133:1 is leading Christians to practice and invoke unity ecumenically. The Church needs to be reconciled back to God. Christians can start by doing this through ecclesial unity.

### ***1 Corinthians 12:12***

In 1 Corinthians 12:12 it states, *Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.* Paul writes that even though there are many Christians, there is only one body. How should Christians be ourselves but also part of a corporate ecclesial body?

The main issue in this periscope is the ecclesial sense of the ‘body of Christ,’ which now appears. Absent from earlier Pauline letters, it now emerges, in a letter in which Paul has been coping with various divisive phenomena in the Corinthian community. This idea of the Church as the body of Christ only gradually dawned on Paul as he sought to cope with the problems in the Christian communities that he had founded. It was almost certainly not an insight that he had at the time of his call on the road to Damascus. The church as the ‘body of Christ,’ is not an element in Lucan theology. Rather, it took time for this important time for this important idea in Pauline theology to surface. Now by means of “body of Christ,” Paul seeks to instill in the Corinthian Christians a sense of their corporate identity of the unity of all of them in Christ, different though they are individually.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Longman III, *Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Wisdom of the Psalms: Psalms Vol. 3: Psalms 90-150*, 569.

<sup>34</sup> James L. Mays, *Interpretation: A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: Psalms* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994), 414.

<sup>35</sup> Joseph Fitzmeyer, *The Anchor Yale Bible: First Corinthians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 474-475.

To take this quote seriously Christians need to understand that Paul is communicating that even though we are many Christians individually, Christians must be unified in our love for Christ and for his Kingdom. Paul is not telling his Corinthian brethren to think the same way, he is saying that even though Christians are individuals Christians all must work together. Denominations need to understand this as well. The United Church of Christ and Emergent/Emerging Christians have to understand and realize that even though Christians are individuals, they must all work together as a body does. The UCC and Emergent/Emerging denominations are working together more than others, but it is safe to say that more work and dialogue is needed.

Early Church fathers had much to say on this topic as well. The researcher believes these voices are also just as valuable. Theodoret of Cyr reminds us that every member is necessary. “Paul is pointing out that just as the body has many members, some of which are more important than others, so it is with the church also. But, every member of the church is useful and necessary.”<sup>36</sup> Theodoret is stating that some people have higher functions within the structure of the church. However all members whether old or young have a role in the church and the Kingdom of God. This is basic ecclesial unity.

Even though the main focus is on verse 12 of 1 Corinthians 12, the researcher must look at verses 13-14 to fully grasp ecclesial unity. “Verse 13 takes up the presuppositional statement (the body is one) and explains how the many of them came to be one body: they were all immersed in and made to drink of the same reality, the Spirit. Verse 14 then picks up a second theme, but rephrases it to emphasize the real urgency of

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<sup>36</sup> Gerald Bray, ed *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament VII: 1-2 Corinthians* (Chicago: Frizroy Dearborn Publishers, 1999), 125.

the analogy: the one body is not one member but many.”<sup>37</sup> The Body of Christ is made up of many people, not just one. This reference from Fee is pointing out the obvious that all Christians make up the body of Christ, all are in the body, and all have a vital role in it, no one person is excluded. Scholar Gerald Bray gives voice to Clement of Alexandria. Clement states that Christians are all one in Christ. “You are all one in Christ Jesus. It is not that some are enlightened Gnostics and others less perfect spirituals. Everyone, putting aside all carnal desires, is equal and spiritual before the Lord.”<sup>38</sup> If Christians are in Christ Jesus, then all are equal before the Lord. Simply put, Christians are now equal with every other Christian. They are all equal to one another; Christians are all equal in the eyes of God.

### ***Ephesians 4:3-6***

In the researcher’s opinion, Ephesians 4:3-6 is one of the most promising and clear portions of scripture in regard to unity amongst believers. “*Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (TNIV).*” If Christians take these scriptures to heart there is no way to get around the issue that they must earnestly seek to practice unity with one another. “Christians must maintain the unity of the Spirit because everything Christians hold to that has any significance

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<sup>37</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmann’s Publishing, 1987), 601.

<sup>38</sup> Bray, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament VII: 1-2 Corinthians*, 125.

Christians hold with other people.”<sup>39</sup> As Christians we have one God, one Faith, one Baptism, one Father, who is all to all. Simply stated, even though we may have differing orthodoxy and orthopraxy, Christians need to put their differences behind them and understand that even in our differences and similarities, we are already one in Christ. Can the United Church of Christ and the Emerging/Emergent traditions, come together to promote and preach this scripture? The apostle Paul is leaving the church and Christians with these words so that there will no longer be disunity amongst believers and that we will all be unified in one body. This is easier said than done. For many this would be a daunting task. However, this is a task that the church must be willing to take up.

The UCC has its early roots with the reformation and reformed movement. As a member of the UCC the researcher believes it important to look at the insights from John Calvin. “Paul recommends patience with good reason, because he wants the unity of the Spirit to continue. Some people take the unity of the Spirit to mean Spiritual unity that the Spirit of God brings in us. There can be no doubt that he alone makes us of one mind, but I interpret the phrase more simply, as harmony of mind. This unity is brought by the bond of peace. We must live at peace if we want gentleness to continue among us.”<sup>40</sup> Calvin preaches patience if Christians are going to have unity. For Calvin, Christians need a harmony of mind, if Christians want to live in a bond of peace like Christ wants his church to do. Simply put, Calvin believes that the Spirit makes all of Christians harmonious in mind so Christians can build unity through peace.

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<sup>39</sup> Klyne Snodgrass, *The NIV Application Commentary: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 198.

<sup>40</sup> Timothy George, ed. *Reformation Commentary on Scripture: New Testament X: Galatians and Ephesians* (Downer’s Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 330.

Ephesians 4:4 states, “*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called.*” Calvin comments on Ephesians 4:4, he shines a light on some very important insights that Paul left with Christians.

Paul expresses more clearly how perfect the unity of Christians should be. It should be so flourishing that we all grow together into one body and one soul...Paul supports this by the powerful argument that we are all called to participate in one inheritance and one life. From this it follows that we cannot obtain eternal life without living in harmony with one another in this world. God calls us all to be united in one faith with one another and to encourage one another.<sup>41</sup>

Calvin is spot-on in his interpretation of Paul’s words in Ephesians 4:4. Paul tells Christians that God has given to his people the tools to be unified in one body and mind. “When Christians come together across the dividing fences of their denominational allegiances, Christians find they have more in common than they suspected. Christians meet not to create unity but to confess it.”<sup>42</sup> According to the researcher, all of the church and its members need to strive to be a more reconciliatory body and a more unified body for the Kingdom of God and to a hurting world.

### **Conclusion**

The researcher is confident that this theology chapter has shown the importance and the need to be a more reconciled and unified body. In this chapter the researcher looked at six important voices who spoke on reconciliation either with Christ, racial issues, or ecclesial issues. Reconciliation is needed if Christians are going to be unified in one body and mind in Christ. The researcher briefly explored three important scripture

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<sup>41</sup> George, *Reformation Commentary on Scripture: New Testament X: Galatians and Ephesians*, 331.

<sup>42</sup> Ralph P. Martin, *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1991), 49.



passages that lay a foundation for Christians to emulate in regard to reconciliation and unity.

## CHAPTER THREE:

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

*If others go to hell, I will go too. But I do not believe that, on the contrary, I believe that all will be saved, myself with them, something which arouses my deepest amazement!*  
-Soren Kierkegaard

#### **Introduction**

Chapter three will explore the related literature in the field of theology and history in the Emerging/Emergent and United Church of Christ traditions. The researcher has decided on these five theological issues, Eschatology, Eucharist, Sin, Prayer, and Salvation. These five issues are obviously not an exhaustive list of what can or could be explored. As the researcher, I needed to pick five theological issues that many denominations would be conversant. These five theological issues were carefully thought out and for the sake of the research chosen to be looked at in depth. As the researcher I believe these five theological themes paint a beautiful picture of understanding and fluidity within theological conversations. In this chapter the reader will hear a plethora of voices speaking openly and honestly about their views on these wonderful topics.

The five theological issues examined are; eschatology, Eucharist, sin, prayer, and salvation. The researcher chose to limit what theological issues or stances one could take. The aforementioned five seemed to be the most important for the sake and scope of this

project. The researcher's intent of this project is to see if the Emerging/Emergent and UCC streams of thought have similarities or differences; and to see if regardless of similarities or differences, these two denominations, as well as Christianity as a whole, can become more unified.

### **Eschatology**

Eschatology is the teaching of 'last things.' It refers to a time in the future when the course of history will be changed to such an extent that one can state a new form of reality.<sup>1</sup> The topic of eschatology is important to study, because it makes the Christian wrestle with things that will happen in the future. If it is important for every Christian to at least look and examine eschatology, likewise it is important that denominations themselves also take a look at this topic. The Emerging church and United Church of Christ are no different in that both of these denominations share in this theological view. Eschatology is an important theological point to study. It makes Christians examine how the "end" will happen. How the "end" unfolds is the mystery.

### *Emerging Voice*

A probing text on eschatology in the emerging tradition is written by Dave Tomlinson. Tomlinson in his text, *Re-Enchanting Christianity: Faith in an Emerging Culture* brings up some very interesting eschatological questions about hell.

The notion of hell, of everlasting torment, is the point in which many people's faith starts to unravel. There are lots of things within Christianity that the rational mind might balk at, but the idea of a loving God dispatching people to eternal misery for not believing the Christian message or for belonging to a different faith

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<sup>1</sup> David L. Peterson, "Eschatology," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (ed. David Noel Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 575.

community seems utterly incredible in the twenty-first century. Without this doctrine being dumped or radically reinterpreted, re-enchantment with Christianity is impossible.<sup>2</sup>

Tomlinson makes a push toward a re-envisioning of the concept of hell.

Tomlinson further makes points out that in this century and in this present world it seems absurd to send people to hell for not believing in their concept of God. The point one needs to understand is within the framework of the Emerging view of hell that this doctrine needs to be re-envisioned or thrown away. Emerging theology is heavily under construction with this view of hell and others.

Tomlinson further explains his viewpoint on the matter. “Yet there is another question that precedes the issue of heaven and hell, which is: how can we be sure that there is anything at all after death? Frankly, I have to say I don’t know. I haven’t died yet.”<sup>3</sup> Tomlinson may sound sarcastic or irreverent to some. On the contrary, he is bringing the question to the forefront. None of us have died yet. No one knows definitively what the other side of reality entails. Tomlinson may push the boundaries of traditional theology. His approach highlights emerging theology’s reminder that no one has data on life after death.

Another view of eschatology that many Emergents have is that heaven is here and now. Even in the midst of evil and death in this world hope is still alive. God’s kingdom is a present reality not a theoretical one. Kevin Corcoran in a chapter in the text entitled, *Church in the Present Tense: A Candid Look at What’s Emerging* suggests what heaven

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<sup>2</sup> Dave Tomlinson, *Re-Enchanting Christianity: Faith in an Emerging Culture* (Norwich, Canterbury Press, 2008), 95.

<sup>3</sup> Tomlinson, *Re-Enchanting Christianity: Faith in an Emerging Culture*. 95.

on earth means and what it could look like. “Heaven is here and now, in this view heaven is not a place where disembodied souls go after they die. Heaven is here, now, embodied in earth and mud. Granted, this Kingdom has not been consummated or fully actualized. Still, it is here and it is now. It is a kingdom come and still coming.”<sup>4</sup> Corcoran is stressing the point that heaven is not a place where disembodied souls go when humans die. This alternative view is that heaven is not necessarily a place where one ascends. It is here on earth in the mud and land humanity inhabits. Emerging theology must understand that this heaven is not fully actualized yet, but will be when Christ returns and makes all things new.

Corcoran further describes what heaven here and now looks like,

For those with eyes to see and ears to hear, there is actually ample evidence of its present reality. Indeed, signs and foretastes of its presence is everywhere. Whenever you witness the tender embrace of reconciliation; glimpse the healing touch of forgiveness both given and received; notice small bands of people living cooperatively, sharing possessions, feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked.<sup>5</sup>

Corcoran is stressing the point that heaven and the conception of heaven is not a far off place or a place one does not understand. Corcoran encapsulates the idea that every time a Christian forgives, helps the homeless, or clothes the naked, then in this reality heaven is here and now in the mud and muck of this world. If Emerging theology is to follow what Corcoran is saying one hears that anytime people live out the commands that Christ gave humanity, then heaven is here and now. Is interacting within humanity now, not later. Emerging theology’s view of eschatology is quite hopeful and possible. One cannot prove these assumptions in the aforementioned quotes; however, it leaves readers with

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<sup>4</sup> Kevin Corcoran, Jason Clark, Scot McKnight, Peter Rollins, *Church in the Present Tense: A Candid Look at What’s Emerging* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2011), 65

<sup>5</sup> Corcoran, 65.

the prospect that heaven is real. It is presently interacting with creation, not fully realized, but here nonetheless.

Finally, Corcoran leaves his readers with a very robust and wonderful vision of heaven here and now and a new re-envisioning of eschatology. “When Christ returns and is all in all, his kingdom is fully realized, when the mountains bring forth prosperity for the people, the cause of the poor and oppressed is defended, and justice and peace kiss. It is a beautiful vision, and scores of Christians are being captivated by it. That, I believe, is a good thing for the church. A very good thing.”<sup>6</sup> This quote powerfully makes Christians re-envision eschatology not as a future happening, rather, it is unfolding in the present. When Christians help the less fortunate, the oppressed then part of this eschatological vision is unfolding. This is an Emerging view, however, it goes beyond just Emerging theology. Other denominations are now re-imagining eschatology.

#### *United Church of Christ Voice*

As a denomination the United Church of Christ does not have a set doctrine of the ‘end things.’ During the researcher’s study he found that the UCC does not focus on how the end will transpire. Rather, the UCC is more concerned with how to treat others, how to be a people who are committed to social justice. The UCC does a great job dealing with the social issues facing the country and world and letting individuals who want to explore eschatology do so.

Since the United Church of Christ does not have a doctrinal stance on eschatology, it is important to explore some teachings that have impacted the UCC and

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<sup>6</sup> Corcoran, 72.

its tradition. H. Richard Niebuhr was a figurehead in twentieth century theology. In the nineteen fifties Niebuhr was in the German Reformed denomination when it merged with three other denominations to form the United Church of Christ. Niebuhr in turn became an important figure in United Church of Christ theology. Niebuhr spoke on eschatology with some very important things to say to not only his denomination but the church at large. “One abiding meaning of New Testament eschatology lies in its recognition of the fact of death as a fact not only in individual life but in national and especially in human life as a whole.”<sup>7</sup> Niebuhr made the claim that eschatology is not just a personal end of life but also a communal end. Niebuhr goes on to state, “The acceptance of death as the end of humanity as well as persons and cultures means that intrinsic value is denied to these events. No reason for living can be found within life itself. In this sense the cross is the revelation of the end and the futility of history.”<sup>8</sup> Niebuhr pressed the reader to understand that life was not meant to be lived divorced from the revelation of the cross. If a Christian’s view of eschatology is not found within the cross then Christian’s have nothing. Our death is not final if the cross is present. The researcher stresses the fact that Niebuhr understood that Christians must have Christocentric eschatology. A church’s theology or doctrine must not be divorced from the cross. Niebuhr makes the point that eschatology is founded in Christology. When one dies, it is communal, and Christians are a family brought together by Christ. He brought his family together through the cross. So for Niebuhr, eschatology is within the cross of Christ.

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<sup>7</sup> William Stacy Johnson, ed. *H. Richard Niebuhr: Theology, History, and Culture* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1996), 86.

<sup>8</sup> Johnson, *H. Richard Niebuhr: Theology, History, and Culture*, 87.

In the New Testament Jesus and Paul both talked about eschatology. Niebuhr shines some light on this. “It is maintained that the apparent indifference of Jesus and early Christianity to the form of the political state was due to their eschatological expectations. They did not think that it was worthwhile to concern themselves with temporal systems which were soon to pass away. But neither Jesus nor Paul gives an eschatological explanation of his political statements.”<sup>9</sup> Niebuhr explained that Jesus and the early Christians were at odds on how the end would happen. Early Christians were obsessed with the end, rather than living the lifestyle Christ has shown. Niebuhr moved the reader toward the understanding that Jesus was focused on the here and now.

Niebuhr explained further, “Just as Jesus’ words about anxiety for food and clothing are non-eschatological in character, being based on the conviction of the natural presence rather than on the apocalyptic imminence of God’s rule, so his attitude toward the state is founded not on the expectation that God will rule soon but on the certainty that he is ruling now.”<sup>10</sup> God is ruling here on earth now. It is not a future revelation. It is now unfolding on earth before humanity. Niebuhr’s statements about eschatology are in the stream of the United Church of Christ. The UCC and Niebuhr state that living the way Christ taught his people and fulfilling his prophecy is more important than how the world will end. It very clear that Christ was teaching that his kingdom is here on earth and not about a far off kingdom. A kingdom that starts in the heart and unfolds to all the margins of the world. Niebuhr explained to his readers that Christ was more content with fulfilling prophecy then eschatology.

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<sup>9</sup> Johnson, *H Richard Niebuhr: Theology, History, and Culture*, 145-6.

<sup>10</sup> Johnson, *H. Richard Niebuhr: Theology, History, and Culture*, 146.



The explanation of Jesus' and Paul's statements about the state is to be sought in prophecy rather than in eschatology. Like the prophets they believe that God is ruling now, though he acts through wicked men and nations, they insist on present obedience to the divine king and present loyalty to his kingdom, within a political life that despite all appearances is under his control.<sup>11</sup>

God who works through wicked men and evil governments is not something many Christians like to hear. God will work through anyone that his kingdom can see and understand. God is in complete control his plans will happen regardless. God will have his kingdom despite humanity. He may use evil nations or people as part of the process to make this occur. Niebuhr sums it up wonderfully; God is working through wicked men and nations so that his kingdom will grow stronger. Niebuhr leaves the reader with the idea that God is ruling now in this present reality. Instead of worrying about how the end of humanity will happen, Christians need to care more about how humanity is living now and how Christians can spread the Kingdom of God now.

In this section the researcher briefly looked at the Emerging and United Church of Christ ideas about eschatology. These streams of faith have some similarities. One major point of similarity between both the UCC and emerging streams is that the Kingdom is here and now, not a far off place. Both of these traditions believe it will be fully actualized with Christ's return. Another similarity is that both traditions are driven by social justice. They both speak heavily in favor of helping the poor, the displaced and the oppressed. Another place of congruency is that both traditions have an idea of hell and an afterlife, but neither will speculate about the end of the world. Both are in agreement that this present reality and the things taking place in them is what is important for the Kingdom of God. The doctrine of eschatology has both a present and future component.

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<sup>11</sup> Johnson, *H. Richard Niebuhr: Theology, History, and Culture*, 146.

It is present, unfolding right before our eyes, and all are invited to experience it. It is future, being fully realized when Christ returns to establish his Kingdom. Both Emerging and United Church of Christ traditions alike hold to these views of eschatology.

## **Eucharist**

### *Emerging Voice*

The Eucharist is one sacrament that all of Christianity partakes in. This section will explore and explain some of the variations of how the Eucharist is incorporated into daily worship settings. Emergent scholar Bruce Ellis Benson comments on what the Eucharist is, “Central to the Eucharist is the very earthly and material things: the bread and wine, water... While there may be differences among Christian traditions as to how ‘holy’ these things are, clearly there is something sacred about them.”<sup>12</sup> Benson is quite right, the bread, wine and water are essential to the sacrament of the Eucharist. How significant a role they play will not be discussed, but their sacredness and holiness must be. As Christians we are still left in awe at the sacredness of the Eucharist.

Benson further explains that the Eucharist as much as it is sacred is quite symbolic as well.

It is easy to get wrapped up in the symbolic aspect of such an act and forget how truly basic it is. Eating is a vital part of our being, so bringing that aspect to church and making it central to worship is highly important. Although the ‘meal’ of bread and wine has special liturgical significance, that significance is highly intertwined with the very earthly act of simply eating and drinking.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Bruce Ellis Benson, *Liturgy as a Way of Life: Embodying the Arts in Worship* (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2013), 153.

<sup>13</sup> Benson, *Liturgy as a Way of Life: Embodying the Arts in Worship*, 154.

Benson does not downplay the Eucharist, he simply states that at the core of the sacrament is the need to eat and drink. There is a symbolic component to the Eucharist, but at a base level Jesus wants his followers to no longer be hungry. As Christians many tend to forget the mundane is important to God as well, that is why eating and drinking is a vital part of the Eucharist. The Emerging traditions must not forget the symbolism that the elements are the body and blood of Christ, but the main idea is that when Christians get together they should break bread and drink. Benson leaves one to wonder if the idea of the Eucharist is more than symbolic. It is a communal act to be done when Christians come together.

Emerging voice Russell Rathbun, pastor of an Emerging congregation in St. Paul, Minnesota, gives his take on what the Eucharist could mean. “A Revolutionary act includes people, it does not exclude them. The act of communion is often not communion at all but exclusion. The banquet table in the Kingdom of God is open to all. It is peopled with those who we don’t know or understand or even like.”<sup>14</sup> Rathbun encourages Christians to understand that the communion table is open to all, not just the people in our own congregations or those we like. The Eucharist is for everyone. The Eucharist is open to all, its inclusive not exclusive. Rathbun further expounds, “Christ sacrificed himself once and for all, when we remember that definitive act of love through the ritual of the Lord’s Supper, there can be no qualifications in our invitation to the table. We should seek instead to find new words, new languages, a thousand new ways of inviting people to the table so that a thousand new people will feel welcome.”<sup>15</sup> Rathburn

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<sup>14</sup> Russell Rathbun, *Post-Rapture Radio: Lost Writings from a Failed Revolution* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 151

<sup>15</sup> Rathbun, *Post- Rapture Radio: Lost Writings from a Failed Revolution*, 151.

contends that the communion table is open to all because of the sacrifice Christ made on the cross. The act of love that Christ displayed on the cross for all humanity is now on display in the act of communion. The way in which Christians honor God and each other is through the breaking of bread and drinking of the wine together. The sacrament of communion is a revolutionary act that calls everyone to the table of love and inclusion, to act out the love Christ showed humanity. Rathbun is quite right; the act of communion is a revolutionary act. It may be quiet, but it shows humanity how to include everyone at the table. If Christians included everyone at the table, would this revolutionary act be a quiet one? It would turn the world upside down. This is what Christ had in mind all along.

#### *United Church of Christ Voice*

With most of its theology and practice the United Church of Christ has its methods whether that be communion, preaching, or certain theological leanings. In the UCC there is not a theological manual on how to view a certain idea. However there is a manual on ministry, how to provide ideas such as the sacrament of the Eucharist.

The United Church of Christ as a denomination formed in the nineteen fifties. But the history and lineage of the tradition goes back to the pilgrims. The average age of a member in a typical UCC church is seventy years old. However, younger families and individuals are flocking to UCC churches. Two younger United Church of Christ pastors have written a book showing some important points in regarding UCC theology and thought. Quinn G. Caldwell and Curtis J. Preston have written a text entitled, "*The Unofficial Handbook of the United Church of Christ.*" These two ministers have

explained the important and sometimes old fashioned way of doing things, as well as new methods.

“The sacrament of holy communion is a central event in United Church of Christ worship. All five senses are engaged in communion, and it is often the most interactive part of the service. Local customs for receiving communion can be confusing or complex, so it is wise to pay attention and prepare.”<sup>16</sup> Often people think of the Eucharist as something boring, archaic, or not relevant. Eucharist is a sacrament that brings Christians closer together with God and his creation. The Eucharist uses the five senses to: smell the bread, taste the wine, see the communion table, touch the bread and wine, and to hear the music in the sanctuary and the prayers of the people. The Eucharist is a sacrament that is individual as well as communal.

The United Church of Christ has an official document on their website defining what communion is and what it means to the UCC. This document covers all the points that encompass communion. For the UCC communion means “In the sacrament of Holy Communion also called the Lord’s supper or Eucharist, meaning ‘thanksgiving,’ Christians hear, taste, touch and receive the grace of God revealed through Jesus Christ in a unique way.”<sup>17</sup> The official document further explains, “The UCC book of worship reminds Christians that the invitation and the call to celebrate not only the memory of a meal that is past, but an actual meal with the risen Christ that is a foretaste of the

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<sup>16</sup> Quinn G. Caldwell, Curtis J. Preston, *The Unofficial Handbook of the United Church of Christ* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 39), 2011.

<sup>17</sup> United Church of Christ, “Holy Communion: A Practice of Faith in the United Church of Christ,” United Church of Christ, [www.ucc.org/worship/communion](http://www.ucc.org/worship/communion) (Accessed 9/16/14).

heavenly banquet at which Christ will preside at the end of history.”<sup>18</sup> For the United Church of Christ communion is not just a memory of a meal that happened in the past with Jesus and the disciples. Rather, when Christians take part in communion it is a foretaste of what will happen when we will reign with Christ at the end of time. It is a combination of the past and the future.

The United Church of Christ systematically describes all the points of communion. This gives a firm grasp of what, and how and why the UCC practices communion the way it does. *What elements are used? What do they mean?*

The broken bread and poured wine represent, t the crucified and risen Christ. The wheat gathered to bake the loaf and the grapes pressed to make one cup remind participants that they are one body in Christ, while the breaking and pouring announce the costliness of Christ’s sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin. Some churches provide non-alcoholic and gluten-free elements. As Christians grow increasingly aware of the rich cultural diversity of the church, the use of elements other than bread and wine is becoming an issue for global ecumenical reflection.<sup>19</sup>

For the UCC participation in the sacrament of communion reminds one that we are one in the body of Christ. When one partakes in the sacrament of communion, it is a reminder of the power in our lives, and Christ is forgiveness of sins.

In the United Church of Christ it is common during the communion service to read liturgies before, during, or after. *What words are used?* (The Book of Worship and the New Century Hymnal) contain several liturgies for the celebration of Holy Communion. In addition, many liturgies from ecumenical and global sources are

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<sup>18</sup> United Church of Christ, “Holy Communion: A Practice of Faith in the United Church of Christ,” United Church of Christ, [www.ucc.org/worship/communion](http://www.ucc.org/worship/communion) (Accessed 9/16/14).

<sup>19</sup> United Church of Christ, “Holy Communion: A Practice of Faith in the United Church of Christ,” United Church of Christ, [www.ucc.org/worship/communion](http://www.ucc.org/worship/communion) (Accessed 9/16/14).

frequently used. At the heart of the service are Jesus' words about the bread and the cup from the Biblical account of the Last Supper.<sup>20</sup>

*How is Communion served?* A variety of practices are found in the United Church of Christ. The bread may be shared by a common loaf or the use of individual wafers or cubes of bread. The wine may be observed by sharing of a cup or of individual cups either at the table or in the pews. Intinction (dipping the bread in the wine) is also an acceptable practice. Care should be taken to ensure that the full meaning of the sacrament is communicated by the way the elements are used and served. The pastor presides at the table, normally assisted by elders or deacons.<sup>21</sup>

*Who may receive Communion?* In most United Church of Christ local churches, the communion table is "open to all Christians who wish to know the presence of Christ and to share in the community of God's people. Some church visitors believe communion should only be celebrated among Christians who are in full doctrinal agreement and might not choose to participate. Their decision should be respected."<sup>22</sup> Within the UCC there is freedom to participate or to abstain. This must be respected at all costs.

*What about Children?* In many Christian churches baptized children and even infants are able to receive communion. Practice in the UCC varies, but increasingly

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<sup>20</sup> United Church of Christ, "Holy Communion: A Practice of Faith in the United Church of Christ," United Church of Christ, [www.ucc.org/worship/communion](http://www.ucc.org/worship/communion) (Accessed 9/16/14).

<sup>21</sup> United Church of Christ, "Holy Communion: A Practice of Faith in the United Church of Christ," United Church of Christ, [www.ucc.org/worship/communion](http://www.ucc.org/worship/communion) (Accessed 9/16/14).

<sup>22</sup> United Church of Christ, "Holy Communion: A Practice of Faith in the United Church of Christ," United Church of Christ, [www.ucc.org/worship/communion](http://www.ucc.org/worship/communion) (Accessed 9/16/14).

children are welcomed to the table at their parents' discretion following a period of sacrament instruction.

*How often is Communion served?* “In the early church communion was served weekly, a practice continued and encouraged by the Protestant Reformers. Gradually the frequency of communion has decreased in many Protestant churches. This trend is now being reversed. While no one pattern prevails in the UCC, many congregations are moving toward a monthly or weekly communion.”<sup>23</sup>

The United Church of Christ has wonderfully laid out their position on the Eucharist. The UCC has some very distinct Protestant themes in regards to their practice of communion but they also have some more progressive ideas as well. The UCC is a denomination that is cemented in their heritage and tradition but also a church that is willing to move forward.

Within the traditions of Emerging and United Church of Christ there are a few similarities. The acceptance of everyone at the table of communion is shared by both. They are inclusionary not exclusionary. Both believe that the sacrament is of vital importance in the church and should be practiced as much as possible. A perceptible difference is that the Emerging tradition tends to put a more mystical and human aspect to the Eucharist than the UCC. The United Church of Christ regards communion as vital but they tend to believe that it is more transformative than the Emerging streams. One should note that this might not be the view in all Emerging and UCC churches but the researcher's studies have uncovered these insightful points. Both of these traditions have

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<sup>23</sup> United Church of Christ, “Holy Communion: A Practice of Faith in the United Church of Christ,” United Church of Christ, [www.ucc.org/worship/communion](http://www.ucc.org/worship/communion) (Accessed 9/16/14).



an extreme amount of respect for the Eucharistic act and both view communion as a sacrament that should be practiced by the church.

## Sin

### *Emerging Voice*

Brian McLaren is a leader in the emerging conversation. One could even call him one of the originals in regard to the Emerging conversation. A lot of the views espoused from McLaren have been provoking discussions in all of Christendom. McLaren's view on sin is also debated. In an interview with the Christian Post from 2010 Brian McLaren gives his view on sin and what it means to him. McLaren is asked the question, "*Regarding the 'fall,' do you reject the notion of original sin and just describe it as a loss of innocence?*" McLaren responds,

I don't object to people using the term. But what I want us to do is really scrutinize that term and ask if it is really in the Bible. Is the only permissible way for Christians to think about sin, and is it the only permissible to frame our reading of the Bible? If people want to read the Bible in those terms, I'm not going to try and stop them; if that's what they are going to do they will not listen to me. But there are others who for whom the way that we have framed the issue of original sin has been a real obstacle and they have raised some very good questions about it. So I think we have to take those questions seriously and ask just as the early Christians had to ask, does every Christian need to be circumcised. That might have been an issue in the first century. Christians might need to ask, the question in the twenty-first century, in order to be a Christian does one have to not only use the word original sin but does one have to hold to the set of mental constructs and assumptions that go along with that word original sin?<sup>24</sup>

McLaren is daring Christians to think outside of the comfortable box of Christianity.

McLaren is not saying he does not believe in sin, rather he wants Christians to re-

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<sup>24</sup> Lilian Kwon, "Interview: Brian McLaren on Sin and Hell," Christian Post, [www.christianpost.com/news/interview-brian-mclaren-on-sin-hell-new-kind-of-christian](http://www.christianpost.com/news/interview-brian-mclaren-on-sin-hell-new-kind-of-christian) (Accessed 9/25/14).

conceptualize what Christianity's definition of sin is. McLaren brings up the point of circumcision because in the first century it was considered mandatory for all believers. If one did not get circumcised then it was sinful. Throughout history Christians have thrown that custom and practice out. McLaren is stating that Christian's conception of sin may need reformatting.

McLaren is asked another question about sin. "*Is the main obstacle that everyone born after Adam and Eve are born sinners?*" McLaren once again responds,

It's a bit more complicated than that. What I suggest in the book that goes a long way with this idea of original sin is that the idea of God no longer loves humanity. The idea that humanity has become detestable to God and it's only the people who become Christians that God can truly love, that they are loved by God through just being God's creatures is somehow destroyed by original sin. And unfortunately sometimes when we frame our story around this idea of original sin-again, a term that never appears in the Bible, that doesn't mean it's wrong but we just need to make a distinction in my mind between the things in our authoritative text and the things that are part of the Christian tradition.<sup>25</sup>

McLaren's point about original sin is that it destroys the love relationship between God and humanity. If one believes in the original sin idea then how does one know that they are loved by God and are going to heaven? McLaren believes there are better views of sin than using the idea of original sin. It can be a sickness that God wants to heal. McLaren is pushing the Christian to think that our idea of original sin does not appear in the Bible, but it is a construct within the Christian tradition. Once again McLaren wants Christians not to throw everything they have learned about sin out the window, McLaren wants Christians to go back to Scripture and make sure the views Christians hold to are

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<sup>25</sup> Lilian Kwon, "Interview: Brian McLaren on Sin, Hell, New Kind of Christianity, Christian Post, [www.christianpost.com/news/interview-brian-mclaren-on-sin-hell-new-kind-of-christian](http://www.christianpost.com/news/interview-brian-mclaren-on-sin-hell-new-kind-of-christian) (Accessed on 9/25/14)

found in the Bible and not just tradition. McLaren wants Christians to redefine what sin really is.

Doug Pagitt is pastor at the Emerging congregation known as Solomon's Porch in Minneapolis. "Sin is dis-integration, while God's intention is integration. When participation is reduced, Christians are more likely to disintegrate than to become fully integrated in the things of God. Ironically, I think that too often the church's desire to be righteous has led to the prevention of people's participation."<sup>26</sup> Pagitt's understanding of sin as dis-integration is worth some thought. Disintegration is when humans sin and walk away from God. Every time Christians do not clothe the naked, feed the hungry, or love all, this is disintegration. Integration is when Christians do the things in which God commands of his people. It is being in relationship with him and community with each other. Pagitt reflects, "God's intention for individuals for collective humanity is to bring together full integration of God's agenda with our world, 'Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,' (Matthew 6:10). This was a prayer of integration and participation."<sup>27</sup>

Pagitt further explains his view of sin. "I certainly believe in sin and forgiveness, but both are not built around a Greek judicial model of separation, rather around a relational call to return to life in full agreement and rhythm with God."<sup>28</sup> This view that Pagitt espouses is a lot like other emerging leaders in this stream of Christianity. Some

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<sup>26</sup> Robert Webber, ed. *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches: Five Perspectives* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 132. The above quote is taken from the chapter entitled, *The Emerging Church and Embodied Theology*, by: Doug Pagitt.

<sup>27</sup> Doug Pagitt, *The Emerging Church and Embodied Theology*, 132.

<sup>28</sup> Doug Pagitt, *The Emerging Church and Embodied Theology*, 134.

reject the Greek judicial way of understanding sin and look at how humans get back to the rhythm of God. This is not to say that sin is absent, rather, instead of focusing on sin, humans need to focus on how getting back to reconcile with God.

Pagitt again describes sin, “So God does not move away in the midst of our sin, but he moves closer. Sin is atoned for and Christians are again integrated into the life of God. My understanding of this atonement is shaped more by ideas similar to those prevalent during the time of the biblical story than it is by the Greco-Roman understanding that influenced some of the early church’s understanding.”<sup>29</sup> Pagitt is stressing the point that when humans sin God does not flee away from his creation. He moves closer to his creation. God wants to be close to those he loves, not distant. God is present in the midst of sin. Pagitt is also pointing out that some conceptions of sin are not from Scripture but from Greco-Roman thought. Pagitt disregards those and focuses on the Biblical stories of sin instead. In Emerging theology sin is seen as something that affects all of humanity and creation. However, instead of God fleeing away from this creation because he hates sin, God gravitates towards the creation in the midst of sin. For emerging folks, sin keeps humans from integrating to the fullness of life in God. Instead of God being wrathful at his creation for sinning, God is with his creation in our darkest hours.

Another interesting take on sin in the emerging tradition is spoken by Spencer Burke and Barry Taylor in their text entitled, *A Heretic’s Guide to Eternity*. In this text both Burke and Taylor push the modern ideas of sin, “The concept of Jesus as a sinless

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<sup>29</sup> Doug Pagitt, *The Emerging Church and Embodied Theology*, 134.

individual permeates Christian theology. But was Jesus really sinless? He certainly seems to have violated a number of rules and interpretations of the law that his contemporaries regarded as huge sins. He violated the Sabbath excused his disciples of their violations. He repeatedly talked with the unclean, the unlovely, and the unrepentant.”<sup>30</sup> According to Burke and Taylor, Jesus was sinless when it came to God and his commands. Conversely, Jesus did break certain customary norms and his disciples did as well. For Burke and Taylor both see this as Jesus not being a sinner, but understand that in the context Christ was seen as sinful for breaking customs and religious teachings. Jesus repeatedly associated and broke bread with the sinners of his day. Does this make Jesus a sinner in the eyes of the law?

Burke and Taylor conclude, “Jesus may not have sinned against God, but he certainly committed sins against the religion of his day. Jesus lived his sinless life in grace-and that grace often transgressed the moral codes of religion. The challenge for his followers of Jesus is to reframe the story and offer society a new understanding of exactly what grace is and what it means for all.”<sup>31</sup> Burke and Taylor are describing that Jesus did not sin directly against God, but he willfully broke certain religious and customary laws that were oppressive or against his kingdom. Call Jesus a revolutionary; he took the Kingdom view instead of the cultural and religious view. Jesus was not sinful, but the world of his time may have thought that he was.

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<sup>30</sup> Spencer Burke and Barry Taylor, *A Heretic's Guide to Eternity* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 65.

<sup>31</sup> Spencer Burke and Barry Taylor, *A Heretic's Guide to Eternity*, 65.

The Emerging view has many great voices that shed some understanding on what sin is. Sin is what happens when Christians disintegrate ourselves from God and his teachings and live a life away from him. For many in the Emerging stream might not like to use terminology such as ‘sin’ but rather the term Pagitt uses, disintegration. Emerging theology is also trying to go back to the source of truth, the Bible for definitions of sin, not Christian tradition or popular ideas of sin. Emerging theology is turning to the ancient to find the teachings of sin and how to live a life the way God wants us to.

*United Church of Christ Voice*

Reinhold Niebuhr, the brother of H. Richard Niebuhr, was also a force in twentieth century theology and ecclesiology. Like his brother, Reinhold Niebuhr was also from the German Reformed tradition which merged into the UCC. So much of the Niebuhr’s thinking is still in the minds of most in the United Church of Christ. “The Christian reading of human nature as sinful has analogies with Greek tragedy, literary classics, and some social-political philosophies.”<sup>32</sup> Niebuhr points out that much of Christianity’s conception of sin is entrenched in literature, and even Greek tragedies. This is not meant to assume that all of humanities conception of sin is influenced by this. Some of our ideas of sin have been influenced by other sources. “Most Americans (even many Christians) view sin as antiquated, defeatist, and psychologically unhealthy. Yet an unfazed Niebuhr insists on human nature as sinful. For him human pride, excessive self-preoccupation resulting in moral blindness, is empirical, rooted in the facts of experience.

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<sup>32</sup> Richard Crouter, *Reinhold Niebuhr: On Politics, Religion, And Christian Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 14.

His signature insight holds that the morality of groups (especially of nations) is even less virtuous than that of individuals.”<sup>33</sup>

Niebuhr believes many individuals view of sin whether Christian or not is unhealthy. Niebuhr considers human nature sinful, but one should not have a defeatist attitude toward it. If Christians have an unhealthy view of sin and assume everything is sinful that can be psychologically insalubrious. Niebuhr believes that sin is moral blindness and human pride, but his signature insight is that the morality of groups whether that be nations, religions or politicians, are less virtuous than the individuals themselves. Niebuhr labors the idea that corporate sin is in some ways just as harmful as or worse than individual sin.

Niebuhr expounds this idea of sin being corporate. “Conscience works less well collectively. Compared to individuals, a group is less free to self-correct its morality. It follows from this idea that self-interested righteousness and imperialism of a nation, driven by cabals of power, are even more pronounced than the same tendencies in individuals.”<sup>34</sup> Niebuhr states that as a nation or corporate body it is harder to correct its error in morality. When an individual sins or is immoral, it is easier to correct. It should be noted that Niebuhr is not saying that all countries are imperialists, or empires. Niebuhr is simply stating that nations and corporate entities have a harder time correcting sin or immorality than the individual.

Niebuhr examines how sin is perceived in current contexts within Christianity.

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<sup>33</sup> Crouter, *Reinhold Niebuhr: On Politics, Religion, and Christian Faith*, 14-15.

<sup>34</sup> Crouter, *Reinhold Niebuhr: On Politics, Religion, and Christian Faith*, 15.

Among present day Christians confessions of sin are largely confined to conservative evangelicals and to the liturgical celebrations of Catholics, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians. Sin is anathema to most liberals and progressive Christian groups. As historians of theology know, the liturgies, creeds, and teachings of Eastern Orthodoxy do not dwell as much on sin as do the traditions of the Western church.<sup>35</sup>

Niebuhr pushes the idea that many denominations' conception of sin as an individual act is not how it is always understood. Not all denominations or streams of Christianity teach on individual sin, the Eastern Orthodox church does not dwell on sin as much as the Western church. Niebuhr is making the point that most Christians in liberal or progressive Christianity are not caught up in the concept of sin. These groups know that sin exists; however, progressive and liberal Christians do not get enslaved in explaining sin or being bound up in it. Liberal and progressive Christians believe in the idea of sin. Niebuhr knows this to be true, just like the Eastern Orthodox Church. Many in the liberal and progressive streams of faith do not put as much importance on sin. This allows the church to better show God's love to a hurting world.

Niebuhr further explains sin as, "The idea of 'Adam's fall' with universal consequences for humanity entered the theological lexicon in Paul's letter to the Romans. The doctrine that arose in the religious-political crises of late antiquity and was brought to prominence through Paul was then given classical shape in the theology of Augustine."<sup>36</sup> Niebuhr is making the point that most Christians have a conceptualization of sin. This concept of sin is grounded more in the teachings of Paul and Augustine than in anyone else. It does not mean that sin is not important to talk about or study. It means that sin is a hard concept to grasp and many traditions view it differently. One cannot be

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<sup>35</sup> Crouter, *Reinhold Niebuhr: On Politics, Religion, and Christian Faith*, 53.

<sup>36</sup> Crouter, *Reinhold Niebuhr: On Politics, Religion, and Christian Faith*, 54.



entirely sure if this is a typical United Church of Christ stance, the UCC is highly ecumenical. There is a very good chance that this is a favorable view of sin.

Both the Emerging and United Church of Christ streams of faith have a similar view of sin. Sin is something that disengages one from God. Christians leave ourselves open for evil to happen, and disintegration to occur. Emerging and UCC both view sin as individual as well as corporate, and even at times both concur that corporate sin is worse than individual sin. McLaren in the Emerging stream does not like to use the modern idea of “sin,” or “original sin.” McLaren does not give a blueprint for what his definition is, rather, he urges Christians to get to a basic understanding of the sin found in Scripture. In the United Church of Christ tradition with the words of Niebuhr one can see that his view of sin is grounded in the classical view of sin. Niebuhr also believes that corporate sin is worse than individual sin. Both traditions have an idea and understanding of what sin is. Both of these streams do not stress sin in their services, but both make known that sin is very real in the world and in all of humanity. The Emerging and UCC both view sin as anything that separates Christians from God. But even in sin, God is with his people. God never leaves his people. For Emerging and the UCC there are many similarities in regard to the idea and understanding of sin.

## **Prayer**

### *Emerging Voice*

Prayer is important for Christians regardless of denomination. Prayer connects Christians to God. Prayer is the sum of all of one's emotions and petitions to God. Tony Jones an Emerging church leader has written a short but fascinating book entitled, *Pray*,

in which Jones very eloquently leads the reader into an understanding of prayer. For the scope of this project the researcher will not go into great depth on the effects of prayer. The researcher wants to better understand what prayer is and how many in the Emerging/Emergent streams understand prayer.

Jones quotes Luis of Granada, a sixteenth century Christian spiritual writer from Spain, to portray what prayer is. “Prayer; properly speaking, is a petition which we make to God for the things which pertain to our salvation, but it is also taken in another, broader sense to mean any raising of the heart to God.”<sup>37</sup> For Emerging Christians prayer is raising one’s heart to God. It is part of faith, Christians pray. For Emerging Christians no prayer is frivolous and no prayer is neglected.

Prayer is a necessity in a Christian’s life. However one does not need to spend hours in prayer to hear from God. Little prayers or long prayers are acceptable to God. There have been many prayers spoken over the millennia since Christ ascended to heaven. Throughout these years churches and theologians have written prayers to be spoken quietly by oneself or by the church. Below is one such prayer that people have spoken together; “And now to him who can on your feet, standing tall in his bright presence, fresh and celebrating, to our one God, our only savior, through Jesus Christ, our Master, be glory, majesty, strength, and rule before all time, and now, and to the end of all time” (Jude 24-25).

Emerging theology’s view of prayer is synonymous with much of the other denominations within Christianity. Most denominations pray in some sort of capacity.

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<sup>37</sup> Tony Jones, *Prayer* (Colorado Springs: Think Books, 14), 2003.

How one prays whether it be more liturgical or a deep seeded prayer from the heart is not important. Emerging theology is rooted in prayer. Prayer is vital in faith; it brings one closer to God.

*United Church of Christ Voice*

Authors and church innovators Phil Snider and Emily Bowen are both ordained in the Disciples of Christ denomination. (Disciples of Christ is a denomination very close to the United Church of Christ and has ecumenical standing with the UCC.) They run an Emerging type of church gathering in their hometown. Snider and Bowen with the help of some others share a very powerful understanding of prayer.

When I use the word *prayer*, for example, I understand it to be first and foremost a verb, an alternative form of discourse; an activity through which God who calls us to an alternative reality is constructed. Prayer (like the work of poetry and fine art) imagines or construes the alternative reality in which God dwells; prayer speaks into being. Prayer relies upon imagination, where, of course, the Holy Spirit lives, breathes, and enjoys.<sup>38</sup>

When one prays an alternate reality is constructed. The person is having a discourse with God. Prayers are also like a piece of fine art, crafted by our minds, hearts and emotions towards God the creator of everything. When one prays, the Spirit is there dwelling with Christians and guiding the prayer to the Almighty.

Scholar Walter Brueggemann who has written extensively on theology sheds some light on prayer. In the text, *Disruptive Grace: Reflections on God, Scripture, and the Church*, Brueggemann describes at how difficult prayer can be at times.

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<sup>38</sup> Emily Bowen and Phil Snider, *Toward a Hopeful Future: Why the Emergent Church is Good News for Mainline Congregations* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2010), 178.

I will show that in this psalm<sup>39</sup> the human person is himself/herself having an ongoing internal conversation, a conversation conducted before God. My own experience of such conversation is that, during the day when I am awake and in control, I can give expression to my life in a single voice. At night however, when I am defenseless, all the other voices sound, and the honoring of them becomes the condition of my humanness.<sup>40</sup>

Brueggemann is exposing his own limitations. Brueggemann is a United Church of Christ ordained minister; he can only speak for himself not the whole denomination. Brueggemann states that during the day it is easier to focus on that single voice in a person's soul, it is easier to focus on God. At night other voices distract from a person's communion with God. Brueggemann suggests that focusing for prayer maybe difficult at times. It may be the other voices one hears that distract. Brueggemann's words on this topic are not solely for the UCC or Emerging groups. Distraction affects all within Christianity.

According to Caldwell and Preston, the two young United Church of Christ pastors prayer is, "intimate communication with God and can be used before a meal, at bedtime, during a worship service, or any time the need or opportunity arises. Silent and spoken prayers are both okay and may be used liberally throughout the day. Prayer is also taking time to listen to what God is saying to his creation. Spontaneous prayer is often best."<sup>41</sup> Caldwell and Preston explain the different types of prayer as: prayers of supplication (requests for God's help), contrition (in which sin is confessed and

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<sup>39</sup> Brueggemann here is referring to Psalm 35.

<sup>40</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Disruptive Grace: Reflections On God, Scripture, and the Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 210-211.

<sup>41</sup> Quinn G. Caldwell and Curtis J. Preston, *The Unofficial Handbook of the United Church of Christ* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 2011), 79.

forgiveness requested), intercession (on behalf of others), and as well as others. Books of personal prayer, hymnals, and devotionals often contain helpful, prewritten prayers.<sup>42</sup>

Caldwell and Preston do not give an exhaustive list of all the right ways a person should pray. However both are giving helpful tips for people in the United Church of Christ to enter into an attitude of prayer. Caldwell and Preston explain that there are many different types of prayers a Christian can say in church or by themselves. Many of the prayers listed here are spoken and practiced in many UCC churches today, such as: prayers for the people, the Lord's Prayer, and other liturgical prayers. Prayer is vital in the growth of the UCC and its congregation.

Much like the Emerging church, mainline churches including the UCC view prayer as an imaginative act. Prayer is not an archaic thing Christians do when Christians want God to answer a petition. Prayer is connecting with God almighty, the Holy Spirit. The prayer comes alive. Prayer should center all Christians in their lives and faith journey. Emergent and United Church of Christ alike can use prayer as an imaginative way to connect with Christ and the Holy Spirit. May prayer shape the vision of the Kingdom. Within both Emerging and UCC traditions prayer is of vital importance to the church and to a person's faith journey. Both traditions practice prayer in services and gatherings. All prayer is important to God. Whether those prayers are spoken communally, or private. These two streams of faith view prayer as an imaginative act, using one's mind and heart to connect with God. The only major difference is that in many Emerging churches prayers from early church fathers or other people in Christian

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<sup>42</sup> Caldwell and Preston, *The Unofficial Handbook of the United Church of Christ*, 79.

history are spoken. In the United Church of Christ these prayers are current and some are written by the denomination. The UCC relies heavily on the creeds to guide prayer(s) in the service. Emerging and UCC alike align themselves with the belief that prayer is the crux of faith and one's spiritual journey.

## **Salvation**

### *Emerging Voice*

Kevin Corcoran speaking on behalf of Emerging theology states, "Many in the Emerging conversation find what one likes to call, *Christocentric Universalism*, the belief that eventually all human beings are reconciled to God in Christ, extremely attractive. Some, sadly, may first need to experience the torments of hell, but eventually love will win, God will win, and all will be saved."<sup>43</sup> Within the Emerging tradition one can see that salvation is had by all. God's love has won over evil and in the end Christ is the victor over all evil. In this view of *Christocentric Universalism* there is a sense of purgatorial torment. Certain individuals may need to be punished for the sins or evils they committed. After purgatory they would be allowed into eternity with God. Numerous people outside the walls of the emerging tradition do not like such an open view of salvation. Many want to pigeon-hole the Spirit and its movement within creation. *Christocentric Universalism* is in many ways a viable ideology in regard to salvation.

Corcoran points out that in this belief of *Christocentric Universalism* God's love is all encompassing. All will be saved at the end of time. Some humans may need to be separated from God at first either in hell or a purgatorial state. In the end all creation will

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<sup>43</sup> Scot McKnight, Peter Rollins, Kevin Corcoran and Jason Clark, *Church in the Present Tense: A Candid Look at What's Emerging* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2011), 69.

be reconciled with God. Emerging Theology does not want to be controversial it is trying to encourage believers to reexamine the doctrines that Christianity has clung to.

Christianity's view on salvation needs to be explored. *Universalism* is such an attractive piece of theology in Emerging thought.

Emergent scholar and professor Scot McKnight sheds some light on salvation.

The Reformation created a 'salvation' culture instead of a 'gospel' culture, and in the process we have lost central features of meaning of gospel and reshaped everything, including gospel, through the lens of soteriology. As a result, gospel now means, 'plan of salvation.' The plan of salvation, I am also suggesting, is the entailment of the gospel, an articulation of how it happens, but the gospel itself was not originally the plan of salvation.<sup>44</sup>

McKnight contends that the reformation created a culture obsessed with salvation instead of one based on the gospel and the message of Christ within those pages. In this salvation culture Christians have lost many key meanings of the gospel message. Certain Christian streams of faith have been obsessed with "getting people saved," or coming up with a "plan of salvation," rather than seeing the stories and message of Christ in the gospel message. McKnight is asking Christians to re-evaluate what it means to be saved.

Salvation is important but there is more to the life of the Christian than just being saved.

Brian McLaren as mentioned before is a leader in the Emerging conversation.

McLaren's view on Salvation is multifaceted but very important. McLaren explains,

I used to believe that Jesus' primary focus was on saving *me* as an individual and on saving other "me's" as individuals. For that reason I often spoke of Jesus as my "personal savior," I urged others to believe Jesus the same way. I still believe Jesus is vitally interested in saving me and you individually by judging us, by forgiving us of our wrongs, and teaching us to live in a better way. But I fear that

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<sup>44</sup> Scot McKnight, Peter Rollins, Kevin Corcoran, Jason Clark, *Church in the Present Tense: A Candid Look at What's Emerging*. 132.

“personal salvation” has for too many Christians have become another consumer product, and Christianity has become its marketing program.<sup>45</sup>

McLaren believes there is such a concept as “personal salvation,” however he shies away from this idea. McLaren believes that the idea of “personal salvation” is too restrictive and narrow. Salvation is not just for oneself. When you follow Christ you are part of a new way of life and a new Kingdom that Christ has in store.

McLaren further explains his view of salvation. “No wonder many people feel that ‘accepting Jesus as a personal savior’ could make them a worse person more self-centered and less concerned about justice on earth because of a preoccupation with forgiveness in heaven. Again, although I believe in Jesus as my personal savior, I am not a Christian for that reason. I am a Christian because I believe that Jesus is the savior of the whole world.”<sup>46</sup> McLaren states his opinion that when someone becomes a Christian by this “personal savior” idea they are missing the point. Christians do not understand what it means to be here on earth and the duties Christians have on earth. For McLaren this “personal savior” idea focused in many ways just on heaven. Christians’ salvation should be worked out by doing the things that scripture has told Christians to accomplish here on earth.

McLaren’s idea of salvation results after carefully examining his own life and his years in the ministry. McLaren and others in the Emerging streams of Christianity are not asking Christians to get rid of their ideas of salvation. McLaren asks Christians to reexamine what it means to know and follow Christ. McLaren believes that salvation is

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<sup>45</sup> Brian D. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 107.

<sup>46</sup> McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 109.



important and that Christians need to have a personal relationship with God, however, it goes deeper than that. As Christians our faith should be evident to others and transformative for the rest of the world.

*United Church of Christ Voice*

Caldwell and Preston comment on salvation for the United Church of Christ.

Many religions are built on the idea that the more closely people follow the religious rules or the more morally people behave, the better God will like them, and the better God likes them, the greater their chances of 'getting into heaven.' While there is nothing wrong with living a moral life or obeying God's laws, that kind of behavior has little to do with the salvation God offers others. You don't need to be a follower of Jesus Christ for that.<sup>47</sup>

Caldwell and Preston make a very good point. Salvation is much more than obeying rules or being a morally good person. This does not make someone a Christian; it makes you a moral nice person.

Caldwell and Preston further explain their view of salvation.

Christianity, on the other hand, says that out of pure love God was willing to sacrifice everything, even his only Son to save you forever from sin, death, and all your false gods. Since God has already done everything needed to secure your salvation through Jesus, you never have to do a single thing to earn God's favor, no matter how bad you are at following the rules. Still, being saved takes some getting used to.<sup>48</sup>

Caldwell and Preston are quite right. God sent his Son to die so that all of humanity has the chance to be saved. This is good news indeed. It does not matter if a person messes

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<sup>47</sup> Quinn G. Caldwell, Curtis J. Preston, *The Unofficial Handbook of the United Church of Christ* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 2011), 114.

<sup>48</sup> Caldwell and Preston, *The Unofficial Handbook of the United Church of Christ*, 114.

up; God's love is so powerful that it encompasses all. What more could Christians and humans hope for than a loving God?

Caldwell and Preston give some brief hints that can help strengthen salvation. It is not an exhaustive list, but short and to the point. "Get with the word grace. Grace means that God gives you all the good stuff, forgiveness, salvation, love, and life, with all its ups and downs, as totally free gifts. Keep an eye out for situations in which you can use this word, and then use it liberally. You'll soon begin to see God's grace all around you."<sup>49</sup> Many people scoff at the idea of grace. However, grace is what saves; grace brings Christians and others together. Grace is as important to Christianity as believing in God. This viewpoint on God's grace is unpopular among many Christians. It was unpopular among the church reformers five hundred years ago. Be aware that once you adopt it you will come under fire and be tempted to lapse back into the old idea.<sup>50</sup> Grace is indescribable. It is something God freely gives to all of humanity. God gives it freely. Christianity should return this act of grace to others.

H. Richard Niebuhr who is a figurehead in Protestant theology and very influential in the United Church of Christ denomination eloquently gives some very important observations on salvation. These words from Niebuhr come from a sermon he gave.

The wisdom of being saved, however, is not only one which we must appropriate intellectually. It is something that needs to reach into our emotional and unconscious life. For all the wisdom of the perishing is not a purely intellectual wisdom. It is based on deep, dark affairs which lie beyond the reach of our

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<sup>49</sup> Caldwell and Preston, *The Unofficial Handbook of the United Church of Christ*, 114.

<sup>50</sup> Caldwell and Preston, *The Unofficial Handbook of the United Church of Christ*, 116.

conceptual thinking. And so must the wisdom of the cross enter into the deepest part of our personal life where it can and does bring about the change in the affairs and lives and hopes of the living, dying, rising self.<sup>51</sup>

Niebuhr in his sermon notes that the wisdom of the cross or the salvation in Christ permeates into one's mind and heart. This makes the self rise up. It is no longer dying. Niebuhr simply states that the cross of Christ in ways that are beyond conceptual thinking saves humanity. It brings forth new life, not death.

The Emerging stream of Christianity and the United Church of Christ have some congruency in their ideas and conception of salvation. Both of these traditions tend to shy away from the idea and notion of "personal salvation." For both of these traditions believing in God does not make one a Christian. A Christian is a transforming agent in a world that needs love and God. Personal salvation is not outright rejected, however. It is stressed as not the only thing that makes one a Christian. For both of these traditions, grace plays a big role. It is by the grace of God that all are saved. God takes humans and makes his creation whole again. Christians and humanity may not understand grace fully, but when God offers it through salvation one must take it. One difference between the two traditions is that the Emerging stream tends to be more open in its idea of universal reconciliation of all people. In the United Church of Christ tradition some might believe this, but it is not often spoke about. Emerging and UCC traditions find the cross of Christ vital and valuable. Salvation is more than personal it is communal and transformative. Let all of creation rejoice in the words of the apostle Paul in Ephesians, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one may boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9).

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<sup>51</sup> William Stacy Johnson, ed. *H. Richard Niebuhr: Theology, History, and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 206-7.

In conclusion, this chapter has been an exploration into some of the minds and ideas of Emerging and United Church of Christ voices. These five theological ideas are only a small sketch of what can be explored in Christianity, but they are important nonetheless. In this research many of the views are congruent between the two traditions with only some minor differences. It is true that these two different faith streams are more similar than different. These traditions can work well together to build the church as a place of inclusivity and unity.

CHAPTER FOUR:  
PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND RESEARCH DESIGN

**Data & Methodology**

The research in chapter four is qualitative in nature and consists of four face to face interviews. Two interviews were conducted with United Church of Christ pastors, and two with Emerging pastors. The researcher collected information from the interviews as well as interactions in church services and reviewed any relevant church literature.

The researcher believes the information gathered at interview was the most useful for this project. The openness of the interviews has far outweighed the other forms of data collection. The researcher of this project gave a list of questions to the interviewee at least a week before the interview. This allowed the person interviewed adequate time to prepare his or hers answers.

The researcher found the following helpful when interviewing others: “During the interview, stay to the questions, complete the interview within a specific time, be respectful and courteous, and offer few questions or advice.”<sup>1</sup> Following the advice from Creswell the researcher stayed to the questions. Ask the prepared questions and let the interviewee talk for as long as they want. “This last point may be the most important and

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<sup>1</sup> John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research: Choosing Among the Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2007), 134.

it is a reminder of how a good interviewer is a good listener rather than a frequent speaker.”<sup>2</sup> When interviewing someone, do not interrupt or give an opinion. Let the person being interviewed speak without interruption so everything that needs to be said, can be. “Also, record information from the interview in the event that the audio recording does not work. Recognize that quickly inscribed notes may be incomplete and partial because of the difficulty of asking questions and writing answers at the same time.”<sup>3</sup> This aforementioned quote is exactly how the researcher completed the interviews. A multiple approach to recording data is very important.

For this project the researcher used the open question interview technique. Cash and Stewart describe this as, “Open questions are expansive, often specifying only a topic, and allow the respondent freedom in determining the amount and kind of information they provide.”<sup>4</sup> This technique allows the interviewee the openness and time to answer freely. Open questions have advantages, over other questions. “Open questions encourage respondents to talk and determine the nature and amount of information they give. Lengthy answers reveal what respondents think is important and motivate them to volunteer important information.”<sup>5</sup> Open questions allow the respondent time to give pertinent answers to the question. Lengthy answers are seen as a positive not a negative. “Open questions communicate interest and trust in the respondent’s judgment, are usually

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<sup>2</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research: Choosing Among the Five Approaches*, 134.

<sup>3</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among the Five Approaches*, 134.

<sup>4</sup> William B. Cash JR. & Charles J. Stewart, *Interviewing: Principles and Practices* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2006), 48.

<sup>5</sup> Cash JR, Stewart, *Interviewing: Principles and Practices*, 48.

easier to answer, and pose less threat. Longer answers are likely to reveal a respondent's level of knowledge, uncertainty, and intensity of feelings, perceptions, and prejudices.”<sup>6</sup>

The researcher is confident that the interviewees have been open and honest. The purpose of these questions was not to see who was right or wrong, but how pastors in the UCC and Emerging churches think about such topics. The researcher has gathered the data and written the findings from each interview. He is confident that the outcome has been fruitful and may lead to a more robust ecclesial conversation.

The researcher asked each pastor a series of eight questions. They gave their responses to each questions and proceeded to the next until the interview was complete. The researcher took considerable time to reflect and formulate these eight questions so the data collected could be strong. These eight questions should be understood as just a sampling of those that could have been asked. Careful thought and consideration went into crafting the interview questions. In the proceeding paragraphs the researcher explained why he chose these questions and the relevance they have on the project.

The participant's first question was, “How did you get into the UCC/Emerging church?” This question lays the foundation for why these pastors are where they are. It also gives the readers a brief introduction of the participant. Context is foundational, knowing where these pastors come from and their background is crucial.

The second question was, “What is your view of the trajectory of the UCC/Emerging church at present?” This question challenged the interviewees to think about their tradition and gauge where they thought it was headed. Often time's pastors

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<sup>6</sup> Cash JR, Stewart, *Interviewing: Principles and Practices*, 48.

become so out of touch with their own denomination that they are on the outside looking in. This question asked the person interviewed to think in depth about their denomination.

The third question was, “What is your opinion on unity, as well as church unity?” This question was used to address the problem statement questioning whether people and pastors can work across denominational lines toward unity. Unity is often talked about in church and seminary but not practiced. The people interviewed were asked to give honest and transparent answers on their feelings of unity and church unity.

Question four was, “Can the church be a place of unity and acceptance?” This question asked the participants to contemplate if their churches or denominations are a place of unity and acceptance. Part of being a church is reconciling itself to others who disagree with the church. The researcher was assured that the interviewees have been open to unity and creating an accepting church.

Question five is crucial to this project. “Can the church be a place of reconciliation? If so, why?” The researcher believes the church needs to be a place of reconciliation with other denominations and a place of acceptance. The interviewees were asked to think about reconciliation and give their thoughts on their churches and denominations.

Question six asked, “As a minister in the UCC/Emerging church, what is your view and practice of the Eucharist?” A portion of the problem statement studied what pastors in these two denominations believe on certain theological topics. The Eucharist is a vitally important practice in the Christian faith. Comparing the similarities and differences of those interviewed is important.



Question seven asked the interviewees, “As a UCC/Emerging minister, what is your view on salvation?” For many in the church, salvation is one of the most polarizing questions that can be asked. The point of this question is to simply compare the interviewee’s beliefs about salvation. Then use the findings to see if there are similarities between the answers and the two faith streams.

The last question asked was, “Can denominations work together even though they have vastly different theological viewpoints?” This question was asked because the researcher thought the answers would be of utmost importance. Christians are urged to put differing theological viewpoints aside and focus on the shared similarities. The interviewees gave answers showing Christians can put differences aside to be a more loving and accepting church body.

The interviewees are four pastors selected by the researcher. Two pastors are from the UCC and two from the Emerging stream. A brief biographical sketch to acquaint the reader with the pastors and their answers in the next chapter.

The first pastor interviewed was Bob Griggs. Griggs grew up on the east coast and was brought up in the UCC denomination. Griggs has been in the ministry for over forty years with churches in small towns, suburban, and urban areas. Griggs informed the researcher that his time as a pastor has made him aware of the importance of a progressive theology. Griggs appreciates the UCC’s progressive theology and its stance on social justice issues. For several years Griggs has been an interim pastor for churches in the Midwest. Prior to his interim work, he was pastor at a UCC church in Minneapolis for over twenty-five years.

The second UCC pastor wished to remain anonymous. For the sake of clarity the researcher will identify this pastor as PUCC2. PUCC2's early childhood was spent in the Assemblies of God church which is a conservative Pentecostal denomination. PUCC2's father went to Bethel Seminary and while at seminary was asked to pastor a small rural UCC church in the Midwest. PUCC2 has been part of the UCC denomination since they were ten years old. When deciding where to go for school they decided to go to a more liberal and ecumenical seminary. PUCC2 is a lead minister at a large UCC church. PUCC2 has been a part of the UCC for over thirty years and feels at home in such a loving and accepting denomination.

The first Emerging pastor interviewed was Russell Rathbun. Rathbun was raised in St. Paul, Minnesota and co-pastors House of Mercy church in St. Paul. Rathbun assisted in the start of House of Mercy over nineteen years ago. Rathbun has an evangelical background and chose to start House of Mercy with some friends who like himself, were disheartened by church involvement in the community. Rathbun loves his community and wishes to do everything to make sure Christ's love is shown to all.

The second Emerging voice interviewed was Jay Bakker. Bakker pastors a church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The church meets in an adjacent theater room at a bar/bowling alley. Bakker's church may have ten to fifteen people per service, but it is recorded and uploaded to the internet. Bakker's online footprint for his church is substantial. Bakker is the son of former televangelists Jim and Tammy-Faye Bakker. Jim and Tammy-Faye were reared in the Assemblies of God denomination and started the 700 Club on television and a ministry called PTL (Praise the Lord). After years of questioning his faith and Christianity, Bakker has been an important voice in the

Emerging church. Bakker has written a book about his faith journey as well as one on faith and doubt. Bakker's voice has crossed over from conservative Christianity to liberal Christianity. Bakker's goal is not to be an Emerging pastor. Bakker's mission is to aid those who need help and point them to God.

In closing, the methodology for this next chapter was the interview process. The researcher has interviewed the four pastors and will decipher if there are similarities between the two denominations. The questions will be recorded and relayed in the data section of the following chapter. The researcher is confident that the data collected will shed a positive light onto the need for churches and people to work with one another.

The approach of qualitative research that has been undertaken is the narrative approach. "Narrative research has many forms, uses a variety of analytic practices and is rooted in different social and humanities disciplines. As a method, it begins with experiences as expressed in lived and told stories individuals."<sup>7</sup> The answers the interviewee's will give will be told in many ways as stories from their own life. The theological questions are less narrative in nature, however, most of the responses have been told in a narrative form.

Analysis of the data after the interview is the next step in the research process. "Analysis of interview data cannot be completely straightforward or cut and dry, but it is still necessary to understand what to do when you reach this phase in the research. The

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<sup>7</sup> John W, Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among the Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publishing, 2007), 53-54.

most obvious way to analyze interview data is content analysis.”<sup>8</sup> The researcher has done content analysis in the following chapter. It is not as cut and dry as some may perceive, it is the most obvious way to analyze all the data that is before the researcher.

The researcher has interviewed the four pastors as previously listed in aforementioned paragraphs. The researcher has used a narrative approach to the interview process. With the data collected, content analysis was the next logical step. Finally, the researcher with all the data collected made constant comparisons. Constant comparisons mean, “The analytic process of comparing different pieces of data for similarities and differences.”<sup>9</sup> In chapter five of this project the researcher has gathered data from the interviewee’s and has made constant comparisons to see if their answers are similar or different in nature.

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<sup>8</sup> Bruce L. Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods: For the Social Sciences* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon Publishing, 2009), 147.

<sup>9</sup> Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research 3e* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publishing, 2008), 65.

CHAPTER FIVE:  
ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

**Introduction**

In this chapter the researcher has interviewed four pastors in the Twin Cities metro area. Two of these pastors are from the United Church of Christ and two from the Emerging church stream. The goal of this chapter is not to list everything said by these pastors is understood within these faith streams. This chapter will give a brief sketch of some innovative pastor's beliefs about certain topics. It is very important to hear these views. Whether these pastors agree with one another is not the purpose. The goal is to gather information to see if these pastors have similar theological leanings. Working toward ecclesial unity is still the crux of this project. However it is essential that these pastors work toward a common goal of building the kingdom of God. The church has been a place of discord and hypocrisy for many. At this pivotal time in church development working together despite differences is necessary.

The researcher conducted four interviews at various times. These four pastors were given as much time as needed to answer the questions openly and honestly. The researcher formalized a set of questions for the pastoral participants. The researcher has listed each question and followed it with all four pastors' answers. This was done to create a fluidity through the project. The researcher has asked all four participants if they

wanted to sign a waiver to partake in this interview. All four declined and made it clear that they were fine with me as the researcher transcribing their answers. One pastor wanted me to keep them anonymous, so in respecting their wishes the researcher did.

### **Question on Denominational Background**

The first question was, “*How did you get into the United Church of Christ or Emerging church?*” Bob Griggs a UCC pastor stated. “I was born into the UCC; I was raised at St. John’s Congregational Church in Richmond, Virginia.” Griggs feels the UCC’s theology and views of social justice create the best environment for him to pastor and work. For Griggs, being raised in the UCC has kept him grounded and moving forward in his spiritual journey.

The second United Church of Christ pastor wishes to remain anonymous, and will be referred to as PUCC2. PUCC 2 grew up in the UCC. She explains that her father grew up in an Assemblies of God background, went and graduated from Bethel Seminary. While at seminary this pastor’s father was asked if he was interested in pastoring a small town UCC church. Without much familiarity with this tradition he said yes. PUCC2’s parents were looking for a church tradition that was more open and progressive albeit even more liberal. The family found it within the UCC. While looking for educational schooling PUCC2 chose a more liberal, ecumenical seminary that would be conducive to their theology. PUCC2 has been in the UCC since they were ten years old, and is obviously still part of this tradition today.

The third pastor interviewed was Russell Rathbun, co-pastor at House of Mercy Church in St. Paul, Minnesota. Rathbun wants to be clear that House of Mercy is not an

Emerging church. Some might contend that House of Mercy is an Emerging church however the church does not claim to be an Emerging ministry. Rathbun finds humor in the irony that a lack of set doctrine makes many label any church Emerging. Rathbun contends it was started nineteen years ago before the Emerging movement started. Rathbun and the others who started House of Mercy set out to create a place where all could find mercy. Rathbun and the three others who started it were from a more evangelical background. All four thought their churches were not places of radical mercy like the gospel describes. Rathbun stated, “All of the leaders wanted a church built on integrity and mercy.”

Rathbun shared how his church was formed and the people who helped pave the way for this ministry. “Spirit Garage was a ministry early on that was opening people to a new way of church here in the Twin Cities.” Spirit Garage helped Rathbun in his early planning of House of Mercy. “Tony Jones and Doug Pagitt were starting to develop new ways of doing and being church. It was shortly after this time that Jones and Pagitt became part of the Emergent church network.” Rathbun says, “In 1998 Jones and Pagitt and others were going down the road toward the Emergent church and thought.” Rathbun and others from House of Mercy chose to go a different way. Rathbun is still friends with Jones and Pagitt. “All of us have chosen to go different paths.”

Jay Bakker is a pastor of a non-traditional church. His church Revolution, meets in a bowling alley/bar. Even though less than ten people come to his church on Sunday afternoon, the online following is huge. Jay was not introduced to the Emerging church through friends already in the Emerging church, but by reading books. Authors that transformed Bakker’s thinking were Brennan Manning and Steve Brown. For Bakker

what really brought him to the Emerging church was the idea and concept of grace. Bakker explained that, “Many people in my life showed what grace really meant and that reading the epistles of Ephesians and Galatians opened my eyes to what grace truly was.” Bakker goes on to explain, “In the late nineteen-nineties one of the major television networks approached me and asked me what the Emerging church was. What is this postmodern Christianity everyone is talking about?” Bakker goes on to explain, “At this time I had no idea what this Emerging church idea was, but since I was part of a non-traditional movement within Christianity my ministry was lumped into the Emerging movement.”

Bakker explained Revolution in 1999 really became Emergent, and he was fine with the label. At this point Bakker was not acquainted with the figureheads within Emerging Christianity such as Brian McLaren and Tony Jones. Bakker since then however has become friends with these individuals and others. Bakker explained, “When I was speaking at churches or music festivals I would preach radical grace and love. People were receptive to it at first but then they were mad that I was not talking about law and salvation. It was pretty crazy stuff.” Finally Bakker found an unlikely ally in Martin Luther and his idea of grace. Bakker explained, “Luther was alone and depressed at times, much like I am at times. Reading some of Luther’s text on grace and life gave me the hope to move into revolution more and realize grace is central to my life and ministry.” Bakker ends by explaining, “A lot of people who left the evangelical church found Emerging Christianity to be a reprieve because many were sick of the bullshit that the church was becoming. The Emerging church does not solve the church’s problems, but it does give the questions new light.”



These four pastors have a rich background belonging to the faith community. They all have very different stories of how they grew into either the United Church of Christ or Emerging church. These four pastors have richly blessed the community and ministries they are entrusted to. Even though diversity is present among these pastors, the crux of Christ is present.

### **Question on the Trajectory of the UCC and Emerging Church**

*“What is your view of the trajectory of the UCC/Emerging church at present?”*

Griggs was very forthright stating that the United Church of Christ is struggling compared to other denominations. Griggs stated, “I have only pastored in Minnesota and in these churches membership has been down. I cannot say this is the same for every UCC church in every state but the trajectory for the UCC is struggling at present.” Griggs also believes the outlook of the UCC is waning in rural small town areas. He struggles to understand why this is happening. It could be economic, agricultural, or a host of other reasons. He finds this troubling. “For many the UCC is that progressive voice in the community that one can resonate with. With so many rural UCC churches closing, that voice is disappearing in small towns.” Griggs understands that the cultural landscape of an increasingly post-Christian, post-denominational, and post-institutional culture looms very large in people’s view of church and faith. Even in the midst of the sobering trajectory of the UCC Griggs is excited to be a part of the United Church of Christ.

PUCC2 brings to light that the UCC is a relatively newer denomination having only been around for about sixty years. Within these sixty years the denomination has

had some ups and downs much like other denominations. “The UCC as a mainline liberal denomination has been declining as of recent as well. I believe one of the reasons that the UCC may be declining in numbers is that the UCC does have more of an openness of theology and faith than others.” Simply put, “The UCC has an openness some might feel threatened by. Proselytizing is another reason that the UCC may be waning.” PUCC2 notes, “Many in the UCC do not talk about their faith, or journey or even witness. This lack of telling our Christian story makes many not knowledgeable about our own faith and even our denomination. Many people who find out about the UCC find out by stumbling in, not by people proselytizing. I believe that the UCC is on the cutting edge on a host of ideas, being radically hospitable and having an openness many don’t have. The UCC is moving forward in powerful ways, as a denomination the UCC needs to talk about our journey and faith a bit more.”

Rathbun believes the Emerging church is becoming less definable. “Many in the Emerging church do not have a definable doctrine or even a pastor that is on staff. There is always a market for different and innovative type of churches. Someone will find a kind of church that one will gravitate toward. I believe that within Christianity we will see more house churches, and small groups, as new ways of doing church. This is why the Emerging church has become less definable.” Rathbun goes on to point out that with all the church plants and new forms of church he is interested to see how the church looks in another ten years. How will it be the same? How will it be different? Rathbun expounds on the Emerging church by asking how one sustains the Emerging church. How does one pay for it? Rathbun explains, “I have talked with some in the Emerging church who have had conferences in regard to funding the Emerging church. Their conclusions

were, 'We don't know how to fund it.' So even within the Emerging church funding is a huge problem. The Emerging church is important but for it to be a sustainable thing, it has to find out how to fund itself."

Rathbun goes on to further discuss, "Within the Emerging church, having enough space or even having a building is hard to come by. At my church, House of Mercy, we rent a church and have rented numerous other churches around St. Paul. Building and maintaining a church is not a very easy task to accomplish." Rathbun has even explored what it would look like to buy a building or a church with another Emerging group. Rathbun gave an example of Solomon's Porch in Minneapolis lead by Doug Pagitt. Outside groups rent their building to offset the costs. More and more Emerging churches are doing this. "Emerging churches need to open their churches to the community for it to be more sustainable." Rathbun ends with the message, "I don't know how everything will turn out in the end within Emerging Christianity. I hope that God is working through Christ reconciling himself to the world."

Bakker believes the trajectory of the Emergent church is dead. Bakker states, "Many in the Emerging church have become too individualistic and many have listened to the critics too much that it has ruined great ministries. Whenever the Emerging church did something, whether it be writing a book, or speaking at a conference, no one ever talked about it. The only time someone talked about the Emerging church is when something negative took place." For Bakker, this is just sad. Bakker says, "The advent of social media in many ways has taken away the real essence of what the Emerging church was founded on being, a movement. Facebook, Twitter, and a host of other social media outlets have made the Emerging church something that it never wanted to be." Bakker

ends using the words of Phyllis Tickle, a Religion scholar, “Tickle believes that every five-hundred years or so the church cleans up shop or has a new reformation.” Bakker wonders if maybe the church is in the new reformation. but who really knows.

The United Church of Christ pastors both feel that the UCC’s trajectory is on the rise but it does have rocky points. It is no secret that mainline Christianity has been waning in recent years. Like most he UCC has struggled in the last number of years too. Both UCC ministers have seen a rise in church membership and more young people coming into their congregations. Both are hopeful that the United Church of Christ and its progressive theology will continue to grow.

The Emerging pastors have a better view of the trajectory of the Emerging church. Rathbun thinks it is difficult to define what the Emerging church is anymore. There are so many Emerging type churches popping up, it’s becoming hard to define it. Rathbun finds it challenging to get a building for services. Bakker wonders if, in many ways, the Emerging church is dead. The Emerging church has killed itself by listening to the critics and the negativity surrounding the movement.

### **Question on Unity**

“*What is your opinion on unity, as well as church unity?*” Griggs very quickly responds, “In the United Church of Christ as pastors we take this right from the gospel of John, *that all may be one.*” Griggs understands unity as people working together for the good of all. As people all need to work with one another toward unity. Griggs states, “Christians need to put differences behind one another and work toward unity and diversity within Christianity.” Griggs emphatically believes that unity is not cheap. “For

unity to happen everyone has to put differences aside whatever they may be and all need to work together for the greater good.”

PUCC2 believes in church unity and that the UCC agrees in unity as well. “The UCC is about uniting; the UCC was formed when two denominations that happened to join out of other splits, joined together and formed the UCC.” PUCC2 believes unity is of utmost importance. “Inter-denominational dialogue is key. Ecumenical diversity is important as well as inter-religious dialogue and understanding. All of these are key components in steps toward unity.” PUCC2 explains, “Christians can unapologetically accept the other into our lives, whether this person is from another denominational background or even another faith stream.” An integral part of the United Church of Christ ideology is how a denomination builds unity with others from outside its faith stream and religion.

Rathbun emphatically says “Yes” to unity. Rathbun explains, “If Christians take the message of Christ that there is no Jew or Greek, no male or female, unity becomes tougher to define and even to accomplish.” Rathbun further states, “People are not against unity and loving the neighbor. Unity is tough because all of humanity is embedded into culture in one form or another. Cultural values tend to define how one looks at the other person.” There might be some deep seated prejudices in certain groups, but in the end unity is tough to come by. Rathbun explains, “Currently we as people live in cultures where unity is not valued as much. All Christians bring their own individual things to the table. All Christians are important. All Christians will bump into each other, exchanging ideas and concepts and exploring how one another partakes in faith.”

Rathbun continues, “Unity can rub off on each other, it can even be messy at times, but it is beautiful to me.”

Bakker is very transparent in his answer to this question. Bakker says, “I want there to be unity in the church. However, when churches can’t put differences behind them, when it comes to the hot-button issues, then the church has a problem.” Bakker points out, “Ministers and ministries that are self-serving break down any chance at building church unity. Also, listening to the critics is toxic; it destroys any semblance of unity.” Bakker further explains, “I want there to be church unity, but I am not holding out hope that unity will happen.”

All four pastors have given positive responses on unity. These pastors agree that the church needs to be a place of unity. Unity is accepting the other and loving humanity as Christ has shown humanity to do. Unity is having inter-religious dialogue, showing grace, and being hospitable. Unity is something the church needs to strive toward. The church should be hopeful of unity but not blindly believe it will fully occur. Unity is to be honored and practiced. Unity may not occur in our lifetime but it should be strived for and practiced as much as possible.

### **Question on Unity and Acceptance**

*“Can the church be a place of unity and acceptance?”* Griggs believes the United Church of Christ can be a place for unity and acceptance. “The UCC is an open and affirming denomination. The UCC encourages everyone to come to church regardless of their faith or denominational background.” Griggs proclaims, “The UCC practices radical hospitality and hospitality is a very important issue for the UCC.” Griggs whole-

heartedly believes that the UCC wants to be a place where everyone is welcomed, where hospitality and inclusion is shown to all. Griggs understands that UCC churches may practice hospitality in different ways. However, unity and hospitality are things the UCC prides itself on.

PUCC2 says, “The United Church of Christ church can be a church of unity and acceptance but only up to a point. It is quite paradoxical. How does the UCC accept the other Christians who refuse to accept the others?” To break this down, how can Christians be a unified people when a major part of the faith is unwilling to accept others? This is the point PUCC2 is stressing. “Part of the heritage of the UCC is to accept the other. Unity is therefore tough in regard to the fact that if a person is not willing to accept the other and have diversity in our faith, how far will unity and acceptance really grow. In the UCC diversity of the other is of great importance. Whether it is racial, sexual or whatever kind of diversity, the UCC is building the bridge toward unity.” PUCC2 stresses the point that as a church, “Christians need to be a place of acceptance not exclusion.”

Rathbun emphatically declares, “Church can be a place of unity and acceptance. However, the church has done a horrible job at being a place of acceptance.” Rathbun explains, “My children do not care who someone marries, or what somebody looks like. Why should the rest of the church care? The culture around Christianity is a place of acceptance. The church needs to be a place of acceptance too.”

Bakker says, “Church can be a place of acceptance, but I don’t think the church can be a place of unity.” Bakker continues with the notion of the church being accepting

but not built on unity, “The church is a safe space, but there will always be people butting heads and a healthy dose of friction will be present too. This is not bad, but it makes unity very unattainable.” Bakker says that Christians should be an accepting people and faith. Accepting people regardless of what they have done or what they believe. Bakker thinks that the church is too fractured to really be a unified place. Church should be a safe place and Bakker hopes it is for many. However, in Bakker’s eyes the church is too dysfunctional to be a place of unity.

Once again the four pastors agree to an extent on the church being a place of unity and acceptance. All four believe that the church can be a place of acceptance. However, the church has not shown this very much. Some of these pastors think unity is key, while others do not. Hands down the church needs to be a place of acceptance and love. If not, than the church has lost its voice. The two United Church of Christ pastors have an optimistic outlook on unity within the church. Both pastors feel that the UCC has been doing an adequate job building unity in their churches and community. Both pastors stress that accepting everyone is where unity starts. The Emerging pastors are more pessimistic in their outlook regarding unity. Both feel that acceptance of others is central to unity. However, the church has done a terrible job practicing the acceptance of others. Both pastors want unity to happen in the church but are skeptical if this is possible.

### **Question on Reconciliation of the Church**

*“Can the church be a place of reconciliation? If so, why?”* Griggs states, “God was in Christ reconciling Himself to the world.” Griggs trusts that reconciliation is needed and can happen. It is hard for this to occur because humans are often hurt by others. This is not to say that one should not forgive someone who has hurt them. Griggs



honestly admits if reconciliation is a requirement of being a Christian it will take Christians time to build the bridges that were burnt. Griggs clearly states, "Reconciliation needs to happen in the church." Griggs view of reconciliation is one of God in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.

PUCC2 believes that reconciliation is a clear clarion call for Christians. PUCC2 states, "Part of the gospel is to be a reconciled body. If Christians cannot stand behind this idea of reconciliation, than this goes against the gospel. Reconciliation takes patience and time and dedication. Reconciliation needs to be worked with other branches of the faith too. However, when working with others in the church tensions will arise that will cause reconciliation to be sometimes difficult to accomplish." Unfortunately PUCC2 does not give a working definition of what they think reconciliation is, but gives a description of what it looks like. "Theologically all Christians are called to love one another. This is a crucial part of faith. Reconciliation and unity is a mandate that Christians need to strive for. It is something that needs to happen."

According to Rathbun the church can be a place of reconciliation. Rathbun does not give his definition of reconciliation. However, Rathbun has said that he believes the church is, "A place of love and acceptance." Maybe this is his view of reconciliation. "If humans read the scripture and look at theology it is shown that humanity needs to be a reconciled people." Rathbun further says, "The reason I am still in the church and a pastor is that I want to see reconciliation occur. Good theology can be a ground work for reconciliation that is what Christians are called to be." Rathbun is clear in his message, "Christians need to be reconcilers in this world, not only to each other, but also to the world at large."

Bakker wants the church to be a place of reconciliation. However, according to Bakker, “The church is slowly going away from reconciliation because more and more people are leaving the church.” Bakker states, “The church historically has been a place of reconciliation. Some great leaders have come from the church and practiced reconciliation. On the flip side, there is also a lot of pain and hurt that has been brought upon by the church.” Bakker goes further to explain, “In certain denominations within Christianity there are leaders who say that if a person is different than you, thinks differently than you, kicking them out of the house or church is warranted.” For Bakker this is not reconciliation, it’s the opposite. For reconciliation to happen restoration has to happen too.

Restoration is needed for reconciliation, but it is not practiced by many. Bakker states that restoration may eventually happen, but right now the church is far from it. Bakker believes that if what Christ and Paul said was true then restoration is not something to think about doing, it needs to be done. Bakker believes the church has done a poor job of reconciliation. Bakker thinks it’s too easy to blame the liberals or the conservatives, all are to blame. If people could just put differences aside, and focus on God, then it would be a lot easier. Bakker ends with saying, “The church needs to be a place of reconciliation and healing.”

All four pastors believe the church is a place where reconciliation is practiced, needs to be practiced more and is something the scripture tells Christians to do. Reconciliation and restoration are imperative in Christianity. Reconciliation has to be at the center of everything Christians do. Griggs believes that reconciliation is God working through Christ, reconciling the world to Himself. PUCC2 does not give a

definition of reconciliation. PUCC2 however does believe that reconciliation needs to be practiced by all in the church. It is a mandate given in scripture. Rathbun does not give a definition of reconciliation either. However, Rahtbun does say that the church needs to be a place of reconciliation and love. Rahtbun is a pastor, so he can be a unifying and reconciling agent of love. Bakker also does not give a definition of reconciliation. Bakker mentions that the church historically has been a place of reconciliation. Church needs to be a place where it is practiced but often it is a place where hurt is found. Bakker believes to bring reconciliation; restoration needs to happen as well. All in all, these pastors hope for reconciliation. Whether reconciliation is attainable, is another story.

### **Question on the Practice of the Eucharist**

*“As a United Church of Christ/Emerging minister, what is your view and practice of the Eucharist?”* The question of the Eucharist is important for a few reasons. First, in chapter three of this project the researcher looked at what the Emerging and United Church of Christ taught on this topic. Bringing this question into the interview seemed to make sense. Obtaining the four pastors’ views on the Eucharist was not only to determine what the denomination believes, but also what these individual believe. Secondly, the sacrament of the Eucharist plays a vital role in much of Christianity. Studying the responses from these four pastors is important because it shows the commonalities and differences Christians may have. In many ways the Eucharist is an act of unity and reconciliation. Christ invites all to participate.

Griggs states, “I was raised in church, I was raised to focus on the Scripture more than on the sacraments.” This does not mean that presently the Eucharist does not mean anything to Griggs now. On the contrary, communion is very important to him. It has

multiple meanings for him. “The holiness people feel when they take communion is closeness to Christ. The Eucharist is a mystical act within certain Christian views. Christians who partake in communion feel mystical as one meets the divine and life is transformed in a way words cannot describe. It is also important because it is a communal event. The church together breaks the bread and drinks the wine as they did at the last supper.” Griggs is influenced by some early reformation thought that there is a mystical aspect in Christ’s presence at communion, but also that Christians partake of communion in remembrance of what Christ did for all of humanity.

PUCC2 states that the Eucharist is vitally important. “In the UCC it is one of the sacraments practiced. Sacraments are very important and significant in the life of the church.” For PUCC2 the Eucharist is important to see Jesus and the symbolism of the bread and cup as not just an act Christians do but an aspect of hospitality. PUCC2 states, “If not all UCC churches worldwide than a vast majority of them practice what is called open communion. Open communion simply means that one does not have to be a member at a UCC church or congregation or even a member at a church at all. Communion is open to all who want to participate.” The UCC practices a great liturgical verse about the Eucharist, “Christ is the host, Christ sets the table, and Christ welcomes all.” PUCC2 believes, “The sacrament of the Eucharist is a powerful metaphor for how Christians follow the gospel of Jesus. The bread becomes the church, the faith community that feeds. The cup becomes the pouring out of ourselves to all. It’s an act and understanding of radical hospitality.”

Rathbun jests that the Eucharist is a “weird ritual.” It looks weird to people on the outside looking in. Rathbun explains, “I had people come into my church and ask me

why every week they eat the body and drink the blood of your deity?” Rathbun contends that obviously Christians don’t really eat and drink the blood of our deity, but it is a tricky issue to explain to the outside world. For Rathbun, “The Eucharist is holy and my church practices it weekly. The Eucharist is powerful and it is mystical at the same time. The Eucharist is sacrament and it helps the community of God.” Rathbun believes that when practicing the Eucharist it is a transforming event. “The Eucharist transforms lives, it helps Christians live a better life altogether. The Eucharist is the great thanksgiving meal. During the Eucharist this is where Christians show gratitude toward God and toward each other.” Rathbun further explains, “The church has done a poor job at looking at the Eucharist as a thanksgiving meal, a meal that means gratitude.”

Bakker’s view on the Eucharist is, “Whenever I am with people who I love or care about, the act of communion is occurring.” For Bakker the Eucharist has never been important to him personally. “It is very important to some, which is fine. For me it always seemed like a chore.” Bakker is very vulnerable in explaining, “Many of the traditions that the church practices I have never been a fan of. When one takes communion it is in remembrance of Christ. If I think and talk about God daily then in essence I am taking communion.” Bakker further explains, “When talking about God, or reading about God it is a form of worship, and this is what I practice.”

These four pastors give very different answers in regard to their view of the Eucharist. Some of the pastors look at the Eucharist as very sacramental, even mystical. Other pastors look at it as a great thanksgiving meal, having food with friends. Finally, one pastor explains that he never was a follower of doctrines or traditions but places a certain importance on the Eucharist.

### Question on Personal View of Salvation

*“As a United Church of Christ/Emerging minister, what is your view on salvation?”* Griggs jokingly states, “This is where I am a little heretical.” When Griggs was in seminary he read many books on the topic and has explored all of the theological views in regard to salvation. Griggs contends that this has been the point in his faith journey and personal life that has caused him the most turmoil. “I cannot believe that a loving, self-sacrificing God would in the end damn all people who did not believe in him. God so loved and loves all of his creation, why would he damn half of them? I am essentially a Universalist and I am okay with this.” Griggs sometimes wrestles with this idea and even thinks it may put himself at odds with some of scripture. For Griggs the resurrection is not a past event it is a present and future event. “As Humans we are living in the resurrection of Christ presently.” Griggs also points out that if he had to pick between faith, hope and love, he would pick hope. It is a hopeful heart that all may be saved and reconciled to God. Hope for Griggs is the most important aspect of his view. Griggs states, “I hope that all will be saved. I hope that God will reconcile all.” After forty years in the ministry Griggs still wrestles with the idea of universalism and the doctrine of salvation. Within the United Church of Christ Griggs states, “All have this freedom to believe so.”

For PUCC2, “Salvation is something that is revealed to humanity through God in Christ in grace, open to all and not contingent on what one does or says. The love of God is a healing love. A love that keeps no wrongs. Salvation makes all things new.” For PUCC2, “Salvation is something Christians experience here and now in this life as well in the life beyond death. Salvation is a mystery in some regard for one does not fully

know life after death. Salvation does not start when one goes to the other side of eternity. Salvation is something that is present here in the lives of Christians, and it will be continual in the life after death.” For PUCC2 salvation is the ultimate act of reconciliation, when humanity will be reconciled in the life here after.

For Rathbun, “Salvation is God in Christ reconciling the world to himself.” It makes no sense to Rathbun that a young child can thwart the reconciliation of a loving God that is so powerful. “God is in the process of reconciling himself to everyone. There is nothing anybody can do or say that can get in the way of God and the love he has for all. God is working through all of creation to reconcile himself to the world.”

Bakker questions the theological idea of atonement. “I don’t know if Christ really died for the sins of all. I know this does not paint me in a positive light in many circles but I think the atonement idea and theory is something that the people of the time and the writers of the scriptures may have understood.” Bakker struggles with the idea of atonement because it does not make sense that God would need to kill himself, or have a blood sacrifice. Bakker further explains, “If God is the creator of everything and has created everything imaginable then why would God need to sacrifice himself?” According to Bakker, “I do not believe in hell. Hell for me is not a literal place.” Bakker positions himself by saying that if everything God stated through Christ in the scriptures is true then everyone is included. “There is no need for a blood sacrifice or hell. Salvation is not a destination. Salvation is a way of life that humanity lives out. Salvation is less about the afterlife and more about living this life.”

Much like the aforementioned question, these four pastors have varying answers and beliefs. Thoughts on salvation range from being universalistic to not believing in the atonement of Christ reconciling the world to God. Even though these four pastors have been in the ministry for many years, their ideas on salvation have evolved to the point where Christ reconciles all of creation to himself.

### **Question of Denominational Unity**

*“Can denominations work together even though they have vastly different theological viewpoints?”* Griggs says, “Absolutely!!” I have seen this to be true with my own eyes. Griggs described working with an ecumenical organization that dealt with homelessness and poverty. “This organization was made up of Catholics, many different protestant denominations and evangelical denominations as well. Each knew where they could work together theologically speaking and where they could not.” As a United Church of Christ minister he would not push his more progressive theology on Gays, Lesbians, Bi-sexual, Transgender issues on evangelical churches or Catholics. “This organization put differences aside to work at helping the poor in their community. I even believe that not only working together in differing denominations is important but working as inter-faith partners is important as well. Putting religious differences aside is important in helping the poor and less fortunate in our midst.” Griggs trusts that protestants and evangelicals can put differences aside and work with one another for the common good.

PUCC2 trusts that denominations can work together even though there are stark differences within them. “There are certain commonalities that all of Christianity shares.” PUCC2 uses the organization JRLC as an example of Christians working with each other



even though they might not believe in the same theological spectrum. “JRLC is, Joint Religious Legislative Coalition, this religious group works together even in differences to help the communities in which they are present. Christians need to focus on the things we have in common, not on the issues we have differences in. Many denominations might have differing theological stances, this is fine, coming together for the community and God is imperative.” PUCC2 stresses, “Christians must focus on the similarities that Christians and denominations have. There is hope in working together with one another, building the Kingdom up. When people who are vastly different work together walls of indifference start to fall. People become less threatening to one another.” For PUCC2 working together builds hope. Maybe not in everything, but hope in working together is something to be achieved.

Rathbun thinks that denominations can work together but it may be tough to do so. “The older generations who are still running the churches and denominations are having a tough time handing over control to the younger generation. I believe that in ten years these older generations are going to realize that all denominations need each other.” Rathbun wants to be clear that not all older people are at odds with working with each other. “Some older individuals in the church are very open to working across denominational lines, a lot however are not.”

Bakker would love denominations to work together but many have a hard time working with people who are different. Bakker explains, “If the church worked like scientists and their beliefs were looked upon as hypothesis rather than dogma then maybe we could all work together.” Bakker truly believes that denominations have started working together in some regard. “While some denominations have ostracized people

away from the church, other denominations have helped people and brought many people in.” Bakker emphatically exclaims, “All denominations can work together if they choose to put their differences behind them. If Christians can die to ourselves; than this is possible!” Bakker ends by saying, “I can’t give up on Christ or the church. There is something so beautiful about Christ and life that I can’t leave my faith. This is what keeps me in my faith and in my ministry.”

These four pastors hope that denominations can work with each other. Two of the pastors explain that it is happening now within the Twin Cities. Organizations and inter-religious dialogue is happening. Getting past differences is paramount and focusing on the end goal of Christ is imperative. The two Emerging voices have less hope that denominations can work together. These two pastors believe it is possible, but right now the church is doing a poor job.

In closing, the researcher has documented four important voices in the church: Two pastors from the United Church of Christ and two from the Emerging tradition. Many of the pastors’ answers were similar, but some were not. All of the pastors have hope that the church can be a place of unity, acceptance and reconciliation. All of the pastors interviewed have hope in the church and feel that the church is important. The church needs to put its differences aside and focus on the similarity all denominations share, Christ. The researcher points out that this is only a small sampling of pastors from each tradition. However, it is important to note that even in agreement on certain questions, all pastors stress pushing our differences aside as a must. Being a church based on love, grace, hope, acceptance, unity and reconciliation is needed. For these pastors

looking past differences and focusing on the similarities and showing the love of Christ is what Christianity is about.

## CHAPTER SIX:

### EVALUATION AND DISCUSSION

This chapter will detail the findings from the previous chapters. The researcher will show the discoveries found in the previous chapters as well as conclusions.

The research question explored is, “Are the theologies of the Emerging/United Church of Christ tradition similar or not?” In response to this the researcher has (a) studied the theology of the Emerging movement; (b) studied the theology of the UCC, (c) reviewed relevant literature dealing with both of these Christian movements, (d) interviewed members in both the Emerging and UCC traditions, (e) identified similarities between the two traditions to help bridge the gap between the two theologies. The significance of this is that many denominations are splintered and are unwilling to work with other churches or other Christians. After examining the data the researcher has found that both of these traditions are similar in theological leanings.

#### **Findings of Chapter Two**

In chapter two the researcher argued that the theology explained shows the church needs to be a more unified body. Reconciliation is needed if Christians are going to be a more unified body and mind in Christ. The six voices of reconciliation explored have impacted how humanity and Christians need to understand and practice reconciliation. Scripture makes it clear that Christians must be a unified body. Christians must be a bridge of grace and inclusion for the Kingdom. Hospitality is of utmost importance since

it is clearly intertwined with reconciliation. Reconciliation and hospitality are not just suggestions for reading but commands for all Christians to participate in. Scripture makes it very clear that Christians are to be a unified body of believers regardless of denominational lines or theological leanings. All of creation and all of humanity is made in the *imago dei*. God desires all of his creation to be unified unto himself.

### **Significance of the Conclusion**

The researcher looked at six important voices who spoke on reconciliation or unity. These six voices were, Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King Jr, Curtiss DeYoung, and a brief look at both Christine Pohl and Shane Claiborne. These voices throughout Christianity have written about reconciliation and unity. All of the voices regardless of race, gender or denominational background, have spoken on the necessity to be a reconciled people. For Barth, if God is reconciled to humanity, then Christians need to be reconciled to one another. True unity cannot start without the body of Christ working together for reconciliation. Bonhoeffer, much like Barth, believes that the crux of unity within the body of Christ is found in reconciliation. Bonhoeffer takes a Christological view believing that humanity needs to take their pain and put it on the cross. Reconciliation is painful, it is messy, and according to Bonhoeffer, placing ones hurts on the cross is the most important step toward reconciliation. King taught that humanity needs to put the ideology of hate and indifference away. King fought his whole life for a world that is peaceful and a world that loves. The church needs to take the words that King spoke and put them into action. To be a loving world and a loving church, reconciliation must occur. Out of reconciliation unity may blossom.

DeYoung implores Christians to be reconcilers. Reconciliation takes patience, it takes time. Many times it is painful and emotional. DeYoung pushes Christians to build deep relationships with one another. Relationships are at the center of reconciliation. Reconciliation will not happen if people within the church cannot be in relationship with one another. Pohl and Claiborne emphasize that hospitality is at the core of reconciliation. Pohl and Claiborne push Christians to be a more hospitable faith. Christians must welcome others into our homes, churches and lives. Claiborne envisions the current church practicing what the early church did. The early church fed the poor, housed the homeless, and took care of the widow and orphaned. If the present church can do what the early church did, maybe reconciliation and unity can occur. Pohl and Claiborne have urged Christians to further examine what it means to give to the least of these.

The researcher finds the conclusion of chapter two pointing to the decision that everyone needs to be a reconciler. Whether one is in the Emerging church or the United Church of Christ, reconciliation is at the core of Christianity. The researcher believes that if the church cannot be reconcilers to the world and to ourselves, then how will church unity and reconciliation occur? Reconciliation is foundational if reconciliation and unity are to happen in the church and between denominations.

Scripture plays a major role in the Christian's life and how one is to live. The researcher studied three key scriptures that talk about unity and reconciliation: Psalm 133:1, 1 Corinthians 12:12, and Ephesians 4:3-6. These scriptures drive Christians to understand that being a unified faith is important. If denominations can put differences behind them and take these scriptures to heart, then the church will be more unified in the

message of hope and love of Christ. The goal is not for all Christians and denominations to agree on every point. The point being made is Christians are called to put differences aside and focus on similarities, to be like-minded in the goal of reaching a hurting and dying world for Christ. The researcher has shown that scripture and important voices in Christianity have called Christians to be a reconciling body of believers. In doing so, the church will be a place of unity and love for all.

### **Discoveries of Chapter Three**

The Emerging tradition and the United Church of Christ have some congruency in their ideas and conception of salvation. Both traditions shy away from the idea of personal salvation. For both of these traditions believing in God does not make one a Christian, one must be a transforming agent in a world that needs love and Christ. Personal salvation is not rejected, however, it is not stressed as the only parameter that makes one a Christian. In both of these traditions grace plays a major role. Christians and humanity may not understand grace fully but when God offers it through salvation one must take it. A difference between the two traditions is the Emerging tradition tends to be open in its idea of universal reconciliation of all people. The idea of universal reconciliation is not talked about as much in the UCC. In the UCC there is freedom of conscious to believe what one wants to about theological ideas. Some might hold to universal reconciliation, but it is not a requirement.

In conclusion, in chapter three the researcher has shown and described thoughts and ideas of both the Emerging voices and ideas within the UCC. These five theological ideas, (salvation, Eucharist, prayer, eschatology, and sin) are important in understanding Christianity and Christian thought. In this research many of the views are congruent

between the two traditions with only some minor differences. It is true that these two different faith streams are more similar than different. Both of these traditions can work together for building the church as a place of unity and inclusivity. Let all of creation rejoice in the words of Paul in Ephesians. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not the results of works, so that no one may boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

### **Significance of Chapter Three Findings**

The researcher studied at length some voices and ideas in both the emerging and United Church of Christ traditions. The researcher believes that these traditions have many similarities and they are able to work with one another in making the church a more unified place. Even the minimal differences between these two traditions can be placed aside for reconciliation and unity can occur.

In eschatology the UCC and Emerging streams of faith have similarities. One major point of congruency between both streams is the Kingdom of God unfolding. Both of these traditions believe that the full reality of the Kingdom is not present. This will not take place until Christ’s return. Another similarity is both have a view on hell and the afterlife, but neither tradition is willing to fully go into detail about its view. One should look at this idea of hell as under-construction. The doctrine of eschatology has both a present reality and a future component. It is present, unfolding before our eyes and all are invited to partake in it. It is also future, being fully realized when Christ returns to establish his Kingdom. Both the Emerging and UCC hold to such a view of eschatology. Since both traditions have a similar view on eschatology this could be a springboard for both to see where else they agree on theological issues. The hope of the researcher is that



both traditions may have more theological similarities. For now, both traditions could start with this view of eschatology and work together for unity.

The Eucharist plays a vital role in both the United Church of Christ and Emerging church. Both of these streams of faith have similarities with a few differences. Both Bruce Ellis Benson and Russell Rathbun who are Emerging voices stress that the Eucharist is symbolic and deeply meaningful. For both men it is much more than just an act or sacrament that is done at church. The act of Eucharist is an opening of the table of inclusion so that all may partake and participate in the community of Christ. Both Emerging voices urge Christians to understand the sacrament of the Eucharist as a revolutionary act of love and inclusion toward all people.

The United Church of Christ is much akin to the Emerging stream in understanding and practice of the Eucharist. The UCC places the Eucharist as one of the core sacraments that the church practices. For the UCC it does not matter how often a church has communion, rather it is important that it takes place. Acceptance of everyone is foundational to the UCC in the inclusion of the Eucharist. Both of these streams of faith have a deep conviction to the Eucharist. The Eucharist is practiced in both the UCC and Emerging churches. The main difference is how often it is practiced and the more mystical aspect of the Eucharist that the Emerging stream holds. In conclusion, both of these streams of faith are congruent in their understandings of the Eucharist and its importance for all to partake in.

Sin is something that is wildly talked about and debated in Christianity. The researcher has found that in the United Church of Christ and Emerging church there are

some variations between the understandings of what sin is. Both streams do not stress sin in their services. Both make it known that sin is very real in all of humanity. The UCC and Emerging churches both view sin as anything that separates one from God. However, even in sin God is with his people. The UCC and Emerging streams of faith both have similarities in theology and understanding of what sin is. Brian McLaren, who is a leader in the Emerging church, believes that Christians tend to focus on sin too much. McLaren believes in sin, but he calls the readers of scripture to go back and carefully read what it says about sin. McLaren wants Christians to reimagine what sin is. What does sin look like? McLaren urges Christians to be more hospitable to the poor, homeless and others. If the church and Christians do not do this, then it is sin.

Doug Pagitt is another important figure within the Emerging church. Pagitt believes that sin is disintegration. Disintegration is when humans sin and walk away from God. Every time a Christian does not clothe the naked, feed the hungry, or love all, this is disintegration. This is what sin is. Emerging theology is trying to go back to the source of the truth, the scriptures. Emerging voices and theology are trying to focus on the narratives in the Bible to define sin. The Emerging church does not focus on popular understandings of sin. Emerging thought is heavily imbedded into going back to the ancient church and focusing on what these voices said about theology and sin.

One of the important voices in the United Church of Christ was Reinhold Niebuhr. Niebuhr has some very deep rooted thoughts on sin. Niebuhr's view of sin is that it is part of human nature. Human pride, excessive self-preoccupation results in moral blindness which is sin in Niebuhr's view. Niebuhr and some in the UCC also share that sin can be an individual act but sin can also be a corporate act. Niebuhr pushes the

idea that even though sin is individual, maybe hurting only oneself. However, corporate sin can be catastrophic, whether done by a church or nation. Niebuhr also makes the point that many denominations do not put a lot of attention on sin. Sin is something that is in this world and a reality. Humans need to work on breaking away from sin and helping the world be a better place. The only way to make sin disappear is by giving it to God. Both of these traditions have similarities once again on a theological issue. The UCC and Emerging streams can further work together toward reconciliation and unity. Finding a common ground is the first step in working toward church unity. The UCC and Emerging streams have found that common ground and can start working with each other.

Prayer is something that many Christians practice and is vital to one's faith journey. Tony Jones is a voice in the Emerging church. Jones contends that it is irrelevant how long or short a prayer is. Any prayer is powerful and heard by God. Christians may not know how prayers are answered fully, but that does not mean prayer is not to be practiced. The United Church of Christ views prayer as an important part of one's faith too. Within the UCC prayer is done weekly at church often many times throughout the service. The UCC often uses creedal prayers and also has a time for prayers of the people. Prayers of the people consist of the pastor praying on behalf of the congregation for healing of congregants as well as for the world. Both Emerging and UCC streams place prayer in high regard in the faith journey.

Salvation is a concept important to all Christians. Emerging voices are pushing the idea and conception of what salvation is. Some voices in the Emerging church believe in Christocentric universalism. Others are even reinterpreting if there is a hell or purgatory. The Emerging stream of faith is working toward a reimagining of salvation.

The United Church of Christ view of salvation is one based on grace. In chapter three the voices from the UCC explained that grace plays a vital role in understanding and accepting salvation. Neither stream of Christianity gave a bull's-eye answer to how to understand salvation. Both streams put grace as a key piece into grasping what salvation is. Salvation is not a one-time thing; it is unfolding in one's life daily. Emerging and UCC streams have distinct similarities in their understanding of salvation. Both of these streams of faith have congruency in their views on salvation. The researcher believes that these faith traditions can be full partners in the mission and work of God and his Kingdom.

In closing, the researcher has shown that both the UCC and Emerging church streams have similar theological stances and both can work together for unity with one another and for the Kingdom of God. These conclusions make the problem statement more easily attainable. Both of these streams of faith are like-minded and it will be easy for them to move forward in unity.

### **Conclusions from Field Data**

The researcher has interviewed and studied four very important voices in the church. Two pastors were from the United Church of Christ and two from the Emerging stream. All of the pastors interviewed have hope in the church and feel that the church can be a place of reconciliation and acceptance. The church needs to put its differences aside and focus on the similarity which all denominations share, Christ. The researcher understands that it is only a small sampling from each tradition. However, it is important to note although some differences were present, all of the pastors interviewed stressed that pushing differences aside is a must. Being a church based on love, grace, hope,

acceptance, unity and reconciliation is what is needed. For these pastors, looking past differences, focusing on the similarities and showing the love of Christ is what Christianity is about.

### **Analysis of Field Data**

When the researcher asked these four pastors about the trajectory of their faith streams the answers varied. The two pastors in the United Church of Christ felt that the UCC trajectory is on the rise. Membership is going up in many churches and more people are visiting and becoming part of the church community. These UCC pastors know that the denomination has had growing pains much like other mainline denominations. For these two pastors there is a definite movement toward positive growth in the UCC. With hope and prayer these UCC pastors feel that the trajectory of the UCC is headed in a positive direction.

The Emerging pastors have a very different answer on the trajectory of their faith stream. These pastors see the Emerging church as something that is hard to define and most likely dead. These traditions are not similar in their answers toward the trajectory of their faith streams. The UCC pastors feel their tradition is on the rise while the Emerging stream feels that it is too hard to pin point what Emergent is anymore, or in many ways it is a dead movement. Even though these faith streams differ on the trajectory of their churches, this should not hinder them working together toward reconciliation and unity.

When the researcher asked if the church could be a place of unity, all four pastors gave positive responses. These four agree the church needs to be a place of unity. The

answers on unity were multi-faceted. Unity is accepting others, loving as Christ has shown humanity to do. Unity is having inter-religious dialogue, showing grace, and being hospitable. Unity is something the church needs to strive toward. The church should be hopeful for unity but not expect that it will fully occur. Unity for these four pastors is of vital importance. However, the fully realized unity that Christ has charged the church with may not occur in this present reality.

The researcher asked if the United Church of Christ/ Emerging church can be a place of unity and acceptance. Once again agreement was apparent by the four pastors. However, not all agree in how this will happen. The pastors believe the church can be a place of acceptance. However recently the church has not shown it. In the end the church needs to be a place of acceptance and love. If not, then the church has lost its influence. The similarities between these four voices are clear. The church needs to be a place of love and acceptance. The UCC and Emerging church are similar in thought and practice in this ideology.

The researcher asked the pastors, if the church can be a place of reconciliation. All four pastors believe the church is a place where reconciliation is practiced. The pastors concluded it needs to be practiced. The scriptures point Christians toward reconciliation. Reconciliation and restoration is imperative in Christianity. Reconciliation must be the crux of everything Christians do. Again, all four hope for reconciliation. If reconciliation is attainable is another question. The researcher is confident that reconciliation is at the forefront of these pastors' minds. If other pastors can jump on board, then radical change will occur.

The researcher next asked, each pastor their view of the Eucharist. All four pastors have different ideas about the Eucharist. Some of the pastors look at the Eucharist as very sacramental and even mystical. Other pastors look at it as a great thanksgiving meal that should be shared with friends and others. The Eucharist is an act of hospitality and inclusion. It is a transformative act. One pastor explains that he has never been a follower of doctrines or traditions of the church, but he thinks the Eucharist plays an important role in the life of the church. Even in disagreement these four pastors can work together. The researcher asked each pastor if they were willing to work with other churches and people who are polar opposites. All pastors said yes.

The researcher then asked the four pastors, to define their view on salvation. Much like the aforementioned paragraph, there were varying answers and beliefs. Thoughts on salvation ranged from being universalistic, to Christ reconciling himself to the world, to not holding to a view of the atonement. Even though these four pastors have been in ministry for years, their ideas on salvation have evolved to the point where Christ reconciles everything to himself in the end. The researcher has noted that these pastors all have differing views on the doctrine of salvation. All agree to put differences aside whether in doctrines, theology, or beliefs to work together for unity and reconciliation.

The researcher concluded the interviews by asking if denominations can work together even though they have vastly different theological viewpoints. All four pastors hope denominations can work together. The two United Church of Christ pastors explain that they are working across denominational lines. Both pastors contend that unity across denominations is happening as well as inter-religious unity. The two Emerging pastors have less optimism that denominations can work together. These two Emerging pastors

believe it is possible to work together but presently the church has done a poor job. Getting past differences is essential. Focusing on the end goal of Christ is imperative. All four believe that working together is needed. If all pastors and congregations can look past differences and focus on Christ then it is possible. None of the pastors believe it will happen soon, but hold out hope for future generations.

In closing, the field data has shown that there are similarities within these two traditions. Many of the pastors answered similarly to most of the questions. Even amidst stark differences all pastors agreed that looking past individual theological views is important to attain unity and reconciliation. One of the core points of the problem statement was to interview members in both the United Church of Christ and Emerging traditions to see if similarities in thought were possible. The researcher has shown this to be the case.

### **Conclusion**

The researcher has solved his problem statement. The main problem that was studied was, “Are the theologies of the Emerging and United Church of Christ traditions similar?” The researcher contends that he has shown through this project that indeed much of the theologies these traditions hold to are very similar. The researcher has studied the theologies of both traditions to see if there was congruency between the two. The researcher found that the Emerging tradition has written far more on their topic than the UCC. The UCC relies on many older theologians who have worked in academia or in pastoral roles. Digging deep in the UCC resources was essential for the researcher to find key theological ideas held by many within this church. After gathering resources from both traditions, the researcher discovered where the differences and similarities lie.



Views of Eucharist and salvation were found to be very similar. Both of these traditions stress unity and reconciliation as well as being a hospitable and inviting place.

Another important part of the problem statement studied was interviewing pastors from the United Church of Christ and Emerging traditions. The point of this section was to see if pastors in these streams of Christianity have similar answers and theology. The researcher was surprised to hear how much alike these pastors were in their answers and standing in solidarity with one another. The four pastors gave very different answers in the sections about Eucharist and salvation. However even though all four pastors answered very differently, all of them stated that moving beyond individual theologies is important for the church to be more unified and to work together. All pastors believe that working across denominational lines is essential and is imperative for Christianity to grow and survive. These two streams of faith are quite similar and working together is something that will not be a problem in the future.

The researcher was right in his hope that both of these traditions were similar and willing to work with one another for the betterment of the Kingdom of God. The researcher can not predict if these two streams of faith will move forward and work together. However all of the pastors and the researcher have optimism in working with each other in the future. The researcher has confidently shown that these streams of Christianity are similar in theology as well as working together for the Kingdom of God. The problem was solved and the two streams of faith have more similarities than differences.

### **Strengths of Research**

The first strength of research is the wide range of resources the researcher found and used in this dissertation. Within the Emerging stream of faith many voices like Doug Pagitt, Tony Jones and Brian McLaren were studied. Other important influences within the tradition were studied to give a very robust look at Emerging theology. It is important in any research that the researcher finds all of the relevant resources available. The researcher has been careful to use a wide variety of sources within Emerging thought. The researcher strove to include a peppering of thoughts and ideas from many in the Emerging stream, rather than too much from one person. This was accomplished.

The resources for the United Church of Christ were somewhat difficult to find. The researcher has done an adequate job in finding the relevant texts that the UCC adheres to. There are not many theological texts pin-pointing what an official or popular view of the UCC is. The researcher enjoyed digging and finding these relevant texts and voices in the UCC.

Another strength the researcher achieved was the differing voices interviewed. Finding pastors within the UCC was not a hard endeavor because the researcher is familiar with it. Finding voices in the Emerging church proved to be more difficult. The researcher could have easily found the more popular voices in Emerging Christianity here in the Twin Cities area. However, finding lesser known Emerging influences was desired. It was important for the researcher to attend both Russell Rathbun's church and Jay Bakker's church before asking each for an interview. The researcher spent time participating in and getting to know each church. Building a relationship with the churches and their pastors really solidified this interview process.

### **Weakness of Research**

An area of weakness was the small sampling of pastors interviewed. The four pastors gave solid interviews and the answers given were extremely helpful. However it would have been wonderful to secure a larger interview base to see how the research might have changed. Four pastors is a minuscule percent of United Church of Christ and Emerging pastors that could have been interviewed. The researcher felt that interviewing five pastors from each tradition would have been ideal, but this dissertation did not allow for that. Researchers must understand that they cannot interview everyone and at times interviewing a small number of people is better. If the researcher writes more on this topic in the future, he hopes to extrapolate the interview process and include more pastors.

A final weakness in this research was only looking at the two streams of faith. The researcher picked these two streams of faith because he is more familiar with these two. For the sake of the dissertation only two traditions could be studied. When researching unity and reconciliation in the church, all denominations should be studied. This most likely will never be accomplished, but it is important to note that it would be great to see a project like this in the future. The researcher was pleased to find that both of these traditions were very similar in theology and thought. If however, the researcher chose a different denomination than the Emerging church, perhaps a more evangelical denomination; would the findings be changed or altered more dramatically? All in all, the researcher is happy with the findings of this project.

## CHAPTER SEVEN:

### REFLECTION

#### **Introduction**

Like every student in a doctoral program there comes a time when they have to decide what to write their dissertation on. I was on a mission to not only write a powerful and meaningful dissertation, but also write something I could look back at and be proud of. I remember walking around a lake and looking at nature: the beautiful water, the singing of the birds, and the swaying of the tree branches in the wind. It was at this moment I felt a beautiful peace in my soul and a pull toward unity and reconciliation.

It may seem odd to some that being outside in nature, seeing and admiring creation, that the idea of reconciliation and unity may arise in my thoughts. I firmly believe that the Spirit pressed on my soul to write what was in my heart. Write something that you are passionate about. Reconciliation and unity are often buzzwords in theological circles. It is sad to say that unity within the church and reconciliation between churches has waned and in some cases has died. The reason reconciliation and unity is so important to me, is for far too long the church has advocated for love, acceptance, being a place of unity. Sadly it has not been such a place. Writing this dissertation is my attempt to show just a glimpse of why and how, churches can work together despite differences.

To give a certain amount of context to why this dissertation was so important for me to write, I will explain the way I got to this point. I grew up in a conservative

Pentecostal denomination. I was raised in the Assemblies of God. I remember being taught as a kid in Sunday school the importance of treating everyone with respect and love and accepting that person. As I grew older and participated in the youth group these same ideas were taught to us. It was ingrained into my mind that working with other Assemblies of God or evangelical churches was fine. However, working with churches such as Catholic, Lutheran, or Methodist was frowned upon. The only reasoning given for such a comment was “They believe differently than we do.” I was floored to hear such a pitiful answer. The church is called to be a place of love and inclusion. A place where everyone is accepted and given worth. The church is a place where working together regardless of differences of theology, doctrine, and denominational allegiances is required. I could write a book on how many times over the years my former denomination lacked ecumenical dialogue and evangelism with other churches because the difference of theology and doctrine was too great. Agreement on all theological matters or doctrine is not the point. My church and by in large my former denomination was not willing to work with other denominations because they believed differently than the Assemblies of God did.

During my educational journey, helping the church was always on the forefront of my mind. My master’s degree was in Christian Thought. This was a hybrid degree that combined Apologetics, Philosophy, and Theology. It is a degree geared toward understanding Christianity and defending it against those who would attack it. After completing my master’s degree I found myself wanting more. I wanted to learn more about practical ministry. I wanted to learn not only about defending Christianity, but also

how I can help the church. I went from being passionate about teaching to becoming passionate about preaching and becoming a pastor.

My years in the Doctor of Ministry program have been fruitful as well as challenging. Early on I picked the concentration of Church Leadership in the Doctor of Ministry degree. I chose this because I felt it would help me understand myself and what it means to be a pastor and a shepherd to a congregation and community. I also selected this program to understand what working in a church would be like. Having classes that deal with evil, suffering, apologetics, and the life of the pastor, have all been extremely beneficial in my journey through this program. So as it came time for me to write my dissertation, picking something I was passionate about, being a unified and reconciled church, became clear. I am not so naïve to think that this will occur in my lifetime or maybe even ever. However, as Christians we are called to practice unity with one another. Christians need to be a reconciling people. Christians are to put differences aside and work for the Kingdom of God.

Honestly this was the hardest thing I have ever done. Writing is something I love to do. Writing allows me to creatively escape and write my feelings and desires on paper. Going into the dissertation writing process I knew I needed to write a major piece of work. This dissertation was the magnum opus of my time in the program. I now know what it means to give everything to something. Giving priority and time to the dissertation was needed; I gave all of my extra time to write this.

I have worked full-time ever since I started the Doctor of Ministry program four years ago. While working in the summers I worked ten- hour days came home and

researched and went to bed only to get up again with very little sleep. Some days the only thing that kept me alert and coherent was the time worked on this dissertation. I have given so much time, energy and emotion to this project. I have told my wife and other close family members that I am emotionally and physically tired. However, I would not miss this experience or process of writing the dissertation. Since I am writing my personal reflection I will not sugar-coat the intensity it takes to write a dissertation. Anyone who has written a dissertation or a book will tell you that it is a very hard, long and arduous process.

The process I used to write this dissertation was something that took some time getting used to. Writing the second and third chapters took the better part of nine months. I would come to the seminary on an almost daily basis. I would lock myself in a private study room and research, research, and research some more until I thought my head might explode. During this time I grew exponentially. I have an even deeper appreciation for my denomination, the United Church of Christ, as well as the Emerging church. I learned many new insights in theology that I never noticed about these denominations. Immersing myself with the voices and thoughts of the theologians in these denominations has helped me grasp their theologies and ideologies. I have done plenty of research before, but this dissertation takes the cake in intensity and level of time management required in order for this project to become reality.

Chapters four through seven, albeit not as research intense, was trying in itself. Taking all of the previous data and transposing it into other chapters was challenging. Finding time to interview and write the data was difficult. Writing the last two chapters

seemed challenging too. Taking ninety pages worth of data and writing conclusions was daunting, to say the least.

I don't know if I can say truthfully what my favorite part of the dissertation would be, I am proud of the whole thing. If I had to choose a section, the interview process was probably the most fun. Usually I am nervous to approach people and ask them to share their feelings on certain topics. For some reason the uneasiness and nervousness seemed to go away. I believe with all my heart that these uneasy feelings left because I felt strongly about what I was writing about. After interviewing all four pastors they said they appreciated my questions and my passion for bridging the church and trying to bring it closer together from its fractured state.

The first pastor I interviewed was Bob Griggs. Sitting in his church study and asking these deep personal questions was so rewarding and a bit nerve-racking. Hearing the stories of his pastorates and his journey was incredible. A mutual respect was formed after that meeting and hopefully a friendship. The second pastor I interviewed was PUCC2. We met at a seminary and had a wonderful time exploring PUCC2's time growing up in the United Church of Christ and current ministry. As I work to become a pastor in the UCC denomination it was so rewarding and incredible to interview these pastors. They have helped shape my outlook in pastoral ministry and shown me what to expect.

Russell Rathbun was the first Emerging pastor I interviewed. We met on a cold blustery December afternoon at a local coffee shop. We had a very fruitful and insightful interview. Rathbun gave heartfelt answers and I could tell that everything he was saying



was from the heart. In all truthfulness, I had not met Rathbun before interviewing him. I found out about his church from reading Emerging books and attended his church once. I found his e-mail address and arranged for an interview. I was truly humbled by meeting him and talking about the church and the future of the Emerging church.

The final pastor I interviewed was Jay Bakker. We met on another cold rainy December day the week before Christmas. I have to be honest; meeting Bakker was a highlight in my life. Bakker's ministry has been one that I have closely followed since I was in high school. When Bakker moved and brought his ministry to Minneapolis a year ago I never thought I would have the opportunity to interview him. Bakker was very busy with interviews both in New York and Los Angeles, scheduling an interview with Bakker was challenging to say the least. It was well worth the wait. Our interview in a Minneapolis pub and was so refreshing. Bakker's passions and hurts about the church were evident. Hearing the stories about his journey of faith and church experience were powerful. I am also humbled that I was able to interview Bakker.

The interview process was the most exciting and challenging part for me. It pushed me and the interviewee to think about things and topics we might normally not talk about. Researching in texts is important and needed, but one can interview someone face to face it's much more rewarding and exciting.

### **Reflections For Further Study**

With any research project, more could be done or a deeper study could take place. This dissertation is no exception. I stated in the last chapter that if further study was given to this dissertation interviewing more pastors might prove useful. In my opinion four

pastors was an adequate amount for the size of this project. If the dissertation was longer or in a book format, more pastors from these two traditions would be needed. It would be safe to assume that at least five pastors from each tradition would be a great starting point if this project was to be longer in nature. It would be interesting to see how these ten pastors agreed or disagreed on these topics.

In this dissertation I only researched and interviewed two denominations. There are over two thousand denominations within Christianity. Having a deeper longitudinal study would be beneficial. Obviously interviewing and studying all two thousand denominations is out of the question. However, studying more than two would be worthwhile and fruitful for unity in the church.

It is my hope that when I become a pastor and am ordained, the preaching and teaching of church unity becomes common place in my church. I believe that much of Christianity shies away from discussing and putting into practice church unity and reconciliation. I hope to have workshops and preach on the importance of unity and reconciliation. To God be the glory.

APPENDIX A:

EXPLORATION ON THE EUCHARIST

This appendix briefly lists another voice in Emerging thought, Peter Rollins. The researcher has decided to include this parable written by Rollins because it did not work well with the other information in the theology section. Rollins view on the Eucharist is a parable asking all Christians to re-imagine what the Eucharist is and how a Christian should understand it.

An Emerging voice that is brilliantly challenging certain views held in Christianity is the philosopher and social critic Peter Rollins. Rollins insights bring a fresh new perspective to the forefront in Christianity. In his book, *The Orthodox Heretic: And Other Impossible Tales*, Rollins gives a different view on what the Eucharist means.

*It is evening, and you are gathered together with the other disciples in a small room for Passover. All the time you are watching Jesus, while he sits quietly in the shadows listening to the idle chatter, watching over those who sit around him, and, from time to time, telling stories about the Kingdom of God.*

*As night descends, a meal of bread and wine is brought into the room. It is only at this moment that Jesus sits forward so that the shadows no longer cover his face. He quietly brings the conversation to an end by capturing each one with his intense gaze. Then he begins to speak: "My friends take this bread, for it is my body, broken for you."*

*Every eye is fixed on the bread that is laid on the table. While these words seem obscure and unintelligible, everyone picks up on their gravity. Then Jesus carefully pours the wine into the cup of each disciple until it overflows onto the table. "Take this wine and drink of it, for it is my blood shed for you."*

*With these words an ominous shadow seems to descend onto the room, a chilling darkness that makes everyone shudder uneasily. Jesus continues: "As you do this, remember me."*

*Most of the gathered disciples begin to slowly eat the bread and drink the wine, lost in their thoughts. You, however, cannot bring yourself to lift your hand at all, for his words have cut your soul like a knife.*

*Jesus does not fail to notice your hesitation and approaches, lifting up your head with his hands so that your eyes are level with his. Your eyes meet only for a moment, but before you are able to turn away, you are caught up in a terrifying revelation. At this instant you*

*experience the loneliness, the pain, and sorrow that Jesus is carrying. You see nails being driven through skin and bone, you hear the crowds jeering and the cries of the pain as iron cuts against flesh. At that moment you see the sweat that flows from Jesus like blood, and experience the suffocation, madness and pain that he soon will envelop him. More than all of this, however, you feel a trace of the separation he soon will feel in his own being.*

*In that little room, which occupies no significance in the universe, you have caught a glimpse of a divine vision that should never have been disclosed. Yet it is indelibly etched into the eyes of Christ for anyone brave enough to look.*

*You turn to leave that place. You long for death to wrap around you. But Jesus grips you with his gaze and smiles compassionately. Then he holds you tight in his arms, like no one has held you before. He understands that the weight you now carry is so great that it would have been better had you never been born. After a few moments, he releases his embrace and lifts the wine that sits before you, whispering,*

*“Take this wine, my dear friend, and drink it up, for it is my blood, and it is shed for you.”*

*All this makes you feel painfully uncomfortable, and so you shift in your chair and fumble in your pocket, all the time distracted by the silver that weighs heavy in your pouch.<sup>1</sup>*

This parable that Rollins wrote is very poignant. Instead of putting the obvious villain Judas in the story, Rollins makes the parable more ambiguous and puts us in as the villain. Rollins brilliantly encapsulates the Last Supper to make it come alive to the reader and give a whole new meaning to anyone reading it.

*This reflection was an outworking of my first interaction with the enigmatic figure of Judas. Here I wanted to play with our tendency to identify with the favorable characters in the Bible. For instance, when reading about the self-righteous Pharisee and the humble tax collector, we find it all too easy to condemn the first and praise the second without asking whether our own actions are closer to the one we have rejected than the one we have praised.*

*Judas is here a symbol of all our failures, and Christ’s actions demonstrate his unconditional acceptance. Judas helps to remind us of Christ’s message that he came for the sick rather than the healthy, and that he loves and accepts us as we are.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Rollins, *The Orthodox Heretic: And Other Impossible Tales* (Brewster: Paraclete Press, 160-162), 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Rollins, *The Orthodox Heretic: And Other Impossible Tales*, 163.

Rollins is imploring the reader to realize that when reading scripture and the wonderful narratives within them, we must look at all the figures in the story. Rollins suggests that instead of casting off Judas as the villain in the story, Christians need to understand that at times we actually might be the Judas character. We might be the villain. Rollins grabs our attention, forcing us to be aware that at times we need to see every figure in the story and try to place ourselves in their shoes. The story of the Last Supper is no different. Sometimes in our spiritual journey we as Christians play the Judas figure. The hope of Christ wins and he accepts us anyways. Rollins retelling of this narrative makes Christians aware that all are accepted.

Rollins paints a very beautiful picture in his commentary of the Last Supper parable. Rollins re-envisioned the story and makes Judas a symbol for all of our failures, not just Judas himself. Rollins also shows all of humanity how loving Jesus really is and how Jesus accepts everyone regardless of who we are. According to Rollins this is what the Last Supper really means.

Rollins account of the Last Supper is a very powerful story, a story that makes Christians examine what it means to love and accept others. Rollins gives an Emerging view of the Eucharist. Not all within Emerging tradition will gravitate to Rollins view, but it is a popular view in Emerging theology.

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