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BETHEL UNIVERSITY  
BETHEL SEMINARY ST. PAUL

THE IMPACT OF PRESENCE AND TOUCH ON CHURCH GROWTH

A THESIS PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY DEGREE  
IN MISSIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

BY  
BILL BERG  
ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA  
MAY 2020



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## ABSTRACT

This project addresses the problem of discovering whether, when churches move to be physically present in their communities and engage in appropriate touch through serving, there is a corresponding impact in confession of faith and church growth. To answer this problem, the researcher began with the incarnation and trinity as a model of presence and touch. The researcher reviewed the Gospels to identify Jesus' use of physical presence and touch in His ministry. The researcher also looked at the impact of presence and touch on the early church in the Book of Acts. He reviewed literature that focused on the importance of presence and touch and its influence on conversions and church growth. The researcher then interviewed senior and associate pastors of seven growing churches. Next, the researcher surveyed congregants from these seven churches. Both the interviews and the survey focused on how serving in the community through presence and touch impacts conversions and church growth. This study revealed that within the seven churches involved in this research there is, indeed, a direct connection between presence and touch and a growth in professions of faith and church attendance. Through his examinations, the researcher identified seven principles of how serving through presence and touch affects churches.

As part of their missions, the majority of churches today serve their community in some capacity. Like any organization, the church is limited in time, gifting, and finances. Thus, knowing the effect of a ministry helps the church wisely allocate resources. This project sought to provide the church insight on how its use of presence and touch when serving the community results in conversions and church growth.

## CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM OF DISENGAGING FROM THE COMMUNITY IN PHYSICAL PRESENCE

### **Statement of the Problem**

This project addresses the problem of discovering whether, when churches move to be physically present in their communities and engage in appropriate touch, there is a corresponding growth in that church and in confessions of faith. To answer this problem, the researcher reviewed the Gospels to identify Jesus' use of physical presence and touch in His ministry as well as the Book of Acts to see how presence and touch was used in ministry and start of the early church. The researcher also reviewed literature that focused on the impact of physical presence and touch in human relationship and how in the ministry of a church influences conversions and church growth. The researcher continued by interviewing growing churches to identify any parallels between physical presence/touch and conversions and church growth. The researcher then organized, reviewed, and analyzed the research and identified actionable principles based on the Holy Spirit's ministry of physical presence and touch that increase confessions of faith and church growth.

### **Introduction**

The research presented by the researcher was limited to churches within Converge North Central. Due to the overall number of denominations within the church world and their variances in core beliefs, leadership structures, processes, and practices, the researcher chose to focus within his own denomination (Converge) to examine the problem at the heart of his research.

The research was limited to the study of appropriate physical presence (hereafter referred to as *presence*) and touch and their impact on increasing confessions of faith and church growth. While the researcher recognizes there are many other factors at play in conversion decisions and church growth, the researcher will focus solely on determining the level of impact that presence has on conversions and church growth.

The study recognizes that the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20)<sup>1</sup> is the main charge of the local church. Just as loved ones gather around family and friends for parting words before a departure due to death or a lengthy separation, Jesus gathered His disciples around Him in between His resurrection and ascension. During these meetings, Jesus communicated important aspects of their future ministry to His disciples, the Great Commission being one of them. Today, churches find and articulate a clear mission based on the Great Commission: “Go make disciples out of all people groups, baptize them, and teach them everything I have taught you” (Matt. 28:19-20).

The study assumes conversion or confession of faith in Jesus means being rescued from sin, its consequences, its evil, and ultimately from how it separates a soul from God for eternity. As the Apostle Paul said, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). The word “condemnation” is courtroom terminology. With the word “no” in front of it, there is pardon and freedom from the sins of the sinner. In Romans, Paul focuses on the tension between law, sin, and its results:

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<sup>1</sup> “Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations are from *The Holy Bible, New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015).

When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 6:20-23)

Humans can only receive this salvation through their faith in Christ. In the article by Leonardo De Chirico, “Salvation belongs to the Lord: Evangelical Consensus in Dialogue with Roman Catholicism,” he states, “While the Old Testament words stress God’s intervention to rescue from oppression, fear, sin and guilt, the New Testament terms are linked to the person and work of Jesus who, as the Incarnate Son of God, crucified and risen from the dead, saves from God’s judgment and delivers from evil.”<sup>2</sup> The Apostle Paul also makes this clear: “God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus bought people back from their sin debt, and they are pardoned by faith in Him alone.

The study believes that individuals who are not in a relationship with Jesus as Savior and Lord are unbelievers. Jesus stated: “Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son” (John 3:18).

The study presumed that Christian churches are a regular gathering of people who practice their belief that Jesus Christ redeemed creation from sin and death by His life,

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<sup>2</sup> Leonardo De Chirico, “Salvation Belongs to the Lord: Evangelical Consensus in Dialogue with Roman Catholicism,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 39 4 10 (2015): 293-294.

death and resurrection. By definition, church (*ekklesia*), is a group of people called out from the world and to God.<sup>3</sup>

The study recognizes that presence and touch is a normal expression of God's creation and a byproduct of being made in His image, expressed in the life of Jesus. John describes it thus:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched — this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ (1 John 1:1-3).

The bigger picture of fellowship in John's writing paints the picture of the intimate relationship that was in the beginning and continues among God's created — not a creation that is distant in relationship, but one that is engaging through presence and touch.

The study recognized the Gospels and Book of Acts in the Bible hold relevance for understanding influencing principles on salvation and church attendance. The message of the Gospels is the “good news” of salvation in Jesus, and the Book of Acts reaffirm salvation only through Jesus and a Christian's participation in His church. The result of conversions is church growth: “And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47b).

The study affirms that beyond church growth, engaging the believing and unbelieving community through presence and touch has value and glorifies God. Jesus calls

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<sup>3</sup> Strong's Greek: 1577. Ἐκκλησία (Ekklesia) –an Assembly, a (Religious) Congregation, biblehub.com/greek/1577.htm.

us to “love our neighbor as ourselves,” (Mark 12:31) and “as we serve unto the least of these, we are serving Him” (Matt. 25:43). Goodness goes beyond just church growth; it is expressed through being present and touching.

### **Project Setting**

This project was set in the context of the local church. Although the church is its people, the researcher compiled information by visiting with people who gather at a church building. The researcher specifically studied presence and touch and their power to influence non-believers towards conversion and church attendance.

The research focused on Converge North Central churches. All the churches engaged in research were located within the Converge North Central district. Converge began in the mid-19th century when Swedes immigrated to America in search of religious freedom. The Swedish Baptist General Conference was established in 1879 to reach other Swedish immigrants with the life-changing message of the gospel. In 1945, Converge had its second name change to The Baptist General Conference. Due to decreased Swedish immigration, the increased use of English within the church, and the planting of non-Swedish churches, the Conference dropped the word “Swedish” in the denominational title.

The challenge of branding did not end there. By the end of the 20th century, the name “Baptist” was losing its cultural relevancy and many, if not all, church plants kept the name out of their titles. The Conference adopted the name “Converge Worldwide” in 2008, which it then shortened to “Converge” in 2015. The Converge name promotes the vision of starting and strengthening churches through the collaboration of eleven districts,

Converge churches and national and international ministries.<sup>4</sup>

### **Importance of the Project**

The researcher came to this project with the belief that churches who engage believers and nonbelievers through presence and touch see church growth through an increased number of new Christians, overall Christlikeness, and in some cases church attendance. Since the researcher's church, New Hope Community Church, invests its resources of time, talent, and treasure into both the believing and nonbelieving communities, the researcher was able to examine if these investments impacted church growth. Research contrasted the allocation of budget and staff time invested between believers and unbelievers. It looked at the categories of church partnerships with area nonprofits (which affected church financial giving and service hours), serving corporately as a church in the community, and responses to local community crises or individual crises outside of church membership.

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

New Hope Community Church (New Hope) is a 15-year old church plant. Its vision is "To see Isanti County and beyond filled with the presence of Jesus." New Hope greatly emphasizes living missionally as a church. Since "community" is in its name, it lives that mission by partnering with fifteen different nonprofits, from the "The Refuge Network" which serves domestic violence victims to "New Pathways," a nonprofit that provides shelter and support services to families with children in rural Isanti County within the walls of New Hope eight weeks per year. To New Hope, "community"

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<sup>4</sup> "About Converge," About Converge | Converge, June 14, 2016, accessed July 05, 2017, <https://converge.org/about>.

includes holding a mud run on its 25-acre property with \$15,000 in proceeds benefitting the Isanti County Food Shelf. For every dollar given, Second Harvest can purchase seven dollars' worth of food. To New Hope, "community" extends to Allina Health Outpatient Addiction Services of Cambridge Medical Center where church members serve patients weekly. It takes the form of regular visits to the county jail where church members encourage and walk alongside prisoners. On average, New Hope invests back into the community more than \$50,000 a year in financial benevolence and serves about ten families outside the church per week. Church members provide another \$20,000 in resource dollars for community nonprofits as well as the equivalent of \$100,000 in volunteer hours.

The researcher started and leads three churches, each with the word "community" in its name. The researcher stays very involved in the community through presence and touch. The researcher requires his staff to practice presence and touch in the community by tithing ten percent of their week back into the community. They serve on nonprofit boards, coach, tutor, or volunteer based on their own interests. Due to this, the community knows the researcher's church as a church that welcomes all, serves its community, and is consistently generous. The research question at the heart of this thesis is this: "Does presence and touch result in church growth?" The results of the researcher's study will evaluate the church's involvement in both the believing and nonbelieving communities, individually, by staff, and corporately as a church. These results will better allow leaders to strategically steward their resources toward church growth.



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

Any church has limited resources of time, talent, touch, and treasure. Certain churches may have more resources than others may have, depending on size, the congregation's socioeconomic composition, staffing, and location, but all churches have limited resources. Given this truth, directing church resources toward church growth has a certain level of importance. The researcher conducted this research to help churches determine if time, talent, touch and treasure expanded outside the church walls to the nonbelieving community actually brings increase of new Christians and church growth.

Is engagement with the community outside the church through intentional activities that result in presence and touch with nonbelievers directly aiding the addition of new Christians and church attendance? Whether or not this is the case, the local church needs to reevaluate its resource allocation to ministries or activities outside its walls. An added bonus is that the research may uncover which ministry activities produce little increase in new Christians and attendance and which ministries and activities do. This would help churches recognize what they may need to add or remove to their outside ministries to better serve church growth. Along with New Hope, many churches are out in the community intentionally reflecting the gospel through presence and touch. Does doing this result in increase in new Christians and church attendance? The researcher believes this would be beneficial for the local church to know.

## CHAPTER TWO: A BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION FOR PHYSICAL PRESENCE AND TOUCH AMONG THE NON-BELIEVING COMMUNITY

### **The Invitation to Presence and Touch**

John introduces the incarnation in the opening verses of his letter. He informs his readers that God is with them in the flesh, through the presence and touch of Jesus:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched — this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete (1 John 1:1-4).

The Apostle John is giving witness to what he has experienced living alongside Jesus in presence and touch. They get a distinct picture of this when John is in exile on the island of Patmos and Jesus touches Him in a vision. “When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead. Then he placed His right hand on me and said, ‘Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last’” (Rev. 1:17).

Jesus was present before the beginning of creation and time, a far distance from humanity but “at just the right time” (Rom. 5:6). He was born into the presence of people through the incarnation. God Himself initiated this timely act. “But in God the message of life also draws near to humanity and finds its culmination in Jesus. In Him the Word of life becomes incarnated, manifested, and hence can be seen, touched, and even

handled.”<sup>5</sup> God communicates people’s value in desiring to be among them in human presence and touch through the life of Jesus. John affirms this, stating, “Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ,” (1 John 1:3). The Greek word for “fellowship” translates to “share a common life.”<sup>6</sup> This paints a beautiful picture of living a life with God and one another, a picture that incorporates presence and touch.

### **The Model of Presence and Touch in the Trinity**

The Trinity models the concept and reality of presence and touch. It resides in the Trinity. “In the beginning was the Word [defined as Jesus in John 1:14] and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning” (John 1:1). The preposition “with” in the phrase “the Word was with God” indicates both equality and distinction of identity along with association. Reinterpreted, the phrase can mean “face to face with.”<sup>7</sup> The word “with” and the rendering “face to face with,” create a visual of the existence of presence and touch within the Trinity. The first incarnation of presence and touch prior to man and woman is that of the Trinity: “Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness’” (Gen. 1:26). “The theology of the Trinity reveals a God in relationship: the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are engaged in eternal communion.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Gary Baker, “1,2,3 John,” In *Hebrew, James, 1,2 Peter, 1,2,3 John, Jude, Revelation*, vol. 12, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: The New International Version*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 306.

<sup>6</sup> Baker, 307.

<sup>7</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, “Acts.” In *John and Acts*, vol. 9, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: The New International Version*, edited by Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 28.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas J. Scirghi, “The Trinity: A Model for Belonging in Contemporary Society,” *Ecumenical Review* 54, no. 3 (July 2002): 333.

When Jesus first appears publicly as the Messiah, John the Baptist baptizes Him. A clear description of communion between the Trinity in the baptism of Jesus is Matthew 3:16-17: “As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on Him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased.’” Jesus receives an intimate confirmation of His value by the Spirit ascending upon Him like a dove and His Father speaking over Him.

It is good to note that in this picture of the Trinity at work together God as spirit manifests himself through presence and touch as a dove. This is a clear visual representation of the ability for touch even in the realm of pure spirit. When the day of Pentecost came, the Holy Spirit brushed up against the disciples through the presence and touch of wind and fire (Acts 2:2-3). God’s theophanies often carried with them a tactile part.

Continually, the Trinity interacts through natural expressions of relationship in presence and touch, and presents humankind with a model for interacting with one another.

“The one God is three! He is by very nature both a unity of Being while also existing eternally as a society of Persons. God’s tri-personal reality is intrinsic to His existence as the one God who alone is God. He is a socially related being within himself. In this tri-Personal relationship the three persons love one another, support one another, assist one another, team with one another, honor one another, communicate with one another, and in everything respect and enjoy one another.”<sup>9</sup>

God created men and women in His image, thus creating in them both the

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<sup>9</sup> Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 20-21.

capacity for presence and touch as well as the need for it in their relationships. Who God is, is who humans are to be. D. J. A. Clines in “The Image of God in Man” states,

One essential meaning of the statement that man was created ‘in the image of God’ is plain: it is that man is in some way and in some degree like God. Even if the similarity between man and God could not be defined more precisely, the significance of this statement of the nature of man for the understanding of biblical thought could not be over-emphasized. Man is the one godlike creature in all the created order. By the doctrine of the image of God, Genesis affirms the dignity and worth of man, and elevates all men — not just kings or nobles — to the highest status conceivable, short of complete divinization.<sup>10</sup>

As humankind is the image of God, the nature of the Trinity reveals itself in humankind’s interactions.

We are created in the image of God and it is therefore to be expected that — relationality will be fundamental to our humanity. That is to say, if God is a communion of persons involving mutual participation, we will experience our humanity in our relatedness to others.<sup>11</sup>

A picture of this relatedness is in a portion of Jesus’ prayer for the interaction and unity of all believers, “I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one, I in them and you in me — so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17:22-23).

For Father and Son to be one and to express complete unity in their diversity, they must create their unity through presence and touch.

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<sup>10</sup> D. J. A. Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 19, (1968): 53.

<sup>11</sup> Neil F. Pembroke, “Space in the Trinity and in Pastoral Care,” *The Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling* 65, no. 2 (2011): 2.

The relationship of the three persons of the Godhead is aptly described with the Eastern Orthodox notion of *perichoresis*, a word roughly translated as ‘interpenetration,’ or permeation without confusion. It describes the dynamic activity of exchange in which persons are who they are because of their relation to each other.<sup>12</sup>

Jesus’ prayer assumes that His followers will interact with one another, that these interactions will challenge relationally at times, and that these followers will thus need to practice unity. Even as Jesus teaches His disciples to pray, he reveals the reality of interaction through presence in His call to prayer, “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matt. 6:12). Today, interactions may take many forms such as letters, phone calls, texts, videos, and email, but interactions that include presence, communication, and touch are still the most vital for humans.

The Trinity equally holds the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. One does not change or diminish the other. Unlike the Trinity, as people interact through presence and touch, they in essence empty a part of themselves into another person. In being present repeatedly with the same people, one becomes more like those they are around, and those that they are around become more like them. They start to portray similar thinking, words, behaviors, and taste. The researcher often says to his congregation, “Show me your friends and I will show you your future.” As people share themselves, they influence others toward their own areas of likeness.

The life of Jesus demonstrates this principle as well. As He invited His disciples to follow Him, they more and more became like Him. Simon Peter draws His sword against a mob and strikes a man (John 18:10). Jesus rebukes him and humbly goes with the mob. In the Book of Acts Peter is involved in many similarly tense situations yet his

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<sup>12</sup> Scirghi, 333.

behavior then was one of submission, not of the sword. Luke wrote that when Peter and John appeared before the Sanhedrin, the Sanhedrin saw the apostles' courage and connected it with being in the presence of Jesus: "When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). Saint Irenaeus wrote, "God took on our humanness so that we might become like God."<sup>13</sup> As people live with one another how they live is taken on by others. All people are distinct as individuals, yet in many ways they are also alike. It is similar to one flame of a candle lighting another, the flame gives itself away through presence and touch, reproducing a portion of itself, but not diminishing itself.

Unlike human nature, the Trinity is complete, both corporately and as individuals. It illuminates how individuals engage each other with presence and how, through presence, they influence each other.

The very fact that God, though singular in nature, is plural and societal in person, indicates that we should not view ourselves as isolated individuals who happen to exist in close proximity to others, but as interconnected, interdependent relational persons in community. God intends that there be a created community of persons in which there is an interconnection and interdependence, so that what one does affects another, what one needs can be supplied by another, and what one seeks to accomplish may be assisted by another.<sup>14</sup>

The interdependence of the Trinity presents to us the model of interdependence that God has created for us in relation with one another. As Thomas Scirghi states, "I want here to address what I believe to be one area of social significance concerning the Trinity. My

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<sup>13</sup> Brennan Manning, *Abba's Child: The Cry of the Heart for Intimate Belonging* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1994), 48.

<sup>14</sup> Ware, 134.

contention is that the Trinity provides a model for belonging to a community, specifically the communities of the church as well as for society as a whole.”<sup>15</sup>

In the Trinity, people have the perfect and best model for relationship with one another, a relationship that portrays individual uniqueness and purpose, but wrapped in interdependence involving presence and touch. This model not only is necessary for the building up of the church but the church’s success with interacting with and leading an unbelieving world toward a relationship with Jesus.

### **The Human Intuition of a Divine Relationship**

#### *Humans to God*

Wherever the researcher has traveled in the world, from Ukraine to Trinidad, southern Ethiopia, to the depths of the Amazon jungle, people worshipped a god. There is an impulse to worship someone or something greater than one’s humanity. People find gods to worship, even if they deny doing so. Reading Romans 1:20 reveals this internal compass toward God, “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities-His eternal power and divine nature-have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.” One aspect of the theology of general revelation (the knowledge about God) is the innate inward belief in God.

In all cultures, at all times and places, humans have believed in the existence of a higher reality than themselves, and even of something higher than the human race collectively. While the exact nature of the belief and worship practice varies considerably from one religion to another, many see in this universal tendency toward worship of the holy the manifestation of a past knowledge of God, an internal sense of deity, which, although it may be marred and distorted, is nonetheless still present and operating in human experience.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Scirghi, 333.

<sup>16</sup> Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House Company, 1983), 155.



“Despite the knowledge of God conveyed to them through the creation, men failed to act on it. They ‘Neither glorified God nor gave thanks to Him’ (Romans 1:21-23).”<sup>17</sup> This is still true in modern times, even as people seek God.

Even among people who regard spiritual life as wishful hocus-pocus, there is a growing sense that humans may not be able to survive without it. It’s hard enough getting by in a fang-and-claw world in which killing, thieving and cheating pay such rich dividends. It’s harder still when there’s no moral cop walking the beat to blow the whistle when things get out of control. Best to have a deity on hand to rein in our worst impulses, bring out our best and, not incidentally, give us a sense that there’s someone awake in the cosmic house when the lights go out at night and we find ourselves wondering just why we’re here in the first place.<sup>18</sup>

Think of the belief in UFOs. Part of the draw of the question, “Are we to be in relationship with beings from other planets?” is that the fact of another being beyond human creation intrigues humans and invites them to look for the possibility of a relationship. God has designed His creation of earth and sky as an invitation for men and women to have a relationship with Him. The beauty and complexity of nature creates an opportunity for an interactive relationship beyond human things.

Scripture itself proposes that there is a knowledge of God available through the created physical order: The psalmist says, “The heavens are telling the glory of God” (Ps. 19:1). General revelation is most frequently thought of in connection with the amazing and impressive character of the creation, which seems to point to a very powerful and wise person who is capable of designing and producing intricate variety and beauty. The person who views the beauty of a sunset and the biology student dissecting a complex organism are exposed to indications of the greatness of God.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Everett F. Harrison, “Romans,” In *Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians*, vol. 8, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: The New International Version*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 23.

<sup>18</sup> Jeffery Kluger, Jeff Chu, Broward Liston, Maggie Sieger, and Daniel Williams, “Is God in Our Genes? *Time International (Canada Edition)* 164, no.17 (2004): 45.

<sup>19</sup> Erickson, 154.

Their God-created inner instinct along with God's outer creation of nature draws humans to a relationship with God and with one another. They have a need for relationship, a need for interaction with one another, and a need for presence and touch. In creating them in His image, God stated, "It is not good for man to be alone" (Gen. 1:18). Alone is the result of eschewing a relationship with God and with others.

### **The Impact of Presence and Touch of Jesus in the Gospels**

The Gospels overflow with examples of Jesus' use of presence and touch in His public ministry. With Jesus' first breath at birth, the Almighty God of all creation became present among humankind incarnated as flesh. Jesus as the incarnate God was not passive in the flesh; instead, he came with a purpose. "Who, being in the very nature of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness" (Phil. 2:6-7). The fact that God took on a body in Jesus tells people something about His affirmation of physicality in relationships. To relate to humankind, Jesus took on a physical body with its inherent desire for relationships of presence and touch. To emphasize Jesus' use of presence and touch because of the incarnation, the researcher has sorted the Gospel examples into five categories:

1. Jesus affirms presence and touch in the incarnation
2. Jesus attests to the strategic use of presence and touch
3. Jesus' actions of presence and touch
4. Jesus' audacious use of presence and touch questioned
5. Jesus' accounts of presence and touch resulting in increased influence, salvation, and followership

*Jesus Affirms Presence and Touch in the Incarnation*

Table 1: Jesus Affirms Presence and Touch in the Incarnation

<i>Presence and Touch Acknowledged</i>	<i>Scripture</i>
Immanuel-God with us	Matt. 1:20-23
Shepherd of the people	Matt. 2:3-6
Kingdom of heaven is near	Matt. 3:1
God has come and redeemed	Luke 1:67-68
The Word dwelt among us	John 1:9-1

One does not have to read far into the first chapter of the first Gospel (Matt.) before they get a clear illustration of Jesus' intent to present the God of the universe as a God of presence and touch. Upon hearing of Mary's pregnancy, the angel restated to Joseph what the prophet Isaiah had communicated years earlier: "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet, 'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel' — (which means, 'God with us') (Matt. 1:22-23). "There is no greater blessing than for God to dwell with His people. Jesus is the one called "God with us," a designation that evokes John 1:14, 18. As if that was not enough, Jesus promises just before His ascension to be with us 'to the end of the age'" (Matt. 28:20).<sup>20</sup> The preposition "with" combines with the noun "God" to express a predication, the affirmation that God's location is among His people.

When John the Baptist's father Zechariah was celebrating John's birth he proclaimed, "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because He has come and has redeemed His people" (Luke 1:67). The word "come" is a verb and portrays moving toward or being near. The word "redeemed" means retrieving something that typically

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<sup>20</sup> D. A. Carson, "Matthew," *In Matthew, Mark and Luke*, vol. 8, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: The New International Version*, ed, Frank E. Gaebelein, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 80.

was once yours. Both words give an expression of the Lord's intimacy with His creation through presence and touch and since Jesus and the Father are one, it gives a picture as well of the social interaction of the coming Savior Jesus.

After Jesus' birth, King Herod was disturbed because the Magi proclaimed Jesus "King of the Jews." Herod wants to know the place of Jesus' birth and goes to the source, the chief priests and teachers of the law. They quoted the prophecy from Micah 5:2 stating, "Out of Bethlehem will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel" (Matt. 2). The description of Jesus as a shepherd gives the description of a leader who will be among His people, leading them with presence and touch.

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me your rod and your staff, they comfort me. (Ps. 23:1-4)

When Jesus was going throughout all the towns and villages teaching and healing, He looked over the crowds and felt moved to compassion. This compassion welled up in Him because the people were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus asks His disciples to pray for more workers (shepherds) to go out into the harvest field to reap those who Jesus is encountering (Matt. 9:35-38). Sheep without a shepherd will be harassed and helpless but with the presence and touch of a shepherd, they will be cared for and protected. This personifies Jesus' ministry to the people.

Prior to Jesus' public ministry, John the Baptist went out preaching in the wilderness proclaiming, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Matt. 3:2). "The phrase, 'kingdom of heaven' in Matthew is depicted at times as a kingdom that is future, Thus in all the parables in Matthew the phrase 'the Kingdom of Heaven' points to

the future in terms of fulfillment, promise, goal, or impending judgment.”<sup>21</sup> These refer to different outcomes that will take place in the kingdom of God while on the other hand, the “kingdom of God” in Matthew also refers to being now or near in the person of Jesus:

The passage in question is 11:12-13 in which ‘the Kingdom of Heaven’ is said to be suffering violence from the days of John until now. But if we build upon W. G. Kummel’s careful study of the passage, the verbs *biazetai*, ‘it suffers violence’, and *harpazousiny* ‘they seize’, in 11:12, is the Kingdom of Heaven as present in Jesus’ person. Thus we may say that it is in Jesus’ person that the Kingdom of Heaven is proleptically present and it suffers violence inasmuch as violence is done to Jesus.<sup>22</sup>

In the first chapter of the Gospel of John, one reads expressions of presence and touch in the coming of Jesus (John 1:9-14). Expressions such as “coming,” “made through Him,” “His own,” “receive Him,” “children of God,” and “dwelling among us” all acknowledge Jesus’ use of presence and touch in His ministry.

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him. He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him. Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, he gave the right to become children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Many prophecies came forth about the Messiah Jesus, a Messiah who would be engaged among the people in relationship and not distant, as a ruler. Jesus was God in the flesh and His presence and touch established His influence among humanity forever. The prophet Isaiah proclaims Jesus’ eternal influence among people:

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<sup>21</sup> James M. Gibbs, “Matthew’s Use of ‘Kingdom’: ‘Kingdom’ of God’ and ‘Kingdom of Heaven,’” *Bangalore Theological Forum* 8, no. 1 (1976): 69.

<sup>22</sup> Gibbs, 71.

Of the greatness of His government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over His kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this (Isa. 9:7).

The people of His time recognized Jesus — God in the flesh — as a leader who engaged in presence and touch among them, not as a standoffish religious leader. They described Jesus as living a life of being present among and touching all people.

*Jesus Attests to the Strategic Use of Presence and Touch*

To “attest” means “to affirm to be true or genuine”<sup>23</sup> Throughout the Gospels there are many scenarios that attest to Jesus’ strategic interaction through presence and touch. Scriptures that portray Jesus’ desire and practice of presence and touch in His relationships and ministry fall into three categories: presence and touch with His disciples, presence and touch with the community, and presence and touch through illustrations.

**Presence and Touch with His Disciples**

Many of Jesus’ interactions with his disciples reveal the natural use of presence and touch. Some are more routine than others, yet all point to Jesus’ strategic use of presence and touch. One that stands out is Jesus washing the disciples’ feet (John 13). “To wash the feet of the guests at a feast was the office of a slave.”<sup>24</sup> By His choice Jesus “made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant” (Phil. 2:7). Even though Jesus was still deity, He submitted himself as a servant to His disciples by interacting

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<sup>23</sup>Merriam-Webster, “Attest.” n.d. Merriam-Webster Dictionary, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/attest> (Accessed September 16, 2019).

<sup>24</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, rev.ed., (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), 2:137.

with them as man in a most intimate way of presence and touch by washing and drying their feet. This act by Jesus is such a vivid demonstration of Immanuel, God with us, in the flesh touching ours with His. This significant move by Jesus attests to His use of presence and touch in His relationship with the disciples to emphasize His position as a humble servant (Matt. 20:28) and His calling His disciples to the same. “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet” (John 13:13-14). “The world is full of people who are standing on their dignity when they ought to be kneeling at the feet of their brethren.”<sup>25</sup> Jesus builds on His relationship with His disciples beyond teaching words to a touch that is unforgettable. He calls the disciples through word and action to the feet of their brethren, and He calls all humankind as well.

### **Presence and Touch with the Community**

Beyond Jesus’ relationship with His disciples, He spent much time in the community among people and did not discriminate between health, wealth, position, age, sex, or education. Jesus had friction with certain groups (e.g., religious leaders), yet in the Gospels He freely interacted with all people through presence and touch. There are a variety of examples of Jesus’ presence and even touch with certain people groups. Jesus’ relationship with the leper (Luke 5:12-16) gives His followers and the community around Him a clear picture of His ministry and heart for all people, regardless of their grave conditions. The man with leprosy was well advanced with the disease as it “covered” Him (Luke 5:12). “By Jewish standards, Jesus performed a miracle on the wrong person and with the wrong methods. He did not yell ‘Be healed!’ to this sufferer from a safe

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<sup>25</sup> Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, 2:139.

distance. Rather, He, a well person, physically touched a leper.”<sup>26</sup> This was a big deal, first to the leper and then to those who observed the law.

Dr. Paul Brand, twentieth-century pioneer medical missionary to India, saw firsthand the stigma associated with leprosy. During an appointment, he touched a patient to reassure Him treatment was possible. Tears began to stream down the man’s face. An attendant explained the tears to Dr. Brand, saying, “You touched him and no one has done that for years. They are tears of joy.”<sup>27</sup>

When Jesus touched the leper, He was communicating a new depth of love and ministry that goes beyond a spoken word: Jesus’ actions communicated as well in another way. Jesus’ touch communicated to those around that He was more concerned with the well-being of people than the regulations in Leviticus 13-14 that requires refraining from contact with people who have skin diseases. The fact that Matthew 8:1-3 records this incident affirms this, since Matthew’s audience was primarily Jewish Christians who knew the law.

### **Presence and Touch through Illustration**

Jesus was a storyteller and many of His stories strategically displayed presence and touch as strong elements to illustrate the importance of relationship with His Father and with others. People matter, relationships matter, and Jesus wanted His listeners and followers to know this. His use of presence and touch in story highlighted this.

Jesus gives this picture in the familiar story of the lost son in Luke 15. The younger of two sons requests his inheritance early from his still-living dad. He leaves home and squanders over time his fortune. In his job tending pigs, he realizes quickly he is below rank among the pigs in the daily rations of food, his pay. The son realizes life as

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<sup>26</sup> Bruce Larson, *Luke*, The Communicator’s Commentary, ed. Lloyd J. Ogilvie (Waco: Word Books Publisher, 1983), 107-8.

<sup>27</sup> Lisa Samra, “Power of Touch,” *Our Daily Bread*, November 17, 2018.



a hired hand on his father's farm is ten times better and heads home with a plan for reentry into the family as a paid employee. As the son draws near to home, His father sees him coming and runs to him, hugs him intently and kisses him.

Some have pointed out that a father in that culture would not normally run as he did, which, along with his warm embrace and kissing, adds to the impact of the story. Clearly, Jesus used every literary means to heighten the contrast between the father's attitude and that of the elder brother" (and of the Pharisees, cf. vv.1-2).<sup>28</sup>

Jesus' use of presence and touch in the lost son's story reveals the extent and exquisite forgiveness and love of God. Regardless of sin and the distance it puts between God and humankind, God is always waiting and watching for their return.

Jesus' life attests to the influence of presence and touch as he called the disciples to follow Him and as he interacted with them on a daily basis. Not every interaction of presence and touch brought individuals into following Jesus in continual proximity physically. In many situations when individuals wanted to follow Jesus, he sent them back to their families or communities to live in presence and touch and to honor God by reflecting Jesus' actions in their life through a healing transformation. For others, the invitation to follow Jesus was too great and many turned away. Jesus used illustrations to depict God's relationship with the people. These illustrations give those listening a greater picture of God's relationship with them, and an invitation to be close with God through presence and touch.

Today's reality is that people can follow someone from a distance through social media, television, periodicals and books. This "follow" is usually from a distance and

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<sup>28</sup> Walter L. Liefeld, "Luke," In *Matthew, Mark and Luke*, vol. 8, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: The New International Version*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 984.

with little interaction. To see the “follow” Jesus intended and depicted in earlier scripture, one needs only to read His “vine and branch” illustration in John 15. Receiving the invitation to connect intimately to Him, people bear fruit by becoming more like Him in character, life, and mission.

“Come, follow me.” These are the words with which Jesus invited people into His community of practice known as the reign of God. Upon hearing them, many people left their everyday lives, joined His band of disciples, and committed themselves to learning His ways. In essence, they became apprentices of Jesus and observed how he modeled life in the reign of God.”<sup>29</sup>

This invitation, “Come follow me,” is still true today. It is not true in the physical sense with Jesus, but it is true in the spiritual reality of His Holy Spirit being present in believers and connecting them to the physical church, the body of Christ.

#### *Jesus’ Actions of Presence and Touch*

There is a common adage met with nearly universal agreement: “Nobody cares how much you know until they know how much you care.” Although this maxim was not around during Jesus’ day, His actions in His public ministry among the people communicated care through presence and touch. Jesus lived out the second-greatest commandment: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31). Jesus’ influence, followership, and salvation of people are a direct result of His presence and touch among the crowds. One can witness this in two distinct areas throughout the Gospels: His teaching and His healing.

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<sup>29</sup> David M. Csinos, “‘Come, Follow Me’: Apprenticeship in Jesus’ Approach to Education,” *Religious Education* 105, no.1 (2010): 45. DOI: 10.1080/00344080903472725.

### **Jesus Teaching Among the People as a Picture of Presence and Touch**

Most towns or villages had a synagogue in Jesus' time, so if He was not obviously teaching in public, He was in the community synagogue or the temple courts. In offering presence and touch among the people, Jesus is teaching the general public whether in the synagogue, temple, or in the streets. He is not always preaching specifically to His disciples or even a Jewish crowd. Most rabbis contemporary to Jesus functioned as the head of a synagogue and taught Jewish traditions and the Hebrew Scriptures. In relation to the people, they functioned much like a current pastor today. Their primary focus was the Jewish community of believers. Jesus infuriated the Jewish community when He communicated for the first time in His hometown synagogue that His message and presence would go beyond the congregation to the Gentile world. One can see a definite shift in paradigm and mood among the people of the synagogue in Luke 4.

So far His listeners are amazed at the gracious words that come from His mouth. He is a local boy, they are happy to recall — “Isn't he Joseph's son”? As one of their own, Luke seems to be suggesting, they expect Him to do wonderful things for them. However, this emphasis on the neighborhood connections prompts Jesus to come out with something they find outrageous. He is going to carry the good news that he bears about God beyond the confines of those to whom he is most closely related by geographical, cultural, religious and racial origin.<sup>30</sup>

After Jesus left Nazareth, He preached or taught in the synagogue twenty-two times and among the people in public nineteen times. This was His mission He communicated to His disciples: “Let us go somewhere else — to the nearby villages — so I can preach there also. That is why I have come” (Mark 1:38). Jesus choice to be

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<sup>30</sup> Fergus Kerr, “Rage Against Jesus,” *Expository Times* 118, no. 3 (2006): 139. Doi:10.1177/0014524606072703.

among the people, no matter who they were, was essential to His message and to whom He was: God incarnate.

### **Jesus' Healings Among the People as a Picture of Presence and Touch**

Jesus lived intentionally among the people and gave a clear definition of Immanuel, which means “God with us” (Matt.1:23). This phrase embodies His life of presence and touch. In reading the Gospels it is seen repeatedly Jesus’ intimate interactions with everyday people through healing. Jesus was an anomaly socially, as he entered into the physical space of those oppressed by disease and demonic footholds. This directly contrasts with the religious leaders of His day as they maintained their distance from and judgment of both Gentiles and fellow Jews. Throughout the gospel stories, Jesus used presence and touch to perform thirteen healings. Two stories reference multiple healings by people touching Jesus’ garment. Jesus performs ten other healings through presence and words, and finally, three times Jesus commands healing with a word only.

Three passages record a story of two healings through two different touches (Matt. 9:18, Mark 5:21, and Luke 8:40). The daughter of the synagogue ruler Jairus dies, and Jesus ends up healing her by taking her hand and giving a command to get up. Jesus extends His power to Jairus’s daughter, and brings her back to life. While on His way to Jairus’s home, the crowds press in on Jesus and a bleeding woman is healed by grasping at His cloak. In the case of Jairus’s daughter, Jesus’ power flows out due to His intentional touch, while the woman in the crowd initiates the touch and power flows from Jesus. In this, it is evident that both extending His touch and seeking His touch can bring

change and transformation to a person. A common denominator beyond touch is Jesus' reflection of compassion for those healed.

But what distinguishes the touch that heals? For one, it is the expression of compassion. Etymologically, "compassion" means "to feel or suffer with." A practitioner cannot take on all the suffering of others or that practitioner would soon be overwhelmed. However, compassionate touch is that which encounters the other not simply as object, an "It," but as a subject, a "Thou" with whom the practitioner can identify.<sup>31</sup>

These stories of touch and healing power reminded the researcher of a time some individuals from his church went to a mission to provide a healing service. Two of the eight people were women. The crowd was primarily African American men. As a man approached the two women for healing prayer, one of the women heard God tell her, "Touch him." Before praying, the woman asked if she could touch the man by placing a hand on his shoulder. Through prayer, touch, and God's power, something broke emotionally in the man and he was healed. In response to his new peace and joy, he initiated touch and hugged each woman. The thankfulness and sincerity of his embrace affected the women as well. One of them, a widow, stated, "I hope he was changed as much as I was."

In each of these stories, foundational compassion accompanied the elements of touch and power. The best way to convey compassion is through presence and touch. Compassion values every person. Jesus could have rejected the sick since Jewish law deemed them unclean and unfit for touching. The woman at the shelter could have rejected God's call for her to touch the African American man since she was a white

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<sup>31</sup> Drew Leder and Mitchel W. Krucoff, "The Touch That Heals: The Uses and Meanings of Touch in the Clinical Encounter," *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* 14, no. 3 (2008): 324. DOI: 10.1089/acm.2007.0717.

elderly woman from a rural community where interaction with African American males is rare. Neither Jesus nor the woman rejects those to whom they can extend compassion. As Jesus speaks over Jairus's daughter, he does so tenderly. "Peter's memory of the event is still so vivid that he slips into Aramaic, the familiar language, as he tells Mark the story. '*Talitha, cumi*' is an invitation of love that literally means, 'Little lamb, arise.'"<sup>32</sup> Even as He rushed to another destination, harried and pressed by the crowds, Jesus interrupted His journey to turn to the woman with the flow of blood and respond with compassion and blessing, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering" (Mark 5:34). The woman at the shelter was ready to extend Jesus' touch and power, because she had come with a compassionate and obedient heart.

Jesus' use of presence and touch in His healing ministry sets Him apart. Pieter Lalleman stated:

It appears that the miracles of healing by a mere touch of His hand ascribed to Jesus are unique. Previous research has insufficiently taken note of this, as have commentaries on the gospel stories. Thus *ἅπτομαι* in the sense of 'to touch-for-healing' is really a word from the Christian vocabulary. It would seem that the practice described goes back on Jesus himself, who broke the barriers of uncleanness reaching out to the sick and allowing them to touch Him.<sup>33</sup>

Jesus ministry of healing was distinctive. His healings were welcoming, not intrusive, full of concern instead of condemnation, and rife with empathy, not fear. Jesus, in His ministry of healing, did this by embracing presence and touch.

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<sup>32</sup> David L. McKenna, *Mark*, The Communicator's Commentary, ed. Lloyd J. Ogilvie (Waco: Word Books Publisher, 1982), 121.

<sup>33</sup> Pieter J. Lalleman, "Healing by Mere Touch as a Christian Concept," *Tyndale Bulletin* 48, no. 2 (1997): 361.

*Jesus' Audacious Use of Presence and Touch Questioned*

Early in Jesus' ministry, He sets up His leadership team by calling His disciples. Jesus invites Levi, a tax collector, to follow Him. "While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with Him and His disciples, for there were many who followed Him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw Him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked His disciples: 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?'" (Mark 2:17). Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners was so opposite of the social norms of the religious leaders of the day. His casual approach to presence and touch among this crowd was radical and even considered sinful by the religious elite.

"Sinners" (v.16) denotes those people who refuse to follow the Mosaic Law as interpreted by the Pharisees. That Jesus would include in His most intimate circle a man associated with so disreputable a profession and would sit at table (in the ancient world a sign of intimacy) was too much for the 'teachers of the law' to keep quiet about.<sup>34</sup>

Jesus blatantly broke the Sabbath law when the Pharisees questioned Him about whether it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:9-14). Instead of saying "yes" or "no," Jesus answers "yes" by healing a man with a shriveled hand right in front of them. Today, one might say, "Watch this!" to convey the same sentiment. Upon witnessing this act, the Pharisees begin planning how they can kill Jesus. This act of kindness would not normally bring a death sentence in any other culture but it moved the Jews who took seriously the Sabbath to consider Jesus' death. As Barclay states in his commentary on Matthew 12:

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<sup>34</sup> Walter W. Wessel, "Mark." In *Matthew, Mark and Luke*, vol. 8, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: The New International Version*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 634.

We will not understand the attitude of the orthodox unless we understand the amazing seriousness with which they took the Sabbath law. That law forbade all work on the Sabbath Day, and so the orthodox Jews would literally die rather than break it. Even in a national crisis, even to save their lives, even to protect their nearest and their dearest, the Jews would not fight on the Sabbath.<sup>35</sup>

Given that the Jews intensely observed the Sabbath, why would Jesus choose to heal on the Sabbath instead of another day? His choice of another day would have muted the religious leaders concern for His healing, “Yet the first-century Jews discussed at length what was permitted in caring for the sick on the Sabbath (e.g., Mishnah Eduyot 2:5; Mishnah Shabbat 6:3; Mek Exodus 22:2; 23:13). Jesus’ attitude was more fundamental: It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”<sup>36</sup> Explained plainly, “Why wait for a non-Sabbath day when you can perform a good deed today? Tomorrow, the same opportunity may not show itself.” Jesus knew the religious leaders observed the requirements for keeping the Sabbath to the point of being intolerable. Jesus declared, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27-28).

Jesus set His own social norms, established His own friend list, and challenged human traditions based on biblical law. His presence among certain people and His interactions through touch opened himself up to the accusations of others. Despite this, He did not change His audacious behavior but insisted upon expanding His behavior of presence and touch. The following is a comprehensive list of times when Jesus’ audacious use of presence and touch was questioned (Table 2). Reviewing this list creates

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<sup>35</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew, rev ed.*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), 2:28.

<sup>36</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 283.



a vivid picture of Jesus' insistence on using presence and touch regardless the consequences.

Table 2: Jesus' Audacious Use of Presence and Touch Questioned

<i>Audacious Use</i>	<i>Scripture</i>	<i>Presence/Touch</i>
Jesus heals paralytic	Matt. 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12, Luke 5:17-26	P
Dinner with Matthew	Matt. 9: 9-12, Mark 2:14-17, Luke 5:27-32	P
Healing Blind Mute Man	Matt. 9:27-34	P/T
A Friend of Sinners	Matt. 11:18-18, Luke 7:33-35	P
Healing on Sabbath	Matt. 12:9-14, Mark 3:1-6, Luke 6:6-11, Luke 13:10-17, John 5:16	P
Prophet without Honor	Matt. 13:53-58, Mark 6:1-6	P
Jesus Actions in the Temple	Matt. 21:12-17	P
Jesus Actions Questioned	Matt. 21:23-27, Mark 11:27-33, Luke 20:1-8	P
Jesus Touched by Woman	Matt. 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9, Luke 7:36-50, , John 12:1-8	P/T
Dinner with Zacchaeus	Luke 19:1-9	P
Jesus and Woman at the Well	John 4:1-27	P
Jesus heals Blind Man	John 9:1-34	P/T
Plot to kill Jesus	John 11:45-57	P

The religious leaders of His time believed Jesus was overstepping the law and social norms as He moved among the people, being present and touching, and as He assumed the authority of God to heal and, worse yet, to forgive sin. Gustaf Aulen wrote, "The cause for the irritation present among the Jews of Jesus' time does not seem to have been His teaching. Primarily at issue was His behavior, His way of acting."<sup>37</sup> Even amidst verbal pushback and threats of death early in His ministry, Jesus persisted in drawing near to many undesirable people. Jesus' audacious behavior came with purpose.

<sup>37</sup> Tucker S. Ferda, "The Historical Jesus and the Law: The Form of His Activity and the Impact of Social Reputation," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 80, no.1 (2018): 67.

Clearly, Jesus didn't view His hanging out with sinners as fun or just hanging out. We don't go to the doctor to hang out do we? Of course not. We go to the doctor to get healed. We go with purpose and intent. And doctors don't go to work to hang out. They go to heal the sick. So Jesus reveals His intent when 'hanging' with sinners: Not to hang, but to heal.<sup>38</sup>

When questioned about His relationships, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:17). It's not that Jesus didn't care for righteous people but He could not help those who had slipped over to self-righteous.

The point of it is that the person for whom Jesus can do nothing is the person who thinks himself so good that he does not need anything done for him; and the one person for whom Jesus can do everything is the person who is a sinner and knows it and who longs in his heart for a cure.<sup>39</sup>

Jesus extended His relationship across many cultures, socioeconomic classes and gender. His use of presence and touch in relationships and in His ministry was radical in His day.

#### *Jesus Accounts of Presence and Touch Increasing Influence and Followership*

The first chapter of the Gospel of Mark depicts Jesus early in His public appearances. He enters Capernaum, and he teaches the people in the synagogue on the Sabbath. The authority with which Jesus was teaching amazed the people. "The verb used for 'amazed' is *exeplesonto*, a compound from *plesso* ('strike,' 'smite'); it has a very strong meaning."<sup>40</sup> The amazement of the crowds at Jesus' authority in every situation increased His influence and followership. As Jesus proceeded to teach, a man possessed

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<sup>38</sup> "Why Did Jesus Hang Out With Sinners and Tax Collectors?" Revelation. Co: Revelation, Bible Questions, Bible Contradictions, Apologetics, <https://www.revelation.co/2009/08/03/why-did-jesus-hang-out-sinners-eat/>

<sup>39</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*, rev. ed., (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), 57.

<sup>40</sup> Wessel, *Mark*, 627.

by an unclean spirit confronted Jesus and Jesus healed him. About Jesus' authority and power "News about Him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee (Mark 1:28)." With this news, people drew near to Jesus wherever he went. Throughout the rest of the Gospels, sixteen of Jesus' healings (including deliverances) result in greater influence and followership. Ten instances of Jesus' teaching moments resulted in increased influence and followership.

The moment Jesus went public with His ministry through presence and touch, His influence and followership grew, so much so that in certain ministry contexts the crowd pressed into Jesus so completely that He had to separate himself in order to be able minister to the people. When the crowds pressed Jesus, He asked Simon (Peter) to push Him out into the lake in one of his boats (Luke 5:1). As Jesus was on the way to heal Jairus's daughter, "the crowds almost crushed him" (Luke 8:42). Peter reported, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you" (8:45). Jesus' influence and followership grew through being present with the people on their turf and being willing to engage them with touch, a touch that resulted in miracle after miracle: the blind seeing, the mute talking, the possessed set free, and the dead raised. The outcome of this was evident. "Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed Him" (Matt. 4:25).

Those influenced by and following Jesus spoke of Him as a prophet and as the possible Messiah. Those who were threatened by His influence among the people called Him Beelzebub, a drunk, glutton, and friend of sinners: "The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'" (Matt. 11:19). Most people have a level of influence and

followership in life. Depending on their platform, they may also threaten others by their language and lifestyle. At times, they may draw concern and criticism. If they do not, each one may need to evaluate his or her level of presence, touch, and authority to others around. Jesus in His lifestyle of presence and touch not only drew people to follow Him, but also drew people who were publicly against Him.

From one Gospel to another, the writers affirm Jesus' use of presence and touch in His ministry. Jesus' ministry approach of being amid the people exemplifies His strategic use of presence and touch. His actions of presence and touch, some being audacious in His time, brought up many questions to those who were watching. Regardless, the result of these accounts was a greater following. Those who followed Jesus later lived out presence and touch among their community resulting in conversions and church growth.

### **The Impact of Presence and Touch on the Church in Acts**

Acts 1 reaffirms the whole premise of presence and touch as a catalyst for growing the church. Jesus' followers would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them and by this power they will be witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Presence and touch among the believers is now in the person of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised, "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:18). Jesus is present within believers by continually manifesting the Holy Spirit in their lives. This presence allows them to go out from Jerusalem to the world and, by His power, participate in making disciples through the ministry of presence and touch.

At the outset of the Jerusalem Church, how new believers practiced presence and touch played a role in growing the church through salvation in Jesus. Luke describes this dynamic.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:42-47)

In this passage the words and phrases such as “fellowship,” “breaking bread,” “prayer,” “together,” “give to anyone,” “every day,” “meet together,” “temple courts,” “homes,” “ate together,” and “favor of others” evoke the practice of presence and touch. To some level, this expression of presence and touch played a role in the early church (Christ-followers) being attractive to those who were not yet saved.

The definite article (*te*) in ‘the fellowship’ (*te koinonia*) implies that there was something distinctive in the gatherings of the early believers. With the influx of the three thousand on the Day of Pentecost and with daily increases to their number after that (cf.2:47), they must have had some externally recognizable identity.<sup>41</sup>

The identity of the early church was that of a strong intimate community. There was great togetherness, a human presence that nothing could supplant. They were together for meals, worship, prayer, mutual concerns, enjoyment, and financial support. Throughout the Book of Acts, His followers are present and touching, which plays a role in bringing salvation and growth to the church. The researcher will reference these with some extended comments on particular instances.

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<sup>41</sup> Longenecker, *Acts*, 289.

Table 3: Presence and Touch in Bringing Salvation and Church Growth, Version 1

<i>Scripture</i>	<i>Situation</i>	<i>Impact</i>	<i>Presence/Touch</i>
Acts 3:6-7	Healing	Gave Peter opportunity to preach resulting in salvation. Acts 4:4	P/T
Acts 5:12a	Signs/Wonders	Many more believed and were added to the number. Acts 5:14	P/T

The early church actively pointed people to Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit on display within them. They shared the Spirit through presence and touch. The early church was certainly a preaching church, a serving church, but it was also a healing church. They were present among the people and touched them by laying on of hands and praying for healing. In his commentary on Acts, Lloyd Ogilvie states,

Luke tells us that the sick were laid in Peter's path so that at least His shadow would fall on them. But people need more than the shadow of our busy lives. They need personal contact; they need to be listened to; and they need the physical contact of touch. The gentle laying on of hands is prescribed in James 5:14. 'Is anyone among you sick? Let Him call the elders of the church, and let them pray over Him, anointing Him with oil in the name of the Lord.' But not just the elders have that power. The hand is indicative of the imparting of power, i.e., the hand of the Lord. And He will use our gentle touch as a physical sign of His spiritual hand. And there will be wonders, be sure of that.<sup>42</sup>

Table 4: Presence and Touch in Bringing Salvation and Church Growth, Version 2

<i>Scripture</i>	<i>Situation</i>	<i>Impact</i>	<i>Presence/Touch</i>
Acts 5:12b	Believers met together	Many more believed and joined to the number. Acts 5:14	P/T

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<sup>42</sup> Lloyd Ogilvie, *Acts, The Communicator's Commentary* (Waco: Word Books, 1983), 122.

The Holy Spirit gathered people physically in one place to empower and inspire believers and, in so doing, make them attractive to others to bring growth to the church.

John Martens in “The Witness of Life” states,

The empowered and inspired life of the church both frightened people — Luke says that “none of the rest dared to join them” — but, conversely, attracted people: “Yet more than ever, believers were added to the Lord, great numbers of both men and women.” This was the power of the witness of life, of death conquered, of new life given, of the glorified life to come; it could overwhelm and frighten but had an inexorable pull.<sup>43</sup>

There is a reason Jesus gave His followers other names that described who they would be in the world, names that only make sense in the context of presence and touch among people, names such as “light,” “salt,” “sweet fragrance,” “witness,” and “ambassadors.” God’s people are to be attractive and certainly the early church was but it could only be attractive if it was present among the people. There is a reason Jesus used the word “go” as part of His Great Commission for the church. Most believers, once they find Jesus and the church, just want to stay and unintentionally establish a club.

Table 5: Presence and Touch in Bringing Salvation and Church Growth, Version 3

<i>Scripture</i>	<i>Situation</i>	<i>Impact</i>	<i>Presence/Touch</i>
Acts 5:42	Temple/house Teaching good news	Disciples increasing. Acts 6:1	P
Acts 6:1-7	Widows taken care of and disciples released to preach.	Disciples increased/Priests followed. Acts 6:7	P/T

The outcome of the dilemma of caring for widows was an increase in Jesus’ disciples. This increase is often attributed to the disciples being released to greater “prayer and ministry of the word” (Acts 6:3). The researcher would also suggest the

<sup>43</sup> John W. Martens, “The Witness of Life,” *America* 214, no. 11 (March 28, 2016): 39.

growth came through the act of presence and care of the widows, about which widows assumedly spoke to other widows, increasing visibility in the greater community. A different society of people were forming in the early church, and people followed:

When the husbands died, their widows were left behind or in some cases some returned to end their final days in Jerusalem. Since they left their homes, they were without family who could support their daily needs, including food, shelter and clothing. This led to the understanding of the possibility of the existence of temple support for the widows and the poor. In this case, some widows may have been attracted to join the believing community because of their concern for the “material needs” of its members (cf. Acts 4.32-37).<sup>44</sup>

This care for society’s marginalized drew more individuals from the fringes of society as well as those who saw it right to care for them. The result was growth in the church. Jesus tells His people they should be seen by others, and by this people will praise God. He proclaims, “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:14, 16). If Christ-followers are not living out Jesus in public, they are not living out Jesus in private.

Table 6: Presence and Touch in Bringing Salvation and Church Growth, Version 4

<i>Scripture</i>	<i>Situation</i>	<i>Impact</i>	<i>Presence/Touch</i>
Acts 8:1-8	Persecution broke out	Christians scattered. Present now among people in Judea and Samaria. Joy in the city, baptisms. Acts 8:8,12	P
Acts 8:26-31	Philip comes alongside Ethiopian	Salvation and baptism.	P/T
Acts 9:1-19	Ananias and Saul	Salvation and baptism.	P/T
Acts 9:32-42	Peter heals Aeneas Peter raises Dorcas	Many believed. Acts 9:35, 42	P/T
Acts 10	Peter goes to Cornelius	Holy Spirit, Salvation, and baptisms to the Gentiles. Acts 10:44-48	P/T

<sup>44</sup> James Ha Tun Aung, “Caring for Abandoned Widows, Reading Acts 6:1-7 Afresh,” *Asia Journal of Theology* 29, no.2 (2015): 164.



The events of Acts 9 are a pivotal point in the accomplishment of the Great Commission, “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19). Peter and Cornelius’s visions both line up to introduce the Gentiles to the Good News of Jesus. This move is significant in the fulfillment of the Great Commission. Due to the animosity the Jews displayed toward the Gentiles, this step of Peter visiting Cornelius’s household and being physically present amid Cornelius and his family shatters any doubt that the Gospel is exclusive but is inclusive. Above all, Jewish law forbade Jews from accepting hospitality from Gentiles, particularly because Gentiles did not tithe. Scrupulous Jews would not even be a guest of a Jewish commoner, much less a Gentile.<sup>45</sup>

This picture of extreme separation obviously displays the power of the Holy Spirit for salvation but also the importance of personal presence and touch among the people. God could have given Peter and Cornelius a vision of a letter written by Peter and sent to Cornelius concerning salvation, but God wanted to make a statement. “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right” (Acts 10:34-35). God sends Peter to Cornelius, a Gentile. This was significant given the Jewish Christians’ disdain for Peter’s actions; “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them” (Acts 11:2). A Jewish Christ-follower being in the physical presence of a Gentile broke open being present to all nations. This was radical to a Jew. Peter’s peers eventually come around: “So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18).

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<sup>45</sup> Longenecker, *Acts*, 390.

Table 7: Presence and Touch in Bringing Salvation and Church Growth, Version 5

<i>Scripture</i>	<i>Situation</i>	<i>Impact</i>	<i>Presence/Touch</i>
Acts 11:19-21	Persecution of Stephen sends people all over to now be present with all people.	People believed. Acts 11:21	P
Acts 11:22	Barnabas sent to Antioch.	Number of people saved.	P
Acts 13:2-3	Barnabas-Saul sent on mission, Cyprus, Paphos	Gentiles believed. Acts 13:48	P
Acts 16:4-5	Traveled from town to town bringing the Jerusalem council letter to Gentiles.	Church grew daily in numbers.	P
Acts 16:13-15	Speaking to women by the river in Philippi.	Salvation and baptism.	P/T
Acts 16:23	Paul and Silas in prison.	Prison guards family. Salvation and baptism.	P
Acts 17:2	Paul spent time with the people in Thessalonica.	Jews, God fearing Greeks, women, followed.	P
Acts 17:17	Paul in marketplace day by day with people.	Some believed and followed. Acts 17:34	P

Luke wrote, “As was Paul’s custom,” referring to His preaching in every town’s synagogue (Acts 17:1). There, Paul was present among those who believed in God. Paul went beyond the synagogue and was present among those in the marketplace who believed in many gods (Acts 17). By being present and observing their beliefs, people believed and followed. Richard Green emphasizes this in his article on Paul as a public relations expert:

Paul’s use of audience segmentation also highlighted his strategic prowess. This proficiency was demonstrated, for example, when Paul visited Athens (recorded in Acts 17:16-34). He spent several days observing the religious practices of the Athenians and noted they even had an altar that was dedicated ‘To an Unknown God’ (v. 23). He used their practice of worshipping this God whose name they did not know to introduce the one true God to them, the Creator of all. This strategy of meeting His constituency at their point of belief and leading them to the true gospel proved successful when Dionysus, Damaris, and others believed (v. 34).<sup>46</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Richard Green, “The Apostle Paul: Public Relations Expert,” *Heythrop Journal* 57, no. 4 (2016): 623.

It only makes sense that if God calls Christ-followers to invite others into a relationship with the true and living God, the best way to draw them in is by understanding their spiritual journey and by being present and touching. In return, the person receiving this invitation will see the Christ-follower's life.

Table 8: Presence and Touch in Bringing Salvation and Church Growth, Version 6

<i>Scripture</i>	<i>Situation</i>	<i>Impact</i>	<i>Presence/Touch</i>
Acts 18:11	Paul in Corinth over a Year.	Many believed and baptized. Acts 18:8	P
Acts 18:23	Paul traveled from place to place.	Strengthened all the disciples.	P
Acts 19:1	Paul to Ephesus.	Imparting of Holy Spirit on believers.	P/T
Acts 28:7-9	Shipwrecked in Malta, staying with official Publius.	Healed Publius' dad and all on island.	P/T
Acts 28:17, 23	Paul gathers Jewish leaders to witness to them.	Some were convinced. Acts 28:24	P
Acts 28:30-31	Taught to Gentiles and welcomed all without concern of cultural background.	Preached Gospel to all.	P

From start to finish, the researcher views the Book of Acts as a picture of presence and touch. The disciples are empowered by the presence and touch of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). They bring all nations Good News of salvation in Jesus through their presence and touch. Nowhere in the history of the early church does this approach end; it remains present in the church today.

God's presence and touch comes to humanity through the incarnation of Jesus. The importance of presence and touch was formulated, lived out, and still exists within the Trinity. It is intrinsic within men and women, who were created in the image of God. Jesus employs presence and touch throughout His life and ministry in the gospels, and it is called for and lived out in the Book of Acts. The results of conversions, growth of early

believers, and the early church are not the primary result of human presence and touch.

It's ultimately the presence and touch of Jesus and, after His ascension, the Holy Spirit.

This being true, one cannot but wonder if God's use of presence and touch by His people encouraged and fostered conversions and the growth of the early church.

## CHAPTER THREE: THE REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE ON THE POSITIVE INFLUENCE OF PHYSICAL PRESENCE AND TOUCH

### **An Overview of Presence and Touch**

Regardless of age, race, wealth, education, giftedness, location, or levels of independence, humans all have the need for the presence and touch of others. In order to understand the greater purpose of presence and touch, the researcher will look at the human need of relationship, the positive influence of physical presence and touch, social structure as designed for physical presence and touch, physical presence and touch in conversions and church growth, and presence and touch in growing churches.

#### *The Human Need of Relationship*

In the current era, it is an oddity to find a people group in remote areas of the world untouched by modern technology, living still primitive as their ancestors before them. Beyond this, it is even stranger to find a person who chooses to live in isolation, separating themselves from all human contact. Chosen isolation is rare and outside the created need for presence and touch, the basic elements of relationship. In Atul Gawande's article, "Hellhole," which addresses the inhumanity of isolating prisoners, he states, "Human beings are social creatures. Humans are social not just in the trivial sense that they like company, and not just in the obvious sense that they depend on others. They are social in a more elemental way: simply to exist as a normal human being requires interaction with other people."<sup>47</sup> If humans do not meet their social needs over an

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<sup>47</sup> "The Human Need for Community," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 48, no. 3 (2009): 217.

extended period of time “isolation not only leads to deep psychological problems but even brain abnormalities.”<sup>48</sup> The need for human interaction is an essential component for sustaining health, as well as hope and purpose in one’s life.

The researcher recalls reading an article in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* years back about a woman who went to her hair stylist for a shampoo and style in between her normal five-week schedule. The article stated how she enjoyed the conversation and company of the stylist and as she was leaving, she gave him a hug. A few days later, the stylist received a note from the client saying that she had come in for a shampoo and style because she was going to commit suicide that night. She wanted to look good for her funeral, but because she had such a good interaction with the stylist, she decided to check herself into a hospital for professional help.<sup>49</sup> The incident changed the view of the stylist’s job, and they realized they did more than just cut and style hair but could be a day maker for every life in their chair. Regardless of one’s personal fortitude, “It is impossible for us to be the people God has created us to be without community.”<sup>50</sup>

Even people who are part of a negative community remain in that community for the mere fact that they have a sense of belonging, a place that offers presence and touch. What is unhealthy appears healthy because of common bonds, but these common bonds are typically around the lifestyle of addictive behavior or negative character traits. The majority of people recognize that these behaviors and characteristics are wrong, but the mere fact that people find companionship with others living similarly is what keeps

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<sup>48</sup> “The Human Need for Community,” 217.

<sup>49</sup> Francis Delma, “Six Military Wives Get Salon Makeovers as Juut Salonspas Starts ‘Daymaker Tour,’” *Star Tribune*, April 8, 2003, E10.

<sup>50</sup> “The Human Need for Community,” 217.

people there. A study of twins Victoria and Daniel who grew up under neglect from their parents and then grandparents reveal this need for community regardless of its negativity.

When they entered high school they made new friendships. These friends led them to their involvement with gangs that set a rigid line between who they could and could not interact with. They both understood that their new friendships were harmful in the long run, but they were desperately alone and simply wanted to feel a sense of belonging.<sup>51</sup>

The researcher facilitates fifth steps, one of the twelve steps for Alcoholics Anonymous. The step involves stating and confessing all the wrongs one has done in life. It's a time of confession and healing. During these sessions, many individuals confessed their realization that their addicted friends were not really friends. Regardless, in their unhealthiness, they would stay in the relationship because it provided a basic level of belonging. Istvan Back in "The Adaptive Rationality of Interpersonal Commitment" reinforces this behavior. "People tend to keep exchanging with the same partner even if more valuable (or less costly) alternatives are available. An extreme example is the case of battered women who stay with their abusive husbands."<sup>52</sup>

It is a foundational aspect of life that people are built for human relationships and thus need human relationships. Sherry Turkle in "Authenticity in the Age of Digital Companions" tells of asking a friend who was a wheelchair user his opinion on the help of robots for his care and companionship. The friend replied, "Show me a person in my shoes who is looking for a robot, and I'll show you someone who is looking for a person

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<sup>51</sup> Saul A. Castro and Alex J. Zautra, "Humanization of Social Relations: Nourishing Health and Resilience Through Greater Humanity." *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology* 36, no. 2 (2016): 65. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/teo0000040>

<sup>52</sup> Istvan Back, "The Adaptive Rationality of Interpersonal Commitment," *Rationality and Society* 20, no.1 (2008): 66.

and can't find one."<sup>53</sup> Nothing nonliving can replace or replicate the presence and touch of another human. As relational beings, our need for presence and touch and the overall sense of belonging is a necessity.

*The Positive Influence of Physical Presence and Touch*

As a young attorney, Bryon Stevenson founded the Equal Justice Initiative, a non-profit legal practice focused on representing the poor, the condemned but innocent, and those forgotten in the criminal justice system. In his book, *Just Mercy*, he provides insight into the value of presence and touch in relating with others.

The legacy of slavery very much shaped my grandmother and the way she raised her nine children. It influenced the way she talked to me, the way she constantly told me to "keep close." When I visited her, she would hug me so tightly I could barely breathe. After a little while, she would ask me, "Bryan, do you still feel me hugging you?" If I said yes, she'd let me be; if I said no, she would assault me again. I said no a lot because it made me happy to be wrapped in her formidable arms. She never tired of pulling me toward her. "You can't understand most of the important things from a distance, Bryan. You have to get close," she told me all the time.<sup>54</sup>

Bryan carried this philosophy into his legal practice. His interaction with a 14-year-old boy named Charlie, sentenced to life in an adult prison, emphasizes the effectiveness, importance, and positive influence of presence and touch.

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<sup>53</sup> Sherry Turkle, "Authenticity in the Age of Digital Companions," *Interaction Studies* 8, no. 3 (2007): 515.

<sup>54</sup> Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy* (New York, Spiegel and Grau: 2015), 14.



“Charlie, I’m really sorry if you’re upset, but please talk to me. I can’t help you if you don’t talk to me.” I started to lean on Him somewhat playfully, until he sat forward a bit, and then I finally felt him lean back into me. I took a chance and put my arm around him, and he immediately began to shake. His trembling intensified before he finally leaned completely into me and started crying. I put my head to his and said, “It’s okay; it’s all right.”<sup>55</sup>

## **Presence**

Even in a world of technological advancements like never before (e.g., social media that connects people globally face-to-face through a screen and the ability to be entertained by a Netflix binge) fails to replace the basic need for the presence of others.

We are a rootless generation, forced to move regularly as landlords arbitrarily increase rents. We move jobs a lot more too — freelancers miss out on the social aspects of office life, and Uber drivers miss out on even saying they work for a company. And with everyone always on standby, social arrangements feel increasingly fragile, always.<sup>56</sup>

Today, humanity surrounds itself with the presence of every form of technology but not the physical presence of one another. People write about it and talk about it because it is a reality. People are missing something, and that something is the presence of other people in our lives. Just being out in public among people (without any verbal or physical touch) as opposed to being alone at home makes a difference in people’s demeanor.

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<sup>55</sup> Stevenson, 122-123.

<sup>56</sup> Richard Godwin, “London’s a Lonely Place, Even for the Smartphone Kids,” *Evening Standard*, (2016): 15.

Mehta develops a typology of different sorts of behavior found in public and different sorts of uses of the street where that behavior is found. ‘Passive sociability’ describes those who are ‘alone in public’ – studying at a café; people watching on a park bench; window-shopping. The stimulation of the street, Mehta notes, makes being alone in public an altogether different, and for some more fulfilling, experience than being alone in private.<sup>57</sup>

People who have experienced the isolation of regular relationship with others have gone to extremes to be in the presence of others. “In prisons, one out of every five inmates is a senior citizen. And in many cases nine out of ten for senior women; the crime that lands them in jail is petty shoplifting.”<sup>58</sup> This statistic comes from Japan and is a result of loneliness, the need for presence. Japanese elderly are shoplifting because in prison they at least meet their need for the presence of others. “I enjoy my life in prison more. There are always people around, and I don’t feel lonely here.”<sup>59</sup>

Technological advancement with all its hype does not always leave people with happiness.

In an era of 24/7 connection via devices that seem to bridge distance while leaving us more alone than ever, we don’t often prioritize human interaction. And yet, according to researchers and leaders alike, success occurs only when we include humanity in a transaction.<sup>60</sup>

Regardless of life ventures, humans will always need the presence and touch of another.

Adam Waytz confirms this need for human contact:

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<sup>57</sup> Elizabeth Strom, “The Street, A Quintessential Social Public Place,” *Journal of Urban Technology* 22, no.1 (2015): 140. doi:10.1080/10630732.2015.1032101.

<sup>58</sup> Mark Abadi, “Elderly People in Japan are Getting Arrested on Purpose Because They Want to Go to Prison,” *Business Insider*, March 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.businessinsider.com/japan-aging-prison-2018-3>

<sup>59</sup> Abadi.

<sup>60</sup> Sam Beals, “The Power of Human Interaction,” *Grand Rapids Business Journal* 35, no. 38 (2017): 10.

“The Clinton campaign dismissed what political scientists call ‘in-person persuasion’ — no one was knocking on doors trying to drum up support for the Democratic nominee.” This remark echoed several political commentators who suggested that Clinton’s staff neglected high-quality, face-to-face conversations with human beings to persuade voters toward the candidate. If this sounds overly simplistic, I assure you we consistently undervalue the power of humans to persuade.<sup>61</sup>

Human beings cannot shortcut their organic need for being physically present among people and craving opportunities for interaction. “A growing body of research reveals that our need for social connection is as basic and as important as our need for food, water and shelter.”<sup>62</sup> UCLA professor Matthew Lieberman argues that social connection is key to humankind’s success as a species and the reason large brains evolved in the first place. He and others have discovered that when the brain is not focused on a specific task, it uses its spare time to learn about and master the social world.<sup>63</sup>

## **Touch**

Regarding physical presence, one can enter another’s personal space of 1.5 feet<sup>64</sup> and touch can occur. “Touch is ten times stronger than verbal or emotional contact, and it affects damn near everything we do. No other sense can arouse you like touch. We forget that touch is not only basic to our species, but the key to it.”<sup>65</sup> Tiffany Field who has

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<sup>61</sup> Adam Waytz, *The Power of Human: How Our Shared Humanity Can Help Us Create a Better World* (New York, NY: W.W Norton and Company, 2019)

<sup>62</sup> Beals, 10.

<sup>63</sup> Matthew Lieberman, APA PsycNET, <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2013-09689-000> (accessed October 22, 2019).

<sup>64</sup> Vikas Mehta, *The Street: A Quintessential Social Public Space* (London: Routledge, 2013), 63.

<sup>65</sup> Tiffany Field, “Touch for Socioemotional and Physical Well-being: A Review,” *Developmental Review* 30, no. 4 (2010): 370.

done extensive research on the health benefits of interpersonal touch claims people today could be suffering from a shortage of tactile stimulation to which she refers to as “touch hunger.”<sup>66</sup>

Interaction through touch was more prevalent in earlier medieval life until “The growing literacy of the educated classes strengthened class divisions as written texts, rather than personal relations, were increasingly used to order society.”<sup>67</sup> In certain orphanages around the world extreme “touch hunger” is seen when “children involuntarily rock their bodies, a self-soothing response to lack of human touch.”<sup>68</sup>

Appropriate touch brings benefits to those who receive it.

The sense of touch provides us with an often-overlooked channel of communication, and interpersonal touch has been shown to play an important role in governing our emotional well-being. Whether a strong handshake, an encouraging pat on the back, a sensual caress, a nudge for attention, a tender kiss, or a gentle brush of the shoulder, physical contact can convey a vitality and immediacy at times more powerful than language.<sup>69</sup>

In the field of healthcare, Gleason has established the connection of thoughtful touch to healing. “Touch makes the patients feel present and anchored in a context and gives them space. They feel seen, accepted, reassured and confirmed. Touch creates a caring space where the patient becomes receptive for care.”<sup>70</sup> In another study, when

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<sup>66</sup> Alberto Gallace and Charles Spence, “The Science of Interpersonal Touch: An Overview,” *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews* 34, no.3 (2010): 247.

<sup>67</sup> Constance Classen, “*The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch*,” (Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois, 2012), 6.

<sup>68</sup> Kristi Gleason, “Like a Family Isn’t a Family,” *Lifelines: Empowering and Strengthening Families*, (Spring 2019), 5.

<sup>69</sup> Gallace and Spence, 247.

<sup>70</sup> Lise-Lotto Ozolins, Ulrica Horberg, and Karen Dahlberg, “Caring Touch-Patients Experiences in an Anthroposophic Clinical Context,” *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences* 29, no. 4 (2015): 836.

depressed mothers massaged their infants and touched them more affectionately, their infants were more responsive. The mothers also benefited from providing this additional touch.<sup>71</sup> “Not only does touching feel good; it is good for everybody. Studies have shown that human contact can reduce stress and tension, and even help patients recover from diseases. Touching can actually lower a person’s heart rate and blood pressure.”<sup>72</sup>

At times, businesses and schools have an institutional coldness, but the use of touch helps make a difference in people’s experience and response.

Customers at car dealers assigned more positive ratings to the salesmen who touched them than the salesmen who did not touch them. They have also demonstrated this phenomenon in the classroom. When a teacher asked students to demonstrate the solution to a math problem on a blackboard, more students volunteered to demonstrate the solution when they were touched by the teacher.<sup>73</sup>

Appropriate touch in human interactions concludes with greater relational results. “An experiment by researchers from the University of Chicago and Harvard showed that when a handshake begins an interaction, openness, honesty, and better outcomes unfold. That physical warmth activates the part of the brain associated with reward.”<sup>74</sup> These benefits of touch have prompted research into producing the benefits of touch without personal contact.

With the realization of the importance of touch and the decrease of personal touch, there have been attempts to mimic human touch.

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<sup>71</sup> Field, 369.

<sup>72</sup> Alison Bell, “The Affection Connection,” *Teen Magazine* 33, no.10 (1989): 20.

<sup>73</sup> Field, 372.

<sup>74</sup> Beals, 10.

Several devices have recently been developed to provide tactile contact. For example, the “keep in touch” system was designed for couples to have physical intimacy across distances. This fabric touch screen presents a blurred image of each partner, and when the partner touches various parts of the body, the image is brought into focus. Similarly, a number of hugging devices have been created. One is intended to provide an actual hug by a vest that inflates.<sup>75</sup>

Every day, our skin receives multiple touches, but the most meaningful touch is that of another caring human being. Regardless of where people live or travel to, surrounding them is a planned infrastructure designed to increase their possibilities for experiencing the presence and touch of others.

#### *Social Structure as Designed for Physical Presence and Touch*

Social structure designed for presence and touch involves the strategic placement of buildings to the sidewalks that carry people. It involves green space outside to interior spaces inside, all primarily designed on the needs and interaction of people and the maintaining of communities. Well-designed commercial streets provide fleeting sociability opportunities, from a quick wave as people pass each other to knowing nods between parents chasing rambunctious toddlers. Public landscapes such as cafés or a set of street benches support enduring sociability and more robust relationships.<sup>76</sup>

Positive intentional design in cities and neighborhoods can promote interpersonal interactions of presence and touch. On the other hand, negative intentional design can segregate people from presence and touch. In her research on architectural segregation, Sarah Schindler reveals, “Bridges were designed to be so low that buses could not pass under them in order to prevent people of color from accessing a public beach. Walls,

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<sup>75</sup> Field, 371.

<sup>76</sup> Strom, 140.

fences, and highways separate historically white neighborhoods from historically black ones. Wealthy communities have declined to be served by public transit so as to make it difficult for individuals from poorer areas to access their neighborhoods.<sup>77</sup>

Human beings as creators and relators lean toward creating space for relationship. They did it as kids by making tree forts outside and blanket forts inside in which they could linger with family and friends. The basic principles of building infrastructure, businesses, schools, churches, homes, parks, and streets include protection, service, and nurturing relationships. Matthew Easterbrook and Vivian Vignoles demonstrate this in their research on physical design and its influence on interpersonal bonds. They studied students living within flats that had design features that encouraged the use of communal areas and shared toilets instead of personal space. The more frequent interactions because of the shared housing design fostered positive relationships and well-being among residents.<sup>78</sup>

The need for intention in moving people toward relationship is important especially today. There are a variety of distractions or choices today to keep people apart or move people away from relationships. Add to this the reality of social media and its ability to isolate people; a building's design is critical to encouraging interaction through presence and touch.

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<sup>77</sup> Sarah Schindler, "Architectural Exclusion: Discrimination and Segregation Through Physical Design of the Built Environment," *Yale Law Journal* 124, no.6 (2015): 1934.

<sup>78</sup> Matthew Easterbrook and Vivian Vignoles, "When Friendship Formation Goes Down the Toilet: Design Features of Shared Accommodation Influence Interpersonal Bonds and Well-Being," *British Journal of Social Psychology* 54, no.1 (2015), 125. doi:10111/bjso.12062.

Our fast-paced, screen focused lifestyles have created a void where meaningful relationships are difficult to establish and nourish. God designed us as individuals, families and churches to function best when we are in authentic relationship with each other. Although the rise of online access to information has transformed the way we communicate, if information is “only” available online, it lacks the emotional connection provided by a personal interaction and can easily get lost in the shuffle of a crazy week.<sup>79</sup>

Buildings create in people a certain feel — from cozy to commercial, from intellectual to inspiring, and from relationally interactive to individual personal reflection. Architects who plan buildings or outdoor spaces shape them with the objective of encouraging human interaction through presence and touch. The use of solitary confinement supports this. The punishment is the taking away of architectural aesthetics and human contact, leaving four walls, a cement floor, and the absence of presence and touch. Within a house, room names (e.g., living room, family room, entertainment room) assume interaction and invite presence and touch.

Beyond home and work, there is the idea of a third space established for impactful relationships. “Urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg defines a *third place* as a place of refuge other than the home or workplace where people can regularly visit and commune with friends, neighbors, coworkers, and even strangers.”<sup>80</sup> Beyond the buildings, “seating and shelter provisions are perhaps the most crucial urban design characteristics that contribute to sociability on the Main Street.”<sup>81</sup> Architectural designs people walk on most every day, yet pay little attention to, are sidewalks. They give no thought to the fact that they do

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<sup>79</sup> Justine Murphy, “Designed for Connection,” *Brown Church Development Group*, [churchdevelopment.net](http://churchdevelopment.net)

<sup>80</sup> Vikas Mehta and Jennifer K. Bosson, “Third Places and the Social Life of Streets,” *Environment and Behavior* 42, no.6 (2009): 779. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.bethel.edu/10.1177/0013916509344677>

<sup>81</sup> Mehta and Bosson, 779.



more than provide a route of transportation from one location to another. “As spaces of access, sidewalks enable people to move from one place to another, thereby facilitating access among properties, and also allow people to come into contact with others-thereby facilitating access to people.”<sup>82</sup> All human design is with a purpose and most often centers on the everyday needs of people.

Because planning organizes and regulates activities and vibrant sidewalks are often complex and fast changing, planning sidewalk life is fundamentally paradoxical. On sidewalks, activities are orderly but spontaneous, and people engage with one another in various ways that integrate purposeful actions, such as vending or walking, and incidental exchanges including smiling or people-watching.<sup>83</sup>

Every building and outside designed space lends itself to the assumption of the interaction of people. With this interaction, comes the presence and touch that is necessary for daily life and helps build a community where people have a sense of connection and belonging. It allows a church that worships inwardly on Sundays to go and practice presence and touch outwardly in its community.

#### *Presence and Touch on Church Conversions and Growth*

The good news of Jesus is that it is a comprehensive plan. The cross of Jesus not only provides the gateway for forgiveness, salvation and new life formation but also provides the gateway for the formulation of a new society. When more people in a community become like Jesus the community as a whole starts to reflect more of Jesus.

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<sup>82</sup> Renia Ehrenfeucht and Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, “Planning Urban Sidewalks: Infrastructure, Daily Life and Destinations,” *Journal of Urban Design* 15, no. 4 (2010): 460.

<sup>83</sup> Ehrenfeucht and Loukaitou-Sideris, 460.

In 1921, Shailer Matthews coined what became a classic, yet somewhat obtuse, definition of the social gospel in North American religious history. He defined it as “the application of the teaching of Jesus and the total message of the Christian salvation to society, the economic life, and social institutions such as the state, the family, as well as to individuals.”<sup>84</sup>

When Jesus walked into a community, He influenced every aspect of the community from personal salvation (He forgave people), to business practices (He turned over tables), health care (He healed people), to the value and worth of all people, (the woman caught in adultery). “At their core, evangelism and discipleship are about building genuine relationships with people who are seeking fullness of life that is mirrored in the life of Jesus.”<sup>85</sup>

Churches, to varying extents, are involved in their communities through service, which lends itself to presence and touch. As the World Conference of Religions for Peace concluded in 2001:

Religious communities are without question the largest and best-organized civil institutions in the world today, claiming the allegiance of billions of believers and bridging the divides of race, class and nationality. They are uniquely equipped to meet the challenges of our time: resolving conflict, caring for the sick and needy, promoting peaceful co-existence among all peoples.<sup>86</sup>

Most churches focus on preaching the life of Jesus. A huge aspect of His life was service. He said of Himself, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give

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<sup>84</sup> Christopher H. Evans, “The Social Gospel as ‘The Total Message of the Christian Salvation,’ *Church History* 84, no.1 (2015): 196

<sup>85</sup> Roderick R. Hewitt, “Evangelism as Discipleship,” *International Review of Mission* 103, no. 2 (2014): 201-2.

<sup>86</sup> Matthew Clarke, “Good Works and God’s Work: A Case Study of Churches and Community Development in Vanuata,” *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 54, no. 3 (2013): 31.

His life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). One reason Jesus attracted followers was His service-based lifestyle that stood out against the religious leaders of His time.

The Communist government collapse in Albania in the early 1990s left the Orthodox Christian Church a smoldering remnant. Under the leadership of Archbishop Anastasios, the few church members and missionaries sought to be a positive influence in rebuilding the Orthodox Church. Their first move was to live with the people as ordinary Albanian citizens and learn the language. From here, they not only developed houses of worship and church-based programs but also created and operated schools and after-school programs for children. They also provided professional training for adults for a variety of occupations as well as the running of a medical center and mobile dental clinic. During the financial collapse in 1996, the church shut down the seminary and sent the students out to serve the poor and during the war in 1998, students were sent to refugee camps. Through this service, the Orthodox Church has rebounded and has become a strong agent in rebuilding Albania. Those they served were changed along with those who served them.

You can convert only with love. We must be careful of each other and never use force. If someone cannot hear us, then let us pray for that person. We each go at our own speed. Our Archbishop has taught us that each person is an icon of God. We must not judge others! We must help anyone in need, no matter what.<sup>87</sup>

As people become Christians and are involved in a church, one byproduct among many is their involvement in the local community through volunteering.

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<sup>87</sup> Anton C. Vrame, “Transforming a Nation Through Mission: A Case Study on the Church in Albania,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 45, no. 2 (2010), 248.

Church participation increases civic activity through enhanced social capital, such as civic skills and communication networks. Researchers often highlight the positive relationship between church participation and civic participation. In his influential book *The Religious Factor*, Lenski showed how the church operates as a ‘training ground’ for Protestants to participate in secular voluntary organizations.<sup>88</sup>

Church members who volunteer outside the church walls often recruit and engage church friends in serving in their community. “People often learn about secular volunteering opportunities from religious sources; and, as the social movement literature demonstrates, hearing about opportunities for voluntary activity and being influenced to participate by friends, such as fellow church members, are often the most important predictors of voluntary activity.”<sup>89</sup> The researcher’s church has a partnership with the “Shalom Shop,” a local thrift store that generates roughly \$30,000 a month in income. They donate this income back into community non-profits such as the “Pregnancy Resource Center,” or “Young Life.” Most of the volunteer workers have become involved through the invitation of other church members who volunteer. With this positive factor of volunteering comes the reality that not all church backgrounds equally encourage their members to serve in their community. “Effect of religion on civic participation concerns the generally lower levels of secular participation among conservative or evangelical Christians compared to liberal or mainline Christians.”<sup>90</sup> Often churches are so busy with their weekly schedules for members that there is little room for nor urge to engage in their communities. At times, a church’s biblical beliefs limit their engagement in serving

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<sup>88</sup> Philip Schwadel, “Individual, Congregational, and Denominational Effects on Church Members’ Civic Participation,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 44, no. 2 (2005): 160.

<sup>89</sup> Schwadel, 160.

<sup>90</sup> Schwadel, 160.

the community due to the lifestyles of the people outside the church. Some of these beliefs and practices do not reflect how Jesus' interacted with His community but reflect more a particular church's theology.

The larger implication for churches that are not involved in civic participation is that they limit their congregants' opportunities to build relationships in the community, grow influence, and share Jesus with others.

Not only can conservative churches limit the political power of their members, but they can also curtail connections between church members and other members of the community, members of the community who can provide them with valuable social, emotional, and physical resources as well as a shared sense of the common good. In other words, though conservative congregations may be conducive to the bonding form of social capital that manifests itself in trust and relationships within the church, they may also limit the bridging form of social capital that connects church members to those outside of the church.<sup>91</sup>

Every church in every community should have a positive influence on changing that community. This is where a church turning inward and becoming a club closes off their opportunity to transform the spiritual fabric of the community through presence, touch, and the speaking of God's word.

It is encouraging to see churches being servants to the people in their communities and the community invited into the churches due to their civic participation. Vanuatu is a group of 80 islands, 65 of which are uninhabited. "In Vanuatu, the historical legacy of mission activity has resulted in more than 95% of Ni-Vanuatu self-identifying as Christian."<sup>92</sup> While introducing Jesus to these people the "Early (Anglican) mission was based on the theological position of 'true religion, sound learning, and useful

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<sup>91</sup> Schwadel, 169.

<sup>92</sup> Clarke, 341.

industry’ thus the ‘first missionaries came with a hammer and pen, not just the Bible.’”<sup>93</sup>

This early approach to community established the church as an integral part or the norm of the community.

While the higher goal is to bring people to Christ, there is not an obvious or clearly demarcated goal between what they are doing in terms of devotional ministry and what they are doing in terms of development ministry. The two acts are interwoven and so working to improve health and education becomes important both in and of itself as it provides an opportunity to live the Gospel. ‘The impact of preaching the Gospel is that you must also live the Gospel.’<sup>94</sup>

The church in Vanuatu lived out what they believed: they provided training in practical skills that helped the community to improve their living conditions. Training included skills such as fishing, agriculture, farming, cattle projects, tree planting (cash crops), and carpentry. For young people, they provided sporting opportunities as a means to discuss both spiritual and physical well-being issues. Through these trainings and outreach, churches used their buildings for community educational purposes and community gatherings.

A growing population that is absent from churches today is Millennials. “While their personal spiritual beliefs and practices reflect patterns from previous generations, they are becoming far less connected to organized religion.”<sup>95</sup> The church, like the corporate world, finds it difficult to attract Millennials. Companies are doing so through

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<sup>93</sup> Clarke, 341.

<sup>94</sup> Clarke, 345.

<sup>95</sup> Richard D. Waters and Denis Sevvick Bortree, ““Can We Talk About the Direction of This Church?”: The Impact of Responsiveness and Conflict on Millennials,” *Journal of Media and Religion* 11, no. 4 (2012): 201. DOI: 10.1080/15348423.2012.730330

engaging in philanthropic causes, social responsibility, and community service that employs presence and touch.

The opportunities are as diverse as the employees who volunteer for them. “We accumulated 1,570 volunteer hours on company time in 2016,” said Amy Hattan, Vice President of Corporate Sustainability at engineering firm Thorton Tomasetti. “One group used their time to volunteer at GrowNYC’s Teaching Garden, an urban farm featuring vegetable beds made from recycled plastic lumber, a small-scale farm, fruit trees, a high-tunnel greenhouse and rainwater harvesting systems.”<sup>96</sup>

Likewise, Millennials are looking for churches who will make a difference outside the church. “Millennials are deeply concerned about things older generations may not have given much thought to, such as environmental and social justice issues. Failing to hear their perspectives makes it harder to build relationships.”<sup>97</sup> In the book, *Growing Young*, there were six essential strategies for engaging young people in local church growth. The sixth essential was “Be the best neighbors.” “Nearly 60% of churches that were effective in drawing young people to participate with them were churches who had service practices, missional practices, or generally being outward oriented.”<sup>98</sup> These churches did not just talk about doing good in their community and beyond; they had specific and intentional ongoing projects and partnerships. They were in their community in the form of presence and touch.

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<sup>96</sup> Marissa Peretz, “Want to Engage Millennials? Try Corporate Social Responsibility,” *Forbes*, September 27, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/marissaperetz/2017/09/27/want-to-engage-millennials-try-corporate-social-responsibility/#75921f9b6e4e> (accessed October 15, 2019)

<sup>97</sup> “Five Reasons Millennials Are Leaving the Church: What You Should Know About Reaching- and Keeping-Young Adults,” *Influence Magazine: The Shape of Leadership*, November 18, 2018. <https://influencemagazine.com/Practice/Five-Reasons-Millennials-Are-Leaving-the-Church> (accessed October 15, 2019)

<sup>98</sup> Kara Powell, Jake Mulder and Brad Griffin, “*Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love your Church*,” (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016), 242.

Seeking to measure a church's results of presence and touch in their community in conversions and church growth can be elusive. Within the literature review, there are some correlations between community service, conversions, and church growth. Beyond this, is there evidence of conversions and church growth through presence and touch in churches that are growing?

*Presence and Touch on Conversions and Growth in Growing Churches*

Today, church growth is challenging.

A new study from *Exponential by LifeWay Research* found 6 in 10 Protestant churches are plateaued or declining in attendance and more than half saw fewer than 10 people become new Christians in the past twelve months. "Growth is not absent from American churches," said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research. "But rapid growth through conversions is uncommon."<sup>99</sup>

Since 2016, only 39 percent of churches reported growing six percent or more.<sup>100</sup>

Within the 39 percent of churches that grew, as well as within church growth in general, is it presence and touch through community service that aided in salvations and church growth?

Jorge Acevedo is the pastor of Grace Church in Southwest Florida. When he became the pastor, church attendance had declined by 75 percent from 1,000 regular attenders. It had many challenges from debt, unpaid bills, and IRS back taxes. The neighborhood had changed over the years but the church had not. His prayer and approach was "Lord, send us the people nobody else wants." From that point onward,

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<sup>99</sup> Aaron Earls, "The Church Growth Gap: The Big Get Bigger While the Small get Smaller." Christianity Today, March 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2019/march/lifeway-research-church-growth-attendance-size.html>

<sup>100</sup> Earls.



Grace Church focused on reaching out by using “Celebrate Recovery.” Not everybody needs Celebrate Recovery, but in reality, all people are in recovery whether it is addiction or another aspect of life. They walked out into their community with this simple approach and were willing to apply presence and touch to difficult lives. “These folk are often overlooked by traditional ministries. They are also the kinds of folk that can make a ministry unpredictable, messy, unruly. But after all, as Jesus put it, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick’” (Matt. 9:12).<sup>101</sup> Today, the church has one of the most effective recovery programs in the country and has grown to over 2,600 worshippers.

Serving the community and seeing results in salvations and church growth does not always result in big churches. When Jon Brown began pastoring Old Bergen Church in New Jersey, a multiethnic, multiracial congregation, the congregation numbered 45, five years later, Sunday attendance averages 100. This is greater than ten percent growth a year, which most churches would gladly accept. Although the congregation is small, it has a strong witness of God’s love, presence, and grace to the community. Brown spent time in the community going door-to-door. “Members ventured outside, with simple, low-cost activities such as making empanadas to hand out at Pentecost or taking an occasional prayer walk through the city, asking strangers, ‘How can we pray for you today?’”<sup>102</sup>

The focus on social concerns and serving the community are practices that are aiding growth results in growing denominations. The Pentecostal Church is having a

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<sup>101</sup> Brandon O’Brien, “Road to Recovery: How One Church was Transformed by Reaching Out to Neighbors with Addictions,” *Leadership Journal* 33, no.1 (2012): 36.

<sup>102</sup> Cathy Lynn, “Against the Odds, Some Small Churches Thrive,” *Christian Century* 133, no. 3 (2016): 15.

wave of growth worldwide. In its growth in Nigeria, the church highlights twelve aspects of Pentecostalism, one of which is “social benefits.”<sup>103</sup> Demonstrating care for people’s present situations, from unemployment to orphans and widows, makes them more open to the gospel. This approach is where the Pentecostal influence surpasses denominations that are more traditional, and churches on the outside can evaluate their successes to glean the positives.

In Carey Nieuwhof’s leadership podcast with Rich Birch, Birch talked about his book *Church Growth Flywheel*. Rich explained that the third of the five things growing churches do is engagement. “Big serving opportunities can grow your church while doing good at the same time.”<sup>104</sup> Birch gave examples of this in churches: some used Tim Tebow’s program “Night to Shine” to throw a prom party for high school youth with special needs and crown every youth king and queen and Elevation Church’s annual “Love Week” when they go out into the community and in one week do 100,000 hours of serving. There are churches that are doing 5K runs for clean water, tutoring, or remodeling shelters. The goal is to get people out of their seats and into the streets. Birch states, “Only two percent of our congregations tell their friends about Sunday church over the course of a year but when there is a big community serve they splash it all over social media.”<sup>105</sup> It is an opportunity to serve the community and show the community that the church is about action and cares for the people where they live. It is a way to connect

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<sup>103</sup>Wilson E. Ehianu, “Growth of Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria: Lessons for World Evangelization,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 38, no.1 (2014): 79.

<sup>104</sup> Carey Nieuwhof, “Rich Birch on the Church Growth Flywheel-The 5 Things Growing Churches Do That Most Others Don’t,” Carey Nieuwhof’s Leadership Podcast. Episode 179, February 14, 2018. <https://careynieuwhof.com/episode179/>.

<sup>105</sup> Nieuwhof, Episode 179.

with the church through presence and touch. The desire is to be a place people want to be. The church grows when people tell their friends. Research done by Thom Rainer with 50,000 churches looked at churches that had five years of decline followed by five years of growth. One of the seven factors relating to the growth of these churches was “an early move to focus more ministries outwardly.”<sup>106</sup>

In a study of how mainline Protestant clergy and congregants explain church growth and decline, researchers asked clergy what factors they believed played a role in their church’s growth. Clergy responses referred to human attributes such as boldness in their message or good leadership. Others mentioned activities such as small groups or focusing more outward. “While all of the responses mentioned cited human attributes or activities of churches, a slight majority of growing church clergy also mentioned a different kind of factor: the work of supernatural forces, specifically God’s work in the congregation and its leaders.”<sup>107</sup>

The redeemed of God do not reconcile others into a relationship with the Savior Jesus. It is God’s work to His glory. Jesus said, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws Him” (John 6:44). Zerubbabel did not hold the power to rebuild the temple although he was assigned to do it: “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord Almighty” (Zech. 4:6). Jesus said that the gates of hell will not overcome the truth that Jesus is the Christ, Son of the living God (Matt. 16:18). Satan

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<sup>106</sup> Thom S. Rainer, “Seven Common Traits of Breakout Churches,” Thom S. Rainer: Growing Healthy Churches. Together, April 18, 2012, [https://thomrainer.com/2012/04/seven\\_common\\_traits\\_of\\_breakout\\_churches/](https://thomrainer.com/2012/04/seven_common_traits_of_breakout_churches/)

<sup>107</sup>Kevin Flatt, D.M. Haskell, and Stephanie Burgoyne, “Secularization and Attribution: How Mainline Protestant Clergy and Congregants Explain Church Growth and Decline,” *Sociology of Religion* 79, no.1 (2018): 99.

cannot diminish Jesus' work on the cross; neither can people add to the work of the cross. God is at work through His people but it is His work.

### **Summary**

Physical presence and touch can influence toward many positive outcomes. People recognize a need within themselves that moves them to pursue the presence of God in their lives along with the presence of others. Presence and touch are important to humanity's emotional and physical well-being. Humans create environments in which to live, work, and learn. As they create these environments, they design them for social interaction through presence and touch. The church consists not of bricks and mortar but of people ministering to each other through presence and touch. It both reaches inward to build up and care for the church and reaches outward to its community to encourage conversions, invite people into community and as a by-product foster church growth and societal change.

## CHAPTER FOUR: THE USE OF INTERVIEWS AND SURVEY FOCUSING ON THE IMPACT OF PRESENCE AND TOUCH ON CHURCH GROWTH

### **Review of Thesis Project**

The purpose of this problem was to discover if, when churches move to be physically present in their communities and engage in appropriate touch, there is a corresponding growth in that church's attendance and in its confessions of faith. To answer this problem, the researcher reviewed the Gospels to identify Jesus' use of physical presence and touch in His ministry as well as the Book of Acts to see how presence and touch were used in ministry and the start of the early church. The researcher also reviewed literature that focused on the impact of physical presence and touch in human relationship and how using it in ministry influences conversions and church growth. The researcher also conducted a qualitative study by interviewing growing churches to identify any parallels between physical presence and touch and conversions and church growth. Along with this, the researcher performed a quantitative study on the impact of presence and touch on conversions and church growth by surveying congregants of these growing churches. The researcher then organized, reviewed, and analyzed the research and identified principles based on the Holy Spirit's ministry of physical presence and touch that increase conversions and church growth.

### *Qualitative and Quantitative Study*

The research included both a qualitative and quantitative study of multiple churches. The researcher chose the qualitative approach because it allows researchers to “collect an extensive amount of verbal data from a small number of people, organize those data into some form that gives them coherence, and use verbal descriptions to portray the situation they have studied.”<sup>108</sup> It allowed the researcher to identify similar language within verbal data as well as identifying similar phenomenon.

The qualitative approach is also, “flexible, and allows for change over the course of the study.”<sup>109</sup> For this approach, the researcher’s primary research models were case study and phenomenology study.

The quantitative approach allowed the researcher to look at “amounts or quantities, of one or more variables of interest.”<sup>110</sup> The primary tool used, survey research, allowed for self-reporting. By using a survey, the researcher was able to “collect basic demographic data, data concentrated around themes, or targeted data, in response to specific questions.”<sup>111</sup> The data allowed the researcher to seek insights and occurrences that he could then connect to other people and places. With these methods, the researcher applied both qualitative and quantitative study to support the theory of presence and touch impacting conversions and church growth.

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<sup>108</sup> Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill, 2010): 95.

<sup>109</sup> Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. 142.

<sup>110</sup> Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. 94.

<sup>111</sup> William R. Myers, *Research in Ministry: A Primer for the Doctor of Ministry Program* (Chicago, IL: Exploration Press, 2000): 65.

## Description of Data and Sources

### *Introduction*

The research produced and presented by the researcher was limited to churches within Converge North Central (Minnesota and Iowa). Due to the overall number of denominations within the church world and their variances in core beliefs, leadership structures, processes, and practices, the researcher chose to focus within the researcher's denomination (Converge) to examine the question at the heart of the research.

The research was limited to the study of appropriate physical presence (hereafter referred to as *presence*) and touch and their impact on increase in conversions and church growth. While the researcher recognizes there are many other factors at play in conversion decisions and church growth, the researcher will focus solely on determining the level of impact that presence and touch has on conversions and church growth.

The primary data for this study consisted of (a) interviews with senior pastors of Converge churches who have seen numeric church growth over the last five years, (b) interviews with associate pastors from the same churches as senior pastors, and (c) a survey administered to congregants of interviewed church leaders.

### *Multiple Case Study*

The researcher chose to use multiple case studies as opposed to one in-depth case study. While the use of one intensive case study could possibly provide insight into the impact of presence and touch on conversions and church growth, the researcher elected to conduct multiple studies in order to reveal meaningful patterns. The primary participants were Converge senior pastors, associate pastors and congregants.

### *Selection of Cases Studied*

To identify a list of growing churches within the Converge North Central region, the researcher sought input from the Executive Minister Dan Carlson and Director of Church Expansion and Growth Joel Nelson. They provided a list of 14 candidate churches to the researcher. The researcher did not consider churches classified as megachurches or churches with more than one site for this study.

The researcher approached 13 senior pastors of Converge churches to be involved in both qualitative and quantitative research. Of these invites, seven senior pastors agreed that they were willing to be involved in the project by doing the following:

- Fill out questions pertaining to their church. (Appendix B)
- Participate in a Zoom videoconference interview. (Appendix C)
- Have one of their associate pastors participate in a Zoom videoconference interview. (Appendix D)
- Send out an online survey to their congregants. (Appendix E)

### *Cases Studied*

The researcher interviewed seven senior pastors and eight associate pastors. The senior pastor selected the associate they wanted to participate based on their knowledge of the research inquiry. The researcher conducted senior pastor and associate pastor interviews at separate times.

### *Case Study Interviews*

#### **Senior Pastor Interview**

The researcher interviewed seven church senior pastors separately by Zoom videoconference. Leedy and Ormrod suggest the number of interview questions be kept



to, “perhaps five to seven of them.”<sup>112</sup> The researcher chose to exceed this recommendation slightly by including eight questions since respondents could answer questions two, three, and four without explanation. (Appendix C) The researcher designed these questions to gain greater insight into the pastors’ view of the importance and impact of their churches’ service in the community. These questions also highlighted the senior pastors’ engagement in serving in the community. Further questions solicited pastor feedback about the level of impact on conversions and church growth resulting from the church’s presence and touch while serving their community. Questions one, five, six and seven of the senior pastor interview asked “why” questions to their response. An author typically presents a small number of sub-questions that further specify the central questions into some areas of inquiry.<sup>113</sup> When necessary, the researcher asked for further clarity beyond the pre-planned questions.

To encourage participating senior pastors to send out the congregant survey, the researcher promised each church a synopsis of its senior pastor interview, associate pastor interview, and congregant survey results. This information proved valuable to the church leadership in evaluating the impact of presence and touch on their conversions and church growth.

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<sup>112</sup> Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. 149.

<sup>113</sup> John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2013): 140.

*Senior Pastor Questions.* **1. On a scale of one to ten, how important is it to you that your church is involved in serving in the community?**

Response options included:

- One = Not important
- Three = Somewhat important
- Seven = Important
- Ten = Very important

The researcher followed up the participant's response by asking why they chose that number. As a foundation for the rest of the survey, the researcher wanted to understand the senior leaders' level of conviction about their church serving in the community. The researcher hypothesized that the greater importance placed on serving in the community through presence and touch, the greater the number conversions and church growth.

**2. How many hours a month are you involved in community service?**

The researcher developed this question to gauge whether the senior pastor lived their conviction of serving the community in comparison to their answer to question one.

**3. What specific organizations in the community do you serve in?**

If the senior pastor could state one or more specific places within their community, it would add another layer of validation that the senior pastor valued serving in their community. Further, the researcher assumes the senior pastor's behavior often influences staff and congregation behavior as well as the culture of the church.

**4. Do you require your staff to serve in the community on a regular basis? If so, how often?**

Again, this question adds another layer of validation to the senior pastor's stated value of their church serving in the community. It also clarifies if volunteering is a staff

requirement or if it is practiced voluntarily. The researcher hypothesizes that if the senior pastor intentionally serves in the community, their staff will be as well.

**5. Which of these two statements would represent your church?**

Response options included:

- A. Our church serves in the community because it fulfills the second greatest commandment.
- B. Our church serves in the community because it brings people to confession of faith and results in church growth.

The researcher wanted to discover the theological view and motivation for the senior pastor's service in the community. The researcher assumed the theological view or motivation would then show up in the same way with staff and congregants.

**6. On a scale of one to ten, how influential has your congregation's serving through presence (4 to 6 ft.) and appropriate touch (e.g., hand shake, hand on shoulder, gentle hug) in the community impact confessions of faith?**

Response options included:

- One = Not at all
- Three = Somewhat
- Seven = Much
- Ten = Very much

The researcher followed up the participant's response by asking why they chose that number. The researcher posed this question to inspire the senior pastor to think of instances where church service in the community influenced unbelievers coming to confession of faith in Jesus. The number of stories or specific people that came to the participant's mind provided the measurement for the question.

**7. On a scale of one to ten, how influential is your congregation's serving the community through presence and touch impact your church's growth?**

Response options included:

- One = Not at all
- Three = Somewhat
- Seven = Much
- Ten = Very much

The researcher followed up the participant's response by asking why they chose that number. The researcher designed this question to be similar to the previous question, but broadened the scope of people to not only unbelievers, but also believers. An example of this would be a Christian family who moved into town and was looking for a church.

**8. Can you tell me a brief story of a person coming to confession of faith due to your church's serving in the community?** The researcher designed this question to affirm and validate the responses to questions six and seven. The researcher required an individual's first name to validate the story and count it in the research. This question also allowed the participant an opportunity to expand on thoughts of serving in the community through presence and touch.

### **Associate Pastor Interview**

The researcher interviewed eight church associate pastors separately by Zoom videoconference. Their senior pastor selected associate pastors for the interviews. The researcher asked associate pastors six questions designed to give greater insight into the pastor's view of the importance of their church's serving in the community. It also highlighted whether the associate aligned with the senior pastor's views. On questions two, three, four and five of the associate pastor interview, the researcher inquired why

they chose their response. Beyond that, the researcher asked for further clarity when necessary.

*Associate Pastor Questions.* **1. How long have you served in your position at your church?**

The researcher asked this question to build rapport with the interviewee, put them at ease, and get them talking about their church experience.

**2. On a scale of one to ten, how important is it to you that your church is involved in serving in the community?**

Response options included:

- One = Not important
- Three = Somewhat important
- Seven = Important
- Ten = Very important

The researcher followed up the participant's response by asking why they chose that number. This question, along with the following questions, was part of the senior pastor interview. The researcher asked the associate pastor these same questions to see if their answers would parallel the senior pastor's answers and reveal a culture of serving in the community. The associate pastor's answers also garnered greater insight on the impact of the church's presence and touch on conversions and church growth.

**3. Which of these two statements would represent your church?**

Response options included:

- A. Our church serves in the community because it fulfills the second greatest commandment.
- B. Our church serves in the community because it brings people to confession of faith and results in church growth.

The researcher wanted to discover the associate pastor's theological view of and motivation for his service in the community. The researcher also wanted to see if it paralleled that of the senior pastor. If so, this would reveal an aspect of alignment with the senior pastor and possibly play a role in influencing the congregation's level of serving.

**4. On a scale of one to ten, how influential has your congregation's serving through presence (4 to 6 ft.) and appropriate touch (e.g., hand shake, hand on shoulder, gentle hug) in the community impacted confessions of faith?**

Response options included:

- One = Not important
- Three = Somewhat important
- Seven = Important
- Ten = Very important

The researcher posed this question to inspire the associate pastor to think of instances where church service in the community influenced unbelievers coming to confession of faith in Jesus. The number of stories or specific people that came to the participant's mind provided the measurement for the question.

**5. On a scale of one to ten, how influential is your congregation's serving the community through presence and touch impact your church's growth?**

Responses options included:

- One = Not at all
- Three = Somewhat
- Seven = Much
- Ten = Very much

The researcher followed up the participant's response by asking why they chose that number. The researcher designed this question to be similar to the previous question, but broadened the scope of people to not only unbelievers, but also believers. An example of this would be a Christian family who moved into town and was looking for a church.

**6. Can you tell me a specific story of a person coming to confession of faith due to your church's serving in the community?**

This question affirms and validates the responses to questions four and five. The researcher required an individual's first name to validate the story and count it in the research. Although senior pastors answered this question, the researcher also asked it of the associates to gather specific stories. With more stories, it would reveal the impact of presence and touch on conversions and church growth. The researcher hypothesized that a person who came to a confession of faith through the church's efforts of serving in the community would also start attending the church.

**Treatment of Data**

Concerning the information garnered from the senior pastor and associate pastor interviews, the researcher chose not to develop preexisting codes or themes for both the senior and associate pastor interviews. Instead, he allowed the interview information to produce emerging codes and themes upon review. Using codes limits the analysis to the "prefigured" codes rather than opening up the codes to reflect the views of participants in a traditional qualitative way.<sup>114</sup> Additionally, the researcher read the interview notes in their entirety several times, immersing himself in the details to get a sense of the

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<sup>114</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 185.

interview as a whole before breaking it into parts.”<sup>115</sup>

### **Church Congregant Survey**

The researcher encouraged the senior and associate pastor to send out the Church Congregant Survey to the whole church to provide greater opportunity for response. In spite of this request, two participants chose to send it to a smaller pool of board members, small group leaders, and key ministry leads. To conduct the survey, the researcher used Survey Monkey, an online platform that allowed congregants easy access from their mobile device or computer. The survey was anonymous, contained ten questions, and took just under three minutes to complete.

*Explanation of Project to Survey Taker.* Dear Participant, My name is Bill Berg. I am the Senior Pastor at New Hope Community Church in Cambridge, MN. I am doing research for my Doctor of Ministry degree. Your participation provides valuable information for your church and the greater church in general. The focus of my project is on, “The impact of presence and appropriate touch on church growth.” This project is seeking to identify if, when churches move to be physically present in their communities and engage in appropriate touch (e.g. through service projects), there is a corresponding growth in that church and in confessions of faith. The definition of presence here is being within 4 to 6 feet from others and appropriate touch for example could be a handshake, hand on shoulder, or gentle hug.

Part of my project includes primary research. I have chosen to conduct this research in the form of a survey, which is provided for you by this link. This survey is

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<sup>115</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 183.



directed toward people who have made a confession of faith in Jesus. The survey is anonymous and takes three minutes or less to complete. Please know that by taking and submitting the survey, you give consent to the use of your answers in my project. Thank you for taking time to help me learn and develop my project.

*Church Congregant Survey Questions.* **1. Please list the name of your church.**

The researcher asked this question in order to develop a synopsis of the survey results for each church as well as to juxtapose congregants' answers with their senior and associate pastors' responses. It also allowed the researcher to identify any unique phenomenon within a church.

**2. How long have you been attending your present church?**

Response options included:

- One to five years
- Six to ten years
- Eleven to fifteen years
- 16+ years

This question allowed the researcher to understand if the congregant was newer to the church and, depending on their answers to questions seven and nine, if their recent choice to attend the church was due to the church's serving in the community through presence and touch.

**3. On a scale of one to ten, how important is it to you that your church is involved in serving in the community?**

Response options included:

- One = Not important
- Three = Somewhat important
- Seven = Important
- Ten = Very important

The researcher designed this question to compare the congregant's assessment of the importance in their church serving in the community with their pastor's assessment, thus providing insight to the church's culture of serving in the community. In addition, if the participant's response was higher on the scale, the researcher assumed responses to questions four and five would be positive.

**4. Are you involved with your church in serving in the community where you are in the presence (4 to 6 ft.) of others you are serving?** Response options included:

- Yes
- No

The researcher wanted to know if how the survey respondents rated the importance of their church serving in the community matched their personal community service efforts.

**5. If you answered "yes" to the previous question how often do you serve in the community a year?**

Response options included:

- Not applicable
- One to three times
- Four to six times
- Seven to ten times

Respondents' answers allowed the researcher to explore if there was a correlation between their sense of the importance of serving and their actions of serving in the community. It also demonstrated if there was a parallel between the amount of community service and an affirmative response to question eight.

**6. Are you involved with your church in serving in the community where you at times use appropriate touch (e.g., handshake, hand on shoulder, gentle hug)?**

Response options included:

- Yes
- No

This question indicated if respondents used touch while serving in the community. Many affirmative responses, alongside other question responses, may support the hypothesis that touch plays a role in conversions and church growth.

**7. Was your confession of faith in Jesus influenced by a church directly serving you outside its walls in the community through presence and touch?**

Response options included:

- None whatsoever
- Somewhat
- Very much

The researcher wanted to know if a church's serving them in their community with presence and touch influenced respondents who confessed faith in Jesus. Regardless of the answer, responses either rejected or affirmed the theory of presence and touch on increased confessions of faith.

**8. Do you know of an individual in your church that confessed their faith in Jesus as a result of your church directly serving them outside its walls in the community through presence and touch?**

Response options included:

- Yes
- No

The researcher sought further statistical data that beyond the respondent's own conversion experience, they knew of another conversion influenced by presence and touch. This question only applied to the church they attend. If a greater number of responses were positive, the researcher compared data to pastor responses to determine if there was a correlation.

**9. To what degree was your decision to attend the church you are at due to the church's involvement in serving in the community through presence and touch among people?**

Response options included:

- None whatsoever
- Somewhat
- Very much

This question provided the researcher insight into how the use of presence and touch in the community impacts church growth. It also allowed the researcher to determine what percentage of the congregation chose their church due to it serving in the community.

**10. Which of these two statements represent your church?**

Response options included:

- Our church serves in the community because it fulfills the second greatest commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself."
- Our church serves in the community because it brings people to confession of faith and results in numeric church growth.

The researcher sought parallel answers between the respondents' answers and that of their pastors. Did practice and culture match? Depending on the response, especially if it was the second statement, does this focus result in greater conversions and church growth?

### **Participants and Treatment of Data**

Regarding the congregant survey, due to the quantitative approach and number of survey responses the researcher chose to use counts. The total number of congregants who completed the online survey was 358. The researcher discarded six of the surveys due to missing information. A general survey overview, along with specific question responses, developed themes supporting the impact of presence and touch on conversions and church growth. The researcher compared survey responses from senior and associate pastor interviews within the same church as well as a whole to determine shared experiences and unique phenomena. The researcher intended to establish, confirm, or validate relationships and to develop generalizations that contribute to existing theories.<sup>116</sup>

Beyond the research approaches already stated, the researcher used simple text analysis to look for repeated words or phrases from pastor interviews. These words or phrases allowed the researcher to identify themes or phenomena and helped to shape the final narrative.

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<sup>116</sup> Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. 95.

## CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS ON PRESENCE AND TOUCH

### **Case Study Observations**

#### *Case One: CrossPoint Church*

#### **Case Study Overview (Appendix B)**

Rick Stapleton is the senior pastor and Matt Troyer is the pastor of groups and outreach at CrossPoint Church. The church is in a rural setting located in Hutchinson, Minnesota, with a population of 14,000 people. Average Sunday attendance is 400. In the last five years, the church has seen attendance growth from 290 to 400. In 2016, the church doubled the size of its auditorium and lobby as well as refreshed its look. At that time, Growth Groups participation increased from 200 to 300.

CrossPoint dedicates ten to fifteen percent of its budget to community service. Partnerships with local nonprofits its congregation serves through presence and touch include Common Cup, a shared benevolence ministry outside the church; HOMES, a ministry to those released from jail/prison; McLeod County Food Shelf; Habitat for Humanity; Youth for Christ; and Free Lunch, an organization that brings churches together to serve 400 students Thursday lunch. CrossPoint's unique service projects to the community happen through their "Growth Groups," which are 20-25 groups and that individually design and carry out 60 to 80 projects in the community every year.

#### **Observations from Senior Pastor Interview (Appendix C)**

*Church serving the community.* Pastor Rick Stapleton sees his church's serving in the community as very important — a ten on a scale of one to ten. Stapleton stated, "It is

the model of Jesus and a product of discipleship. Jesus was preaching, teaching but also out healing people. He went throughout the towns and villages preaching, teaching and serving. He did not stay in one place.”

*Personal serving.* As far as involvement in the community, Stapleton serves roughly 21 hours a month primarily through his Growth Group at church. Examples of his service include community block parties and serving at the local community college. His staff was not required to serve in the community on a regular basis, but generally did so based on their own interest.

*Church's serving motive.* When asked, “Does CrossPoint serve the community because it fulfills the second greatest commandment or because it brings people to confession of faith and results in church growth?” Stapleton chose the latter. On this he commented, “It is our mission to reach people. As leaders, we are trying to stir up a missional mindset. Shifting from just loving your neighbor to being more intentional.”

*Presence and touch on conversions.* Stapleton ranked this category as a “five” on a scale of one to ten, so between “somewhat” and “much”. He referenced the challenge of measuring this due to what he called the “ruban” mindset, a combination of rural and urban. Rural people are more independent, while urban people use group decision-making.

*Presence and touch on church growth.* This ranking was “much,” a seven. Stapleton credited this answer due to CrossPoint’s relationship credibility in the community. “People in our community who are more traditional in their religious practice are more distant in relationships in the practice of their faith. We are more intentional and utilize presence and appropriate touch which builds relational credibility.”

*Conversion story due to CrossPoint's serving.* Stapleton shared, "Mrs. A is an individual who is now involved in one of the church's Growth Groups. Prior to this, a man from CrossPoint had seen the van Mrs. A was driving with her kids. He recognized how unsafe and unreliable it was and so he reached out to his Growth Group and ten people donated money to buy her a newer used minivan. They made sure everything was working on it and gave it to her. Mrs. A's background was Jehovah Witness so she was suspicious of people ministering to her. She eventually started attending CrossPoint and in a particular message series she heard the gospel, it became clear and she accepted Christ."

#### **Observations from Associate Pastor Interview (Appendix D)**

*Church serving the community.* Pastor Matt Troyer responded with an eight out of ten for the importance of CrossPoint serving in their community. Matt stated, "We have to be interacting with people outside ourselves as Christians if we want to be effective with the Great Commission. We need to be intentional about having relationships with people who do not know Jesus."

*Church's serving motive.* When asked, "Does CrossPoint serve the community because it fulfills the second greatest commandment or because it brings people to confession of faith and results in church growth?" Troyer chose the first one. Troyer struggled choosing one statement over the other because he believes it is equal. "We are called to serve others, but people want to see people they minister to come to relationship with Jesus. Serving breaks down barriers to cynicism and confusion."



*Presence and touch on conversions.* Troyer responded “somewhat” a three to this question. It’s a difficult question to quantify. He stated, “We know people who have come to Jesus have been served in some way through our jail and recovery ministry.”

*Presence and touch on church growth.* This question received a “much,” (seven) from Troyer. CrossPoint has a reputation of serving in the community that comes out of encouraging its people towards intentional and missional serving. Troyer emphasized, “We just need to care about our neighbor and through this it opens doors.”

*Conversion story due to CrossPoint’s serving.* Troyer shared, “Mrs. B was going through a hard financial time and was evicted from her apartment. She has two children. She shared her situation with a coworker who attends CrossPoint. People from the church stepped in and helped financially to get her on her feet. She started attending church and later received Jesus and was baptized.”

### **Observations from Interviews Compared**

Both the senior pastor Stapleton and associate pastor Troyer ranked the importance of CrossPoint serving in the community an eight or above so “very important.” Both emphasized being outside the church and in the community. They stated in similar fashion the practice of “going out and having relationship with people who don’t know Jesus.” When asked the motive to serving, whether to fulfill the second greatest commandment or conversions and church growth they answered differently, but used similar language. Stapleton stated, “We shifted from just loving people to being more intentional (about salvation),” and Troyer stating, “People want to see people they minister to come to relationship with Jesus.” Both want to see CrossPoint’s serving result in salvations, and they both realize that some have.

Comparing the impact of serving on church growth, both Stapleton and Troyer ranked it a “much,” a seven out of ten. They both used the word “intentional” when it came to using presence and touch in serving one-on-one with the church’s neighbors. Through this practice, CrossPoint developed a reputation for serving that has built relationship credibility in its community. When sharing specific stories of individual conversions due to CrossPoint’s service, both specified that it was a result of CrossPoint members stepping out individually and not through a corporate serve activity. This fits with both Stapleton and Troyer’s “discipleship desire to build in the DNA of our people missional living, serving others.” Both Stapleton and Troyer put high value on serving in the community, and they each had specific stories of conversion through that service.

#### **Observations from Congregant Survey (Appendix D)**

CrossPoint’s total number of survey responses was 30. From this number, 73 percent attended CrossPoint one to ten years, with 27 percent having a tenure of eleven plus years. When asked, “How important is it to you that your church is involved in serving in the community?” 100 percent of responses stated “important” to “very important.” With this percentage, 82 percent stated they are involved in serving in the community through presence (4 to 6 ft.) among others. Of that 82 percent, 51 percent serve “one to three” times per year, 12 percent serve four to six times per year, and 19 percent serve seven to ten times per year.

When asked, “Does your serving involve appropriate touch (e.g., hand shake, hand on shoulder, gentle hug)?” 78 percent said “yes.” When asked, “Was your confession of faith in Jesus influenced by a church serving them outside its walls?” 60 percent said “somewhat” to “very much.” In response to being asked if they knew

someone from their church who confessed faith in Jesus because their church served them outside its walls, 53 percent said “yes.” When asked, “Was your decision to attend CrossPoint based on the church serving in the community?” 60 percent stated “somewhat” to “very much.” When asked, “Which of these two statements would represent your church: A) Our church serves in the community because it fulfills the second greatest commandment. Or B) Our church serves in the community because it brings people to confession of faith and results in church growth” 70 percent chose the first option.

A high number of congregants at CrossPoint value the church’s serving in the community, and they demonstrate this by engaging in their own service. Their serving is not hands off or at a distance, such as dropping food at a food shelf or buying Christmas presents for “Angel Tree,” but instead directly engages with people through presence and touch. A higher percentage of these people were also influenced to faith by being served by a church, and they know of someone personally at CrossPoint who experienced a confession of faith influenced by the church serving them in the community. The number of serving times a year is equal across the board to number of years in attendance at CrossPoint. A majority of people chose to attend CrossPoint because it serves in the community through presence and touch.

### **Observations from Interviews and Survey Compared**

Both the senior pastor Stapleton and associate pastor Troyer ranked the importance of CrossPoint serving in the community an eight or above, i.e., “very important.” All the respondents to the church survey did as well. Stapleton serves during the month in the community, as does his staff. The culture of serving in the community

through presence and touch that Stapleton desires to see at CrossPoint is evident in his staff voluntarily serving and 82 percent of survey respondents stating they serve in the community.

Reflecting on serving and conversions, Troyer stated, “People want to see people they minister to come to relationship with Jesus.” Over half of those who took the survey stated that a church serving them in the community influenced their conversion. Over half knew someone at CrossPoint who came to confession of faith because they church served them in person in the community. Both Stapleton and Troyer shared specific stories of an individual’s conversion due to CrossPoint serving that person. More than half to some degree chose to attend CrossPoint due to the church serving in the community.

The research conducted with CrossPoint’s senior and associate pastor as well as congregants’ reveals that the church values serving in the community through presence and touch. The church’s service has also resulted in number of conversions and church growth.

### *Case Two: Cornerstone Church*

#### **Case Study Overview**

Paul Jorgensen is lead teaching pastor and Jeff Garland is care and Spanish ministries pastor at Cornerstone Church. The church is in rural Litchfield, Minnesota, with a population of 6,700. Cornerstone recently opened a second campus. The congregation of 1,300 congregants has grown by 600 people over the last five years.

The amount of Cornerstone’s budget dedicated to community service is three percent along with two staff members focusing on community relationships as part of their job duties. Local nonprofits they serve through presence and touch include United Community Action Program, local schools, a food shelf, Ecumen, and youth sports

teams. Cornerstone does not hold any unique service projects. Its main engagement in serving the community is through individual action. Through this approach, the church serves an estimated thousands of hours per year.

### **Observations from Senior Pastor Interview**

*Church serving the community.* Pastor Paul Jorgensen quickly stated that serving the community was very important: “We are called to ‘go.’ Jesus modeled it for us, as he was involved in the community. We see him at weddings, funerals, and in the marketplace. The best way to make disciples is to get involved in people’s lives.”

*Personal serving.* Jorgensen serves his community 15 hours a month through tutoring at schools, giving rides after sports practice to students in need, and providing chaplaincy at a subsidized apartment complex with elderly and special needs adults. Cornerstone staff is not required to serve in the community, but they do so anyway because of the church culture. “I live this way so my staff lives this way,” Jorgensen stated.

*Church’s serving motive.* When asked, “Which of these two statements would represent your church: A. Our church serves in the community because it fulfills the second greatest commandment. B. Our church serves in the community because it brings people to confession of faith and results in church growth,” Jorgensen chose the latter. His reasoning: “This is what drives us. The Great Commission drives us. We serve people because we want to see people come to Jesus. We do not have a lot of church programming so people can serve in the community.”

*Presence and touch on conversions.* Jorgensen stated, “somewhat,” and then briefly added, “Benevolence is a long road to people coming to faith in Jesus.”

*Presence and touch on church growth.* This was a “much” answer for Jorgensen. Not so much due to Cornerstone serving as a group in the community, but from individuals serving. “It is more organic, it just happens.”

*Conversion story due to Cornerstone serving.* Mrs. C, a realtor, saw a mom with three children living in a van. Her husband went to prison and they were homeless. The agent was closing on a house and saw it had a trailer home in the back yard. She asked the owner what his plans for the trailer home was. The owner was going to get rid of it so she asked if she could have it for the mom and three kids. Her small group helped to move it onto a lot they found. Another small group built steps for an entry and another built a deck. Others brought her a dryer. “You can’t program this kind of stuff,” Jorgensen says. “We affirm our people in living this way.”

### **Observations from Associate Pastor Interview**

*Church serving the community.* Pastor Jeff Garland’s response was a “10,” very important. “It’s about loving God and loving people,” Garland said. He sees the need to minister to people before they arrive at church. “They are sick and do not know it so they need to be brought in.”

*Church’s serving motive.* When asked, “Which of these two statements would represent your church: A. Our church serves in the community because it fulfills the second greatest commandment. B. Our church serves in the community because it brings people to confession of faith and results in church growth,” Garland chose the latter. “It’s about the Great Commission, making disciples,” says Garland. “We build relationship through need and its effectiveness is when people come to know Christ.”

*Presence and touch on conversions.* Garland's response was highest of all interviews, with an "eight" between "much and very much." His only statement concerning why he chose the rating was his hearing on a regular basis people coming to faith at Cornerstone due to the congregation's serving in the community.

*Presence and touch on church growth.* Garland scored this a seven out of ten. He then shared a recent story. "Mrs. G from the sheriff's office called Cornerstone because they needed a place for training. She stated, 'We know Cornerstone is so involved and open to community things ... a church that is willing to help.'"

*Conversion story due to Cornerstone's serving.* "We connected with Mrs. D through the sheriff's chaplaincy when we had to notify her that her husband died," Garland stated. "We sat with her late into the night. She did not have a church home so Cornerstone offered to have the funeral service for her. After this she started attending Cornerstone and decided to accept Jesus, was baptized, and is serving others today."

### **Observations from Interviews Compared**

Both the senior pastor Jorgensen and associate pastor Garland ranked the importance of Cornerstone serving in the community as ten ("very important"). Both stated, "It's about the Great Commission." Their approach to serving in the community is a result of the Great Commission as they both see the purpose of serving in seeing conversions and church growth. "This is what drives us," said Jorgensen. Jorgensen does not require staff to serve in the community "but they serve because he serves, and it is part of the church's culture," Jorgensen stated.

In ranking Cornerstone's serving impact on conversions, Jorgensen and Garland differed. Jorgensen has experienced benevolence as a long road to conversion, so he

ranked serving resulting in conversions as a “somewhat” where Garland notices the impact on a regular basis and ranked it as a “much.” Garland’s position in pastoral care and counseling may lend itself to seeing more easily how serving moves people to conversion. When it came to serving and church growth, they both ranked the impact as “much.” The majority of people coming to Cornerstone come through personal invite. “When we get out of the church this is what can happen,” stated Garland. Jorgensen sees much of the serving done in the community as organic, that is, performed on an individual basis, not as a structured church event. Both Jorgensen and Garland put high value on serving in the community, and each pastor had specific stories of conversion through the church serving in the community.

### **Observations from Congregant Survey**

Cornerstone’s total number of survey responses was 161. From this number, 74 percent attended Cornerstone one to ten years and 26 percent for eleven plus years. When asked, “How important is it to you that your church is involved in serving in the community?” 92 percent of responses stated “important” to “very important.” Within this percentage, 69 percent stated they are involved in serving in the community through presence (4 to 6 ft.) among others. Of that 69 percent, 24 percent serve one to three times per year, 9 percent serve four to six times per year, and 36 percent serve seven to ten times per year.

When asked, “Did your serving involve appropriate touch (e.g., hand shake, hand on shoulder, gentle hug)?” 68 percent said “yes.” When asked, “Was your confession of faith in Jesus influenced by a church serving them outside its walls?” 48 percent selected “somewhat” to “very much.” In response to knowing someone from their church who



confessed faith in Jesus because their church served them outside its walls, 58 percent responded “yes.” When deciding to attend Cornerstone based on the church serving in the community, 60 percent stated “somewhat” to “very much.” Out of the two statements that could represent Cornerstone’s motive for serving, (“to fulfill the second greatest commandment” or “it brings people to confession of faith and results in church growth,”) 78 percent chose the former.

A high number of Cornerstone congregants value the church’s community service, and they affirm this through their own service. Their serving is not hands off but instead directly engages with people through presence and touch. About half of these people were influenced to faith by being served by a church, and over half know of someone personally at Cornerstone who was influenced in confession of faith by being served. A majority of people chose to attend Cornerstone because it serves in the community through presence and touch.

### **Observations from Interviews and Survey Compared**

Both the senior pastor Jorgensen and associate pastor Garland ranked the importance of Cornerstone serving in the community as “very important.” The majority of respondents to the church survey did so as well. Jorgensen serves during the month in the community, as does his staff. The culture of serving in the community through presence and touch that Jorgensen desires to see at Cornerstone is evident in his staff’s voluntary service and in the 69 percent of survey respondents who state they serve in the community.

In looking at serving and conversions, Jorgensen admitted it is more difficult to reach people through benevolence and that results are slow. Regardless of this statement,

just under half of those who took the survey stated a church serving them in the community influenced their conversion. Over half knew someone at Cornerstone who came to confession of faith because they were served in the community by the church. When it came to the motive for Cornerstone serving in the community, both Jorgensen and Garland stated “conversions and church growth,” where 75 percent of those surveyed chose as a motive, “fulfilling the second greatest commandment.” These responses may reveal a difference in vision, but it did not seem to have a negative effect on Cornerstone’s service and the results from that service. To affirm this, Jorgensen and Garland shared specific stories of an individual’s conversion due to Cornerstone serving them. To some degree, more than half of congregants surveyed chose to attend Cornerstone due to the church serving in the community.

The research conducted with Cornerstone’s senior and associate pastors and its congregants reveals the church values serving in the community through presence and touch. This service has resulted in greater conversions and church growth.

### *Case Three: The Journey North Church*

#### **Case Study Overview**

Mark Bjorlo is lead pastor and Lynfield Hines is campus pastor of The Journey North Church. The church has two locations, both in the Brainerd Lakes tourist area. Bjorlo pastors the first campus in Baxter, Minnesota, a town of 20,000 people, and Hines is campus pastor in Aitkin, Minnesota, a town of 3,000 people. Together, the congregation is 1,100 people (800 in Baxter, 300 in Aitkin). The church grew over the last five years from 700 to 1,100 attendees.

The amount of The Journey North’s budget dedicated to community service is five percent. Local nonprofits they serve through presence and touch include Ruby’s Pop

Up Pantry, Soup Kitchen, Community Education Advisory, Police Chaplaincy, Fire Chaplaincy, Lakes Area Pregnancy Support, and School Sandwich Program. The church's main unique service project is a "Service Scavenger Hunt" where they deploy 60 plus people with a list of ways to make an impact, and then equip people with gift cards to bless others. They then return and share stories of making a difference. The Journey North serves their community 25 times a year for a total of 2,500 service hours.

### **Observations from Senior Pastor Interview**

*Church serving the community.* Pastor Mark Bjorlo rated the importance of the church serving in the community as a seven out of ten. When asked why, Bjorlo stated, "It has to do with value but it's an area we cannot follow-up. I practice my own personal passion, mechanisms, but if there is not impact I don't value it." Most of Bjorlo's answers were brief and to the point with little further explanation.

*Personal Serving.* Bjorlo serves roughly five hours a month in the community as a police chaplain on call. He does not require staff to serve in the community, and the church's primarily focuses on gifting rather than volunteerism.

*Church's serving motive.* When asked if The Journey North served the community because it fulfills the second greatest commandment or because it brings people to confession of faith and results in church growth, Bjorlo chose the first option. His main reasoning, "I have not seen it as a growth mechanism. It is not part of our strategy."

*Presence and touch on conversions.* Bjorlo answered "Not at all" stating, "No way to measure it. If (you) cannot measure it, (you) cannot count it."

*Presence and touch on church growth.* “Not at all” was the rating with Bjorlo stating, “We do not measure it. We are called to do it over and over and I hear our involvement is why people are engaged but is there a correlation, I am not sure?”

*Conversion story due to The Journey North’s serving.* None

### **Observations from Associate Pastor Interview**

*Church serving the community.* Pastor Lynfield Hines stated “very important” to the church serving the community. “It is a small community. Everybody knows everybody so you can make an impact,” Hines said.

*Church’s serving motive.* When asked, “Which of these two statements would represent your church: A. Our church serves in the community because it fulfills the second greatest commandment. B. Our church serves in the community because it brings people to confession of faith and results in church growth,” Hines chose the first option. His reasoning, “God has told us to do this and we need to be obedient. Love God, love others, yet it has worked well for option B.”

*Presence and touch on conversions.* Hines shared a confident seven out of ten. “People share stories with us,” Hines said. “Our people are going out and living what we are preaching and we are seeing the results.”

*Presence and touch on church growth.* Again, Hines stated seven out of ten. Hines sees it firsthand as a wrestling coach. Through his service as a coach, the head wrestling coach and the other assistant coach have both began attending The Journey North with their families. “This would not have happened if I wouldn’t have gotten out into the community,” says Hines. New people at our V.I.P. table on Sundays state they came because of the church’s involvement in the community.

*Conversion story due to The Journey North's serving.* Hines shared, "Mr. A was in jail and Mr. B developed a relationship with him through the jail ministry. When Mr. A got out, he didn't have a place to stay so Mr. B did a 'Contract for Deed' on a house for Mr. A. Mr. A eventually went to prison and just got out in the last six months. Mr. B maintained this relationship, and Mr. A accepted Jesus. The church ended up performing Mr. A's wedding, and his whole family is involved including his kids who attend youth group. His next step is further treatment through Teen Challenge in Brainerd."

### **Observations from Interviews Compared**

Both Lead Pastor Bjorlo and Associate Pastor Hines ranked the importance of The Journey North serving in the community as "important" to "very important." Bjorlo's ranking has to do with value but stated his observation that, "it is an area that is hard to measure impact." Hines, who serves at the second campus and in a smaller community of 3,000, can see the value of service because, "everybody knows you so you can make an impact." Both stated The Journey North's motive for serving was to "fulfill the second greatest commandment." Their reasoning was similar in that God told His church to do this, regardless of potential for growth. "We need to be obedient," Hine's stated, "Love God, love others." Bjorlo doesn't see it as a growth mechanism.

When it came to serving's effect on conversions, Bjorlo and Hines were apart on answers. Bjorlo stated "not at all" and Hines stated "much." Bjorlo simply feels that if you cannot measure it, you cannot count it. Hines, on the other hand, measured impact by "people sharing stories with us." With church growth, Bjorlo's ranking and answer was the same as Hines's response. Hines sees personal results, for example, his peer wrestling coaches and families attending church and comments from new attendees due to the

church's involvement in the community. Bjorlo did not have a story of conversion due to the church's serving in the community, but Hines did. Beyond "love your neighbor" as the motive for serving, it is clear Bjorlo and Hines hold a different mindset on its impact. Bjorlo recognizes the importance of serving in the community, but not its impact. Hines sees the importance of deliberately serving in the community as well as its impact on both conversions and church growth.

### **Observations from Congregant Survey**

The Journey North's total number of survey responses was 77. From this number, 76 percent attended The Journey North one to ten years and 24 percent attended for eleven plus years. When asked, "How important is it to you that your church is involved in serving in the community?" 95 percent of responses stated "important" to "very important," and 75 percent of those people stated they are involved in serving in the community through presence (4 to 6 ft.). Of the 75 percent, 23 percent serve "one to three" times per year, 15 percent serve four to six times per year, and 37 percent serve seven to ten times a year.

When asked, "Are you involved with your church in serving in the community where you at times use appropriate touch (e.g., hand shake, hand on shoulder, gentle hug)?" 66 percent said "yes." When asked, "Was your confession of faith in Jesus influenced by a church directly serving you outside its walls in the community through presence and touch?" 51 percent said "somewhat" to "very much." When asked, "Do you know of an individual in your church that confessed their faith in Jesus as a result of your church directly serving them outside its walls in the community through presence and touch?", 60 percent said "yes." Asked if they based their decision to attend The Journey

North on the church serving in the community, 64 percent stated “somewhat” to “very much.” Out of the two statements that could represent The Journey North’s motive for serving, “to fulfill the second greatest commandment” or “it brings people to confession of faith and results in church growth,” 89 percent chose the prior.

A high number of congregants at The Journey North value the church’s serving in the community, and they affirm this through engaging in their own service. Their serving is not hands off or at a distance; instead they directly engaged with people through presence and touch. Just over half of those surveyed were influenced to faith by being served by a church, and over half of respondents know of someone personally at The Journey North who was influenced in confession of faith by being served by the church. A majority of people stated they attend The Journey North because it serves in the community through presence and touch.

### **Observations from Interviews and Survey Compared**

Both the senior pastor Bjorlo and campus pastor Hines ranked the importance of The Journey North serving in the community as “important” to “very important.” The majority of respondents to the church survey did as well. Bjorlo serves as an on-call chaplain for the police department, and Hines does the same for the fire department. This example of serving in some way influenced The Journey North congregation, as 75 percent of respondents stated that they served in their community. Bjorlo’s interview was brief with short answers, and it supported his view that serving in the community has not been a focal point in the church. Regardless, just over half of those congregants who took the survey stated that a church serving them in the community influenced their

conversion. Over half knew someone at The Journey North who came to their confession of faith because the church served them in their community.

When it came to the motive for The Journey North serving in the community, both Bjorlo and Hines answered that it was to fulfill the second greatest commandment. The majority of survey respondents (89 percent) demonstrated their agreement that the church has a culture of service by choosing the same answer. More than half answered affirmatively that they chose to attend The Journey North due to the church serving in the community.

The research conducted with The Journey North's senior and associate pastor and the congregants reveals that the church values serving in the community through presence and touch. It also answers Bjorlo's comment, "There may be some correlation (in serving in the community) but I am not sure what it is." The correlation is that by serving in the community, The Journey North has experienced greater results in conversions and church growth.

#### *Case Four: Crossroads Church*

##### **Case Study Overview**

Ned Eerdmans is the senior pastor and Joey Kalan is director of spiritual growth, adults at Crossroads Church in Fergus Falls, Minnesota. Fergus Falls is a rural tourist community with a population of 13,500. The size of the congregation is 200 on a Sunday. In the last five years, Crossroad's has doubled attendance at its mid-week activities, averaging 200 to 250 people.

The amount of Crossroad's budget dedicated to community service is two percent. Local nonprofits they serve through presence and touch are the Salvation Army, Health Resources Pregnancy Center, A Place to Belong for mental health, Habitat for Humanity,



and Fergus Falls Raking Club. The church's main unique service projects are the Community Leaf Raking Project, and the Health Resources Fun Run fundraiser. Crossroads serves their community ten times per year for an estimated 1,000 hours.

### **Observations from Senior Pastor Interview**

*Church serving in the community.* Pastor Ned Eerdmans ranked the importance of community service for Crossroads as an eight out of ten. Eerdmans arrived at Crossroads after it had just celebrated its 150-year anniversary. His observation was they were very insular. Eerdmans states, "I set out to change the culture and move the church to go outside itself. Over the last 15 years we are recognized as one of the most involved churches in the community."

*Personal Serving.* Eerdmans serves ten hours a month with the Salvation Army and has served on the board of Habitat for Humanity and acted with Community Theater. He does not require his staff to serve in the community, but reports that it happens naturally due to the churches DNA. Eerdmans described it like this: "How I live, they live."

*Church's serving motive.* When asked if Crossroads serves the community because it fulfills the second greatest commandment or because it brings people to confession of faith and results in church growth, Eerdmans chose the first option. "We don't have a transactional mindset," Eerdmans stated. "If we do this, pay back will be this. We live by the second commandment first, and then maybe there will be kingdom impact."

*Presence and touch on conversions.* Eerdmans responded to this question with "somewhat," (three out of ten). Crossroads recognized that mental illness and poverty

needs transcended the need for Jesus, but people came to faith through other areas such as the arts community and in the schools. “Certainly not in areas we thought,” said Eerdmans.

*Presence and touch on church growth.* This answer as well was “somewhat,” (three out of ten). Eerdmans reports that for the last ten years, they have employed a “Community Service Coordinator” who works five to ten hours a week and responds to needs in the church and community. He stated that while it is hard to measure that role’s impact, “The Mayor has called to say ‘thank you’ for our role in the community and colleagues recognize it as well.”

*Conversion story due to Crossroads serving.* Ms. E, a single mom, had separated from her boyfriend and was, by her own description, “in a dark place.” Her boss at the hospital reached out to her to help and to connect her with Crossroads. “We were able to help her with some very specific needs and she started attending on Sundays,” said Eerdmans. When Crossroads offered a membership class, Ms. E attended and inquired about salvation stating, “I want what these people have.” That day, she gave her life to Jesus. “Since then her life has been a remarkable turnaround,” stated Eerdmans.

### **Observations from Associate Pastor Interview**

*Church serving in the community.* Pastor Joey Kalan ranked this question as a ten, the highest score. He stated, “Serving is especially important in small town communities. Presence is the only way they will open up to you.”

*Church’s serving motive.* When asked, “Which of these two statements would represent your church: A. Our church serves in the community because it fulfills the second greatest commandment. B. Our church serves in the community because it brings

people to confession of faith and results in church growth,” Kalan chose the first option. “The first option represented the majority of the church,” said Kalan. People at Crossroads serve the community because it is the right thing to do. They would be uncomfortable doing it for option B.

*Presence and touch on conversions.* Kalan provided a split response to this question, stating “somewhat” for adults and “much” for children. In the end, he could not draw a direct correlation between the congregations serving and impact on conversions.

*Presence and touch on church growth.* Kalan rated this question a seven out of ten. Growth seen in this area has come about through people at Crossroads interacting with people in the community. “People are creating more space for people,” Kalan stated. He also observed, “The inclusion of people by the Senior Pastor influences our willingness to be more welcoming.”

*Conversion story due to Crossroads serving.* Kalan did not have a specific story.

### **Observations from Interviews Compared**

Both Eerdmans and Kalan chose “important” to “very important” for Crossroads serving in the community. Crossroad’s theology didn’t support this earlier in their history as Eerdmans stated, “Their theology was ‘the body serving the body.’” Eerdmans set out to change the culture and move the church outside itself, believing how he lived the church would live. Eerdmans does this by serving in the community in a variety of ways. Kalan supported this effort with the belief the church should look at what needs could be fulfilled in the community and start there. Eerdmans and Kalan agree Crossroads serves in the community to fulfill the second greatest commandment. They also agree on why

they do this: It is the right thing to do and not about a transactional mindset, “If we do this, payback will be this.”

Growth through conversion and church involvement came in areas Eerdmans didn't expect such as through the art community and schools. Although source is hard to attribute, growth didn't come via what Eerdmans thought as the obvious avenues, such as those dealing with mental health or poverty. Kalan has seen growth as well, but primarily in the Wednesday night children's program which more than doubled over the last five years. Crossroads has transformed from being inwardly focused into an outwardly-oriented church. Eerdmans commented, “Over the last many years, we have been recognized as the most involved church in the community.”

### **Observations from Congregant Survey**

The total number of survey responses from Crossroads congregants was 26. From this number, 31 percent attended Crossroads one to ten years and 69 percent attended for eleven plus years. When asked, “How important is it to you that your church is involved in serving in the community?” 84 percent of responses stated “important” to “very important.” Within this group, 64 percent stated they are involved in serving in the community through presence (4 to 6 ft.). Of the 64 percent who engaged in service, half serve one to three times per year and the other half serve seven to ten times per year.

When asked, “Does your serving involve appropriate touch (e.g., hand shake, hand on shoulder, gentle hug)?” 54 percent said “yes.” When asked, “Was your confession of faith in Jesus influenced by a church serving them outside its walls?” only 17 percent said “somewhat.” When asked if they knew someone from their church who confessed faith in Jesus because their church served them outside its walls, 32 percent

said “yes.” When deciding to attend Crossroads based on the church serving in the community, 42 percent stated “somewhat” to “very much.” Out of the two statements that could represent Crossroads’ motive for serving (to fulfill the second greatest commandment or it brings people to confession of faith and results in church growth), 100 percent chose the prior.

While a high number of congregants at Crossroads (84 percent) value the church’s serving in the community, only 64 percent stated they are involved in serving in the community. Of this percentage, just over half used appropriate touch while serving. Only 17 percent were influenced in conversion due to being served by a church, and only 32 percent know of someone at Crossroads who came to confession of faith through Crossroads serving them in the community. Less than half of those attending Crossroads do so in part because of the church’s serving in the community.

### **Observations from Interviews and Survey Compared**

Both Senior Pastor Eerdmans and Director of Spiritual Growth Kalan ranked the importance of Crossroads serving in the community as “very important.” The majority of respondents to the church survey did so as well. Eerdmans serves monthly in the community, as does his staff. The culture of serving in the community through presence and touch that Eerdmans desires to see at Crossroads continues to develop as is evident in his staff voluntarily serving. More evidence of this is that greater than half (64 percent) of survey respondents state they serve in the community.

In looking at serving influencing conversions, both Eerdmans and Kalan admitted it is more difficult in their community to reach adults and they have seen more response from children. Only 17 percent of those attending Crossroads were influenced toward

conversion by a church serving them, and only 32 percent at Crossroads knows of someone confessing faith in Jesus due to Crossroads serving them. Less than half (43 percent), chose to attend Crossroads due to the church serving in the community. Kalan, who is newer to the community and small town life, mentioned that relationship building is challenging and presence and touch is necessary.

When it came to the motive for Crossroads serving in the community, both Eerdmans and Kalan agreed that it is to fulfill the second greatest commandment. When asked, 100 percent of Crossroads congregant respondents affirmed this. This indicates to Eerdmans' that the congregation embraces his vision for serving the community. A lower percentage of people at Crossroads came to conversion through Crossroads serving them. Likewise, a lower percentage chose to attend Crossroads because of its community service. Could this be a factor in Crossroads not seeing as many adult conversions and church growth compared to children? It is hard to say, but it does affirm Eerdmans' approach to serving the community: "Live the second commandment and then maybe there will be kingdom impact."

The research conducted with Crossroads senior and associate pastors and congregant respondents reveals that the church values serving in the community. This serving is through presence and touch. There is evidence of movement toward conversions and church growth, as 32 percent of those surveyed knew of a conversion at Crossroads impacted by the church serving them in the community. Eerdmans personal story of conversion of a woman named Jamie supports this as well. The church doubling their mid-week children's ministry reveals impact on church growth.

*Case Five: Northridge Fellowship*

**Case Study Overview**

Ben McEachern is lead pastor and Dan Monson is missions pastor at Northridge Fellowship in Rogers, Minnesota. Rogers is an exurban setting with a population of 13,000 people. Church attendance is 700 a week. The main growth over the last five years has been the result of planting two new churches.

The amount of Northridge Fellowship's budget dedicated to community service is 28 percent. Local nonprofits it serves through presence and touch are the Cross (local food shelf and financial assistance), Great River Family Promise (supporting families and children experiencing homelessness), and Mobile Hope (afterschool tutoring for kids in mobile communities). Northridge engages in other service projects, but all take place on-site at its church locations such as a block party, VBS, trunk or treat, hosting school banquets, and Cub Scouts. Northridge serves its community roughly 20 times a year and does not measure the amount of hours served.

**Observations from Senior Pastor Interview**

*Church serving in community.* Lead Pastor Ben McEachern rated Northridge as a ten stating, "It's an essential part of our church." The church's vision is, "Love God, love each other and make a difference." "One-third of our vision is about serving. We want to love people to Jesus and meet needs," McEachern said.

*Personal serving.* McEachern serves ten hours each month in his community as a police chaplain along with being involved in the church's various partnerships. His staff is not required to serve in the community, but they speak about it and encourage it.

*Church's serving motive.* When asked if Northridge served the community because it fulfills the second greatest commandment or because it brings people to

confession of faith and results in church growth, McEachern chose the first option. Northridge serves in the community because they follow Jesus and it is about discipleship. “We are not sales people. We are not going to do this because we want them to come, because we want something out of them. I am not a chaplain because I want them to come to church,” McEachern said.

*Presence and touch on conversions.* McEachern rated this three out of ten (somewhat). McEachern used the parable of the soils from the gospels for his explanation stating, “There was only one soil that really bore fruit, and our expectations are low.”

*Presence and touch on church growth.* McEachern rated this a seven. He spoke about hearing people attending Northridge coming to the church because the church is active in the community and wants to reach their community.

*Conversion story due to Northridge’s serving.* None.

### **Observations from Associate Interview**

*Church serving in the community.* Missions Pastor Dan Monson rated Northridge as a ten. He referenced the church’s vision to, “Love God, love others and make a difference.” Monson stated, “If Northridge is not this way, then I know it is time for me to leave.”

*Church’s serving motive.* When asked, “Which of these two statements would represent your church: A. Our church serves in the community because it fulfills the second greatest commandment. B. Our church serves in the community because it brings people to confession of faith and results in church growth,” Monson chose the first option. This is how Northridge thinks of serving the community. They want to love God,



love one another, and then take it outside Northridge. It is their vision, and it fulfills the second greatest commandment.

*Presence and touch on conversions.* Monson rated this a seven out of ten. He would rank it higher, but they are such a Scandinavian community. “When I hear Latinos talk about coming to Jesus they talk about being welcomed and cared for, about how our church is like the love church,” Monson said. He went on, “If we were not participating in the community, we wouldn’t have relationships for when these opportunities come up to make a difference.”

*Presence and touch on church growth.* Monson rated this seven as well. Northridge used to question its serving impact on the community, but as new people join their congregation, they tell them it is because of their involvement with the community. “It is pretty hard to make an impact if you are not present,” Monson stated.

*Conversion story due to Northridge’s serving.* Mr. C is a member at Northridge who owns a photography business. The church partners with a ministry called “Mobile Hope.” Mobile Hope volunteers help with homework, access to lawyers, immigration services, and food and clothing for people living in mobile home parks. Mr. C offered to do family portraits for the families in the park. Monson stated, “Usually you only see moms and kids coming for help but when we offered family portraits the whole family showed up including the dads.” Through this, Mr. C has built relationships with folks as he takes pictures and the families tell stories. Many of those he has influenced for Jesus are Latinos who may be undocumented, so Northridge has connected them with an area Hispanic pastor.

### **Observations from Interviews Compared**

Both the Lead Pastor McEachern and Missions Pastor Monson ranked the importance of Northridge serving in the community as “very important,” each stating in similar fashion: “It is a third of our vision ‘to make a difference.’” When asked the motive to serving, both stated that it was to fulfill the second greatest commandment rather than to increase conversion and church growth. McEachern stated, “We are not going to do this because we want them to come, because we want something out of them. We do it because we follow Jesus.” McEachern reflects the importance of serving in the community by being a police chaplain. He does not require staff to serve in the community, but he does encourage it.

In measuring Northridge’s serving in the community and impact on conversions, McEachern stated “somewhat” of an impact where Monson stated “much.” This difference may be because Monson’s position in missions and outreach gives him an opportunity to see more impact. McEachern stated the parable of the soils, “Out of the four soils only one bore fruit. Our expectations are low.” In response to serving and impact on church growth, both said, “much.” Monson said, “Newer people are coming because of Northridge in the community.” McEachern made a similar statement, “When I listen, I hear people state, ‘We are an active church, we want to reach our community.’” Both leaders desire Northridge to serve in the community, but specifically in the sequence of their vision to “Love God, love each other and make a difference.”

### **Observations from Congregant Survey**

Northridge’s total number of survey responses was 31. From this number, 81 percent had attended Northridge one to ten years and 19 percent had attended eleven plus

years. When asked, “How important is it to you that your church is involved in serving in the community?” 97 percent of responses were “important” to “very important.” Of this percentage, 81 percent stated they serve in the community through presence (4 to 6 ft.) among others. Of that 81 percent, 58 percent serve one to three times, 10 percent serve four to six times and 13 percent serve seven to ten times a year.

When asked if their serving involved appropriate touch (e.g., hand shake, hand on shoulder, gentle hug), 68 percent of respondents said “yes.” When asked, “Was your confession of faith in Jesus influenced by a church serving you outside its walls?” 32 percent of respondents said “somewhat” to “very much.” In response to being asked if they knew someone from their church who confessed faith in Jesus because their church served them outside its walls, 39 percent said “yes.” When deciding to attend Northridge based on its serving in the community, 55 percent stated “somewhat” to “very much.” Out of the two statements that could represent Northridge’s motive for serving (to fulfill the second greatest commandment or it brings people to confession of faith and results in church growth), 97 percent chose the former.

A very high number of congregants at Northridge (97 percent) value the church’s serving in the community, with 81 percent stating they engage in community service. Of this number, 68 percent use appropriate touch. Over a third know someone confessing faith due to Northridge serving them in the community, and a third were influenced in their own conversion due to a church serving them. Northridge congregant’s views of serving in the community match their leadership’s view of service “fulfilling the second greatest commandment.”

## **Observations from Interview and Survey Results Compared**

Both Senior Pastor McEachern and Missions Pastor Monson ranked the importance of Crossroads serving in the community as “very important,” each stating in similar fashion: “It is a third of our vision ‘to make a difference.’” The majority of respondents to the church survey did as well. McEachern serves monthly in the community. The culture of serving in the community through presence is 81 percent, which supports the last third of Northridge’s vision “to make a difference.” Of the 81 percent that serve, the majority do so by employing touch. A third of the people were influenced toward conversion by a church serving them, and over a third know someone at Northridge who made a confession of faith due to Northridge serving them in the community. It supports Monson’s comment about serving in the community: “It’s pretty hard to make an impact if you are not present.” In comparing the impact of serving on conversions, both McEachern and Monson admitted it is more difficult to measure, “especially in a Scandinavian culture,” stated Monson.

Concerning the motive for Northridge serving in the community, both McEachern and Monson answered to “fulfill the second greatest commandment.” When asked, 97 percent of Northridge congregant respondents affirmed this. This communicates to McEachern that his vision for serving the community is embraced by his congregation. Over half those surveyed stated their choice to attend Northridge was determined in some way because it serves in the community. This may answer a comment made by McEachern, “It’s more about following Jesus, but it may result in B (conversions and church growth).”

The research conducted with Northridge's senior and associate pastors and the congregants reveals the church highly values serving in the community. This serving is through presence and touch. This serving has revealed there are people at Northridge who have experienced conversion because they were served in the community by a church or specifically by their church. People chose to attend Northridge due to their service in the community. Although Northridge's recent growth has come through planting churches, serving in the community through presence and touch influenced its present congregation in conversions and church growth.

*Case Six: Oakwood Community Church*

**Case Study Overview**

Jon Tolly is lead pastor and Andi Custer is associate pastor at Oakwood Community Church in Waconia, Minnesota. Tolly has been at Oakwood for three years. Waconia is a bedroom community located 35 miles west of the Twin Cities with a population of 12,000. Church attendance is 400 per week. Church attendance grew over the last five years from 175 to 400.

The amount of Oakwood's budget dedicated to community service is 4 percent. Local nonprofits they serve through presence and touch are the Waconia Food Shelf and MN Adult and Teen Challenge. They are in the beginnings of working with Families Moving Forward (housing homeless families in their church), Love INC (which assists churches in how to serve the underprivileged in the community) and UpWorks (serving local schools).

Oakwood's unique service project is working directly with their local food shelf hands on collecting food, filling backpacks for kids in the fall, and outfitting children in

need with winter clothing. On average, the church serves in the community five to seven times a year, but does not track service hours.

### **Observations from Senior Pastor Interview**

*Church serving the community.* Lead Pastor Jon Tolly rated the importance of the church serving the community a ten. The church hired Tolly because it was looking for someone to help them turn its focus outward. The church felt it had zero influence in the community. “They said they were a discipleship church, but what is discipleship if it is not going out,” Tolly said.

*Personal serving.* Tolly stated that he is not serving directly in the community at present other than at times doing funerals for families without a church home. Since he is still new in his role, he is focusing on changing the internal culture before moving outward. His staff is not required to serve in the community. Most of the staff is newly hired and part-time employees.

*Church’s serving motive.* When asked, “Which of these two statements would represent your church: A. Our church serves in the community because it fulfills the second greatest commandment. B. Our church serves in the community because it brings people to confession of faith and results in church growth,” Tolly chose the first option. “We are an option ‘A’ approach church. We are driven by ‘A’ but ‘B’ happens,” said Tolly. “It’s the mission of Oakwood, ‘Passion for God; compassion for people.’”

*Presence and touch on conversions.* Tolly gave this a three out of ten, sharing that Oakwood’s culture has not been an inviting culture. The staff at the time of his hiring said they would not even invite people to their church. The church did a series called

“Stretcher Bearer” which encouraged them to look for needs and give money away. They invited people to take \$20 and add their money to it. The goal was to get people to care for people on the outside of church. Oakwood is doing more now but Tolly is not sure it is resulting in confessions of faith.

*Presence and touch on church growth.* Tolly ranked this a seven out of ten. He stated, “People just started to look around more and realize they can care. They are developing more relationships, inviting more, and by being in the community Oakwood is developing a better name in the community.”

*Conversion story due to Oakwood serving.* Mrs. F came to Financial Peace University (FPU) through a Facebook advertisement. At the time, she was living with her sister due to her husband’s alcoholism. From the Monday night class, she started attending church on Sundays and eventually attended an Alpha course. A couple befriended her, loved her well, and on Easter, she chose to receive Jesus and be baptized. She is now involved at Oakwood regularly, serves others, and is in a life group with five other couples.

### **Observations from Associate Pastor Interview**

*Church serving in community.* Associate Pastor Andi Custer ranked the importance of this a ten. He is a missionary kid and it is a higher priority for him than he sees in the church. It is also its mission, “Passion for God; compassion for others.” Custer stated, “If we are more upward with our worship, it will result in being inward in Christian community which should turn our people then outward.” The goal of maturity will result in serving and being outward.

*Church's serving motive.* When asked, "Which of these two statements would represent your church: A. Our church serves in the community because it fulfills the second greatest commandment. B. Our church serves in the community because it brings people to confession of faith and results in church growth," Custer chose the first option. When asked why, Custer stated, "Love God, love others. It's obedience to God first and then for lost people."

*Presence and touch on conversions.* Custer rated this two out of ten. Most of Oakwood's outreach is international or in Minneapolis/St. Paul. They perform very little community service in the local community, and when they do, it tends to be hands off service such as a coat or food drive. Custer stated, "We are not living eyeball to eyeball with others. We are not present."

*Presence and touch on church growth.* Custer ranked this question a two as well. Oakwood has a reputation as a Bible and theology church where they see transfer growth. They have seen some growth through FPU and Alpha course, but the challenge is they are asking the community to come to them. Custer said, "A fisherman goes to the fish. It is hard to fish from your house."

*Conversion story due to Oakwood serving.* Custer had the same story as Tolly.

### **Observations from Interviews Compared**

Both Lead Pastor Tolly and Associate Pastor Custer ranked the importance of Oakwood serving in the community as "very important." Oakwood hired Tolly specifically to help them turn their focus outward. Custer supported this stating, "My passion for this is due to being a missionary kid." When asked the motive for serving, both stated option A (to fulfill the second greatest commandment) over option B



(conversion and church growth). “Oakwood is an option ‘A’ approach church but ‘B’ happens,” stated Tolly. Custer sees it “as obedience to God versus for the lost.” With this approach, both only “somewhat” connected Oakwood’s serving in the community to results in confessions of faith. The church’s engagement in the community is still relatively new with Tolly coming to Oakwood and Custer recognizes, “We are not living eyeball to eyeball with others. We are not present.” Although this is reality, both still were able to share a conversion story from Oakwood.

Tolly sees a stronger correlation of serving in the community and church growth than Custer does. Tolly sees a positive shift in Oakwood people developing more relationships, inviting more, and the church developing a better name in the community. This is a significant shift considering that when he came to Oakwood, “staff would not even invite people to the church.” Custer has been on staff a lot longer and does not see the shift as much as Tolly. Despite this, they both share a unified goal to move Oakwood forward in living out the second greatest commandment with hopeful results of conversions and church growth.

### **Observations from Congregant Survey**

Oakwood’s total number of survey responses was 10. Oakwood chose to distribute the survey to a choice number of leaders as opposed to the church as a whole. Regardless of the small sample size, the researcher chose to report the results.

From the surveys, 30 percent of respondents had attended Oakwood one to ten years, while 70 percent had attended eleven plus years. When asked, “How important is it to you that your church is involved in serving in the community?” 100 percent of responses stated “very important.” Likewise, all respondents also reported that they serve

in the community through presence (4 to 6 ft.) among others. Of the respondents, 45 percent serve one to three times per year, 44 percent serve four to six times per year, and 1 percent serve seven to ten times a year.

When asked if their serving involved appropriate touch (e.g., hand shake, hand on shoulder, gentle hug), 89 percent said “yes.” When asked, “Was your confession of faith in Jesus influenced by a church serving you outside its walls?” 22 percent said “somewhat.” In response to being asked if they knew someone from their church who confessed faith in Jesus because their church served them outside its walls, 67 percent said “yes.” When deciding to attend Oakwood based on the church serving in the community, 78 percent stated “somewhat” to “very much.” Out of the two statements that could represent Oakwood’s motive for serving, “to fulfill the second greatest commandment” or “it brings people to confession of faith and results in church growth,” 78 percent chose the former.

A very high number of congregants at Oakwood value the church serving in the community, and they affirm this through their own community service. A high number engage in appropriate touch. Almost a quarter of these people came to faith in part because a church served them, and two-thirds know of someone personally at Oakwood whose confession of faith was influenced through being served by the church. Three quarters chose to attend Oakwood because it serves in the community through presence and touch.

### **Interview Observations and Survey Compared**

Both Lead Pastor Tolly and Associate Pastor Custer ranked the importance of Oakwood serving in the community as “very important.” All the respondents to the

church survey did as well. The church hired Tolly to help move it toward greater presence in the community. Those who took the survey are serving in the community through presence, and a high percentage stated they use appropriate touch. This supports Custer's desire to see the people of Oakwood get into people's lives and houses.

A quarter of the people were influenced toward conversion by a church serving them, so the importance of Oakwood serving in the community is evident. Two-thirds of survey respondents know someone who made a confession of faith due to Oakwood serving them in the community. Close to 80 percent chose to attend Oakwood in part because of how the church serves in the community. This affirms Tolly's approach that if a church "fulfills the second greatest commandment," conversions and church growth will follow. Church culture takes time to shift, and Tolly can be encouraged in what is taking place. At Oakwood, 78 percent of the people want to "fulfill the second greatest commandment" in their community and a high percentage serve. This movement is resulting in more conversions and church growth.

### *Case Seven: Ignite Church*

#### **Case Study Overview**

Steve Krier is lead pastor, John Rusten is executive pastor and Chase Selcer is discipleship pastor at Ignite Church in Moorhead, Minnesota. Krier asked if the researcher would interview his two key staff members for this project, so one more than the other churches in this study. Ignite is located in a suburban area of Moorhead, a city with a population of 40,000 people. Church attendance is 420, and it has grown over the last five years from 200. Concurrently, Ignite also planted two churches: one in Ukraine and one in North Dakota.

The amount of Ignite’s budget dedicated to community service is 2 percent. Local nonprofits they serve through presence and touch include the local pregnancy center, men’s homeless shelter, shelter for families, Toothbrush Ministries, United Way, Elementary School, Food Pantry, Organizations to New Americans and Refugees, and jail chaplaincy.

Ignite’s unique service project is Giveback Sunday, an event where they invite each person in the church to grab an envelope out of the offering plate that has ten dollars in it. They are then to couple their offering with it and go into the community to look for a way to bless someone. Ignite serves in the community four to five times a year and estimates that each attender serves in the community twelve hours per year for a church total of 5,040 hours.

### **Observations from Senior Pastor Interview**

*Church’s serving the community.* Pastor Steve Krier scored an eight out of ten for how important it is Ignite serves in the community. He stated, “It is my DNA. I am a cop’s kid and my Mom was a director of a group home.” Ignite serves as part of its Christian identity.

*Personal serving.* Krier serves in the community three to five hours each month at the area men’s homeless shelter. He also serves in the community through his life group from church. He does not require staff to serve in the community, but they do through their life groups, which they are required to attend.

*Church’s serving motive.* When asked, “Which of these two statements would represent your church: A. Our church serves in the community because it fulfills the second greatest commandment. B. Our church serves in the community because it brings

people to confession of faith and results in church growth,” Krier chose the first option. To Ignite, serving in the community is not so much an evangelistic thrust as it is an act of loving the people of the city. “When we love our neighbor as ourselves it does till the soil for people coming to Jesus,” stated Krier.

*Presence and touch on conversions.* Krier rated this a three out of ten. His reasoning was brief, stating, “We have had people come to faith due to our serving.”

*Presence and touch on church growth.* His ranking for this question was a five out of ten. Krier stated, “Relationships and community involvement have helped people stick at Ignite. The church desires to put discipleship into the hands of their believers and encourages them to go put their talents into action.”

*Conversion story due to Ignite’s serving.* Every year Ignite does a “Give Back” Sunday. They hand out \$5,000 in ten-dollar bills. They pass buckets around, and people take an envelope and bless someone. An ignite member approached Mr. D in the mall who needed help after he and his dog were evicted. The church member gave him the ten dollars, but also stepped in and got Mr. D a place to live and helped him get on his feet. Mr. D ended up giving his life to Jesus and joining a men’s life group.

### **Observations from Associate Pastor Interview.**

*Church serving the community.* Pastor John Rusten scored this item seven out of ten. He quoted from Jeremiah 29:7: “The church is called to be for the welfare of the city.” At Ignite, community impact is one of its five pillars and occurs in varying degrees in a variety of situations.

*Church’s serving motive.* When asked, “Which of these two statements would represent your church: A. Our church serves in the community because it fulfills the

second greatest commandment. B. Our church serves in the community because it brings people to confession of faith and results in church growth,” Rusten chose the first option. He said quickly, “This is our mentality.” Ignite wants people to know it cares, it notices them, and it desires community with them. Rusten said, “If option B happens, it happens. B is not our evangelistic approach. We don’t want to be disingenuous.”

*Presence and touch on conversions.* Rusten ranked this a three out of ten stating, “We intentionally seek out opportunities to get to know people, build up relationships with locals, but cannot really quantify it or qualify it.”

*Presence and touch on church growth.* Rusten gave this a seven out of ten. “We hear about people coming because they kept hearing about Ignite Church,” said Rusten. Ignite’s For Our City events get them into the community to meet practical needs such as park clean up, street clean up, and serving nonprofits such as The Perry Center Program, which helps young girls facing unplanned pregnancies.

*Conversion story due to Ignite serving.* Rusten did not have specific story.

### **Observations from Associate Pastor Interview**

*Church’s serving in community.* Pastor Chase Selcer rated this a seven out of ten. Chase stated, “This is the Great Commission.” Selcer’s desire is to equip the believers, and he spends a lot of his time with the sheep of the church. In this equipping, he is encouraging their life groups to serve. When asked, “Which of these two statements would represent your church: A. Our church serves in the community because it fulfills the second greatest commandment. B. Our church serves in the community because it brings people to confession of faith and results in church growth,” Selcer chose the second option. His reasoning was, “Ignite exists to advance the Kingdom.” At Ignite,

discipleship starts at every level and they desire to move people from one step to the next regardless if people are yet Christians.

*Presence and touch on conversions.* Selcer rated this a three out of ten. He stated, “I say a three simply because I can think of a small handful of people who did not know God but then came to faith because we were out serving in the community.

*Presence and touch on church growth.* Selcer ranked this a six. He cited a recent conversation: “I was visiting with an individual who is newer to Ignite. He is involved in our life groups. He stated he saw our people involved in the community through our Give Back Sunday, and he wanted to be a part of this and a church that would support this.”

*Conversion story due to Ignite serving.* Selcer shared this story. “During our fall kick-off, we take over the biggest park in Moorhead and throw a party. We have blow-ups, grilling, games, and music. Mr. E, who was un-churched, walked by, heard the music, and stopped for a moment. A couple from Ignite started talking with Mr. E and they ended up exchanging numbers. Mr. E and the couple built a relationship and Mr. E eventually came to Ignite, received Jesus, and chose baptism. Mr. E is an accountant and now runs our books. He eventually got married at Ignite and now co-leads our marriage ministry.”

### **Observations from Interviews Compared**

All three pastors — Krier, Rusten, and Selcer — ranked the church serving in the community as “important.” Krier stated, “Ignite serves as part of their identity as Christians.” Rusten added, “Community impact is one of our five pillars,” and Chase emphasized, “It is the Great Commission.” Krier serves in the community and staff serves through the church’s life groups. Ignites’ approach to serving is by “fulfilling the

greatest commandment.” Krier stated, “For us it is not so much an evangelistic thrust as to just loving the people of the city.” Rusten agreed, “If option ‘B’ happens it happens. ‘B’ is not our evangelistic approach.” As the discipleship pastor, Selcer sees it as an opportunity for conversion and church growth, taking people from one step to the next even if they are not Christians.

Whether or not Ignites’ serving impacted confessions of faith, the answer across pastors was a “somewhat.” Krier admitted they have had people come to faith due to this, and Selcer could think of a handful of people as well, but the overall challenge for Ignite is how to qualify or quantify it. Church growth as a result of serving the community received an above average score as “much.” People in the community have been hearing about Ignite due to their serving and seeing it first hand as Selcer stated: “I had a conversation with an individual who started attending Ignite because he saw our people out serving in the community.” Krier and Selcer had separate stories of people deciding to follow Jesus and joining the church. Although the focus for Ignite in serving is to “fulfill the second greatest commandment,” they are seeing from this conversions and church growth.

### **Observations from Congregant Survey**

Ignites’ total number of survey responses was 13. Like the previous church (Oakwood), Ignite chose to distribute the survey to a choice number of leaders as opposed to the church as a whole. Regardless of small sample size, the researcher chose to report the results.

From the surveys, 100 percent attended Ignite one to ten years. When asked, “How important is it to you that your church is involved in serving in the community?”



100 percent of responses stated “important” to “very important.” A full 100 percent stated they are involved in serving in the community through presence (4 to 6 ft.) among others. Per year, 38 percent of respondents serve one to three times, 23 percent serve four to six times, and 39 percent serve seven to ten times.

When asked, “Does your serving involve appropriate touch (e.g., hand shake, hand on shoulder, gentle hug)?” 84 percent said “yes.” When asked if their confession of faith in Jesus was influenced by a church serving them outside its walls 54 percent said “somewhat” to “very much.” In response to knowing someone from their church who confessed faith in Jesus because their church served them outside its walls, 53 percent said “yes.” When deciding to attend Ignite based on the church serving in the community 77 percent stated “somewhat” to “very much.” Out of the two statements that could represent Ignites’ motive for serving, “to fulfill the second greatest commandment” or “it brings people to confession of faith and results in church growth,” 77 percent chose the former.

A very high number of congregants at Ignite value the church serving in the community and affirm this by participating in their own service. A high number do so through appropriate touch. Just over half of these people were influenced to faith by being served by a church, and just over half personally know of someone at Ignite who was influenced in confession of faith through being served by the church. When choosing to attend Ignite, 77 percent chose to attend because it serves in the community through presence and touch.

## **Interview Observations and Survey Results Compared**

All three Ignite pastors — Krier, Rusten, and Selcer — see the church’s serving in the community as “important.” The majority of respondents to the church survey saw it as “very important.” The culture of serving in the community through presence is 100 percent, and 84 percent of Ignite engages in appropriate touch when serving. “We intentionally seek out opportunities to get to know people and build relationships with locals,” Rusten stated. Out of those surveyed, 54 percent stated a church serving them influenced their conversion. Ignites’ serving in the community has made a difference, as 53 percent of those surveyed said they knew someone at Ignite who confessed their faith in Jesus because the church served them. This percentage should encourage Selcer and Rusten in qualifying and quantifying how serving in the community has influenced conversions.

Concerning the motive for Ignite serving in the community, two out of the three pastors, Krier and Rusten, answered to “fulfill the second greatest commandment.” When asked, 77 percent of Ignite congregant respondents answered the same. This response affirms to Krier that his congregation is embracing his vision and culture for service. Of those surveyed, 77 percent chose to attend Ignite because of the church serving in the community.

The research conducted with Ignites’ pastors as well as congregants reveals the church values serving in the community. They serve through presence and touch. This service has revealed there are people at Ignite who have experienced conversion because they were served in the community by the church. There are also people at Ignite who have experienced conversion due to a previous church serving them in a previous

community. People also chose to attend Ignite because of its engagement in serving its community. This affirms that when Ignite moves to be physically present in its community and engage in appropriate touch, there is a corresponding increase in conversions and church growth.

## **Cross-Case Analysis**

### *Case Study Overview*

Of the seven churches that participated in this research project, four are rural and three are suburban/exurban. The city population represented in these communities ranged from 6,700 to 40,000 people. Of the seven churches, five saw numeric church growth over the last five years in their Sunday service, one through their Wednesday night children's program, and one through participating in two church plants. Church budgets designated toward serving in the community range from 2 to 28 percent. All seven churches had partnerships in their communities with nonprofits that they served. All the churches served in the community seven or more times per year.

### *Observations of Senior Pastors Compared*

Compiled interview responses from the seven senior pastors regarding the importance of their church serving in the community demonstrated that 100 percent saw this as "important" to "very important." When asked why, similar words and phrases used included "out in," "go," "outward," and "Jesus model." With reference to serving in the community, 85 percent of the senior pastors serve in some capacity on a monthly basis. Fulfilling the second greatest commandment was the statement that best represented 71 percent of the senior pastors in why their church served in the community. When it came to the question of their church serving in the community and its impact on conversions, 85 percent had a hard time qualifying the correlation between the two and

then quantifying results, stating, “not at all” to “somewhat.” Rating the impact on their church’s growth due to their church serving in the community, 71 percent stated “much.” A majority (71 percent) of senior pastors were able to relate stories of specific individuals who came to a confession of faith due to the church serving in the community.

#### *Observations of Associate Pastors Compared*

A review of compiled responses from associate pastors concerning the importance of their church serving in the community demonstrated that 100 percent rated this as “important” to “very important.” When asked why, similar words and phrases included “intentional,” “relationships,” “present,” “outward,” and “impact.” Fulfilling the second greatest commandment was the statement that best represented 75 percent of associate pastors’ view of why their church served in the community. When it came to the question of their church serving in the community and its impact on conversions, 62 percent stated it had “somewhat” of an impact, while 38 percent selected “much.” Measuring impact on church growth due to church community service, 87 percent stated “much.” Three quarters of associate pastors were able to relate stories of specific individuals who came to a confession of faith due to the church serving in the community.

#### *Observations of Senior and Associate Pastors Compared*

Comparing interview responses from senior and associate pastors concerning the importance of their church serving in the community, a full 100 percent stated it was “important” to “very important.” When asked why, a primary theme in language between both senior and associate pastors was “outward focus” with some referencing the Great Commission and commandment. When asked which statement best describes your church, fulfilling the second greatest commandment or because it encourages confessions of faith and church growth, 73 percent of pastors chose the former. When measuring the

impact of the church's serving in the community and number of conversions, there was a difference between the pastor groups, with 85 percent of senior pastors stating "not at all to somewhat," and 71 percent of associate pastors stating "much." Measuring the impact of the church's serving in the community on church growth, there was also a difference as 71 percent of senior pastors stated "not at all" to "much," and 87 percent of associate pastors stated "much." Out of all the pastors, 73 percent were able to relate stories of specific individuals who came to a confession of faith due to the church serving them in the community.

#### *Observations of Congregant Survey Compared*

From church survey responses, 93 percent stated it was "important" to "very important" their church served in the community. When asked if they were involved with church community service where they are in the presence (4 to 6 ft.) of others, 72 percent said yes. In asking how often they serve in the community a year, just under half of the people did so between four to ten times. When serving, 68 percent used appropriate touch. Concerning confession of faith in Jesus, 46 percent of respondents reported being influenced by a church serving them outside its walls in the community. A higher number, 55 percent of respondents, know of an individual in their church who confessed faith in Jesus because the church directly served them in the community through presence and touch. When deciding to attend their current church, 60 percent were influenced "somewhat" to "very much" by the church's involvement in serving in the community. When asked why their church serves in the community 83 percent chose "fulfilling the second greatest commandment" over seeking confessions of faith and church growth.

*Observations of Interviews and Surveys Compared*

In comparing both the pastor and congregation responses concerning the importance of their church serving in the community, 96 percent stated “important” to “very important.” With reference to serving in the community, 85 percent of the senior pastors serve in some capacity in specific ways. Their congregations follow suit with 72 percent stating they serve in the community in presence (4 to 6 ft.), and 68 percent using touch. Just under half of the 72 percent who serve do so four to ten times per year.

When asked which statement best describes their church, fulfilling the second greatest commandment or because it impacts confessions of faith and church growth, 73 percent of pastors and 83 percent of congregants chose the second greatest commandment. When measuring the impact of the church’s serving in the community to number of conversions, 85 percent of senior pastors answered “not at all” to “somewhat,” and 71 percent of associate pastors stated “much.” Responses from the church congregant survey trend closer to the associate pastors’ answers. Congregant responses indicated that 46 percent felt that a church serving them outside its walls in the community were influential on their own confessions of faith. A higher number, 55 percent of respondents, know of an individual in the church who confessed faith in Jesus because of the church directly serving them outside its walls in the community. Likewise, of all the pastors, 73 percent could relate a story of a specific individual coming to confession of faith due to the church serving them in the community.

In measuring the impact of the church’s serving in the community and church growth, there was a difference with 71 percent of senior pastors stating “not at all” to “much,” and 87 percent of associate pastors stating “much.” Of the survey respondents, 60 percent state they were influenced “somewhat” to “very much” to attend the church

because of its involvement in serving in the community. Out of those who have been attending the church in the last five years, 64 percent were influenced to do so because the church serves in the community.

### **Summary**

All seven churches included in this study rate the importance of serving their communities like Jesus — through presence and touch — as “important” to “very important.” They live this value: three quarters of attendees serve in their communities. These churches’ senior and associate pastors serve regularly in their communities. That the church served people in its community influenced almost half of respondents either towards conversion or to join the church. There is no evidence that the community service budget affected the amount of conversions and church growth. When it comes to church resources, the most significant resource is people who profess Jesus and, as a result, serve in their community through presence and touch. This study supports the researcher’s thesis that a church’s impact in serving the community through presence and touch is evident and a catalyst toward conversions and church growth.

## CHAPTER SIX: EVALUATION AND DISCUSSION

### **Seven Principles of Presence and Touch on Church Growth**

This project set out to discover if, when churches move to be physically present in their communities and engage in appropriate touch, there is a corresponding impact on conversions and church growth. In answering this central question, the researcher reviewed the practices of Jesus and the early church. The researcher also engaged with literature that focused generally on the impact of presence and touch in day-to-day life and specifically within the church. The researcher conducted interviews with seven different church's senior and associate pastors as well as surveyed church congregants. From examining these sources, the researcher identified the following seven principles on serving through presence and touch.

#### *The Principle of Serving*

Growing churches live out the value of serving in the community. God created the human model for serving through presence and touch by sending his son, Jesus Christ. Jesus went through towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness (Matt. 9:35). By demonstrating serving through presence and touch, Jesus placed high value on serving and expected His followers to do the same. Jesus gives this charge after washing His disciples feet, "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet" (John 13:14). When the early church launched, it was not



only a preaching church; it was a church of service, carrying on Jesus' model for serving as seen in their care for widows (Acts 6).

Today's church still embraces the value of serving through presence and touch. As the researcher stated previously, during the Albanian financial collapse in 1996, the church shut down the seminary and sent the students out to serve the poor. During the 1998 war, it sent students to refugee camps to serve. Churches are one of the largest feeders of volunteers serving in the community and meeting today's challenges. True Christ-followers do not shrink back from messy situations but serve in prisons, homeless shelters, sex-trafficking halfway houses and the like.

All senior and associate pastors surveyed (100 percent) rated the importance of their churches serving in the community as "important" to "very important." When asked why, their explanations commonly contained the words, "Jesus model" and "outward." From church congregant survey responses, 93 percent stated it was "important" to "very important" that their church served in the community. Of those surveyed, 46 percent were influenced toward conversion due to a church serving them. All the churches researched had nonprofit partners they served during the year. Both the associate pastors and congregations embraced their senior pastors' vision for serving in the community with presence and touch through their own acts of service.

Serving through presence and touch outside church walls is not only essential for the church to reflect Jesus, but also is something the non-believing community expects. Serving is an important component to the Gospel. Jesus stated, "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). Churches need to live the cliché "walk the talk." As the researcher has been

among the public in his county, he has heard the positive comments from nonbelievers on churches serving in the community along with negative comments on churches who lack engagement in the community. Serving in the community is a vital value and an integral part of growing churches.

*The Principle of Motive When Serving*

Simply loving one's neighbor influences church growth. When asked which of all the commandments is the greatest, Jesus responded, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Mark 12:30-21). Throughout the Gospels, Jesus served regardless of people's response. Jesus didn't tell his followers to love your neighbors as yourself "because," or "if." They were to love as Jesus loves. When the ten lepers come to Jesus for healing, he heals them and sends them along. Jesus did not retract the healing of nine out of the ten lepers, even though only one came back to give Him thanks (Luke 17). Jesus recognized the lepers' lack of gratitude but did not retract their healing.

Church members who volunteer outside church walls often recruit and engage church friends to join them in service. The motive for this invitation is rarely to influence people into a relationship with Jesus, but more often just to serve as Jesus served. Pastor Ben McEachern's comment represents other pastors' views from the interviews, "We do it because we follow Jesus. We are not sales people. We are not going to do this because we want something out of them."

In stating why their church serves in the community, 73 percent of pastors and 83 percent of congregants chose the reason of "fulfilling the second greatest commandment" over "moving those they served to confession of faith and church growth." Pastors and

the people of their congregation serve because Jesus modeled it and commands them to, regardless of the serving outcomes. Despite this separate motive, serving through presence and touch often does encourage conversions and church growth.

*The Principle of Presence When Serving*

Growing churches employ presence when they serve their communities. When referencing “presence” in serving, it means being physically within four to six feet of those who you are serving. A church doing highway cleanup is serving in the community, but they are not doing it through presence. While they are present in the community, they are not in physical proximity of people. This type of service affects the participant, the environment, and the general public who enjoy clean green spaces. Additionally, it glorifies God. The researcher does not designate this service as negative, but he distinguishes between serving and serving through presence when in the community.

That God took human form in Jesus tells people something about His affirmation of physicality in relationships. Throughout Jesus’ ministry, He is present among people. The researcher identified thirteen stories within the Gospels that reveal Jesus’ bold use of presence within the community. He spent much of His time among people and did not discriminate because of health, wealth, position, age, sex, or education. As He charged them to, the early church carried on this expression of presence after receiving power by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8).

People write and talk about the need for connectedness through presence; it greatly affects one’s demeanor. The intention to connect people through presence is central to the design of people’s homes, businesses, churches, recreation centers, and walkways. Research in this study revealed being out in public among people, even without any verbal interaction or physical touch, makes a difference in people’s

wellbeing. Today, the church's community presence through serving is meaningful and impactful. Churches mentioned in this research project, such as Grace Church in Southwest Florida or Old Bergen Church in New Jersey, have experienced church growth through presence in their community.

The intentionality of presence is a key aspect of growing churches. Pastors and those who attend their churches mindfully serve in presence with the community. Among church leadership, 85 percent of senior pastors serve in the community (among people) in some capacity on a monthly basis. Senior pastors did not require staff to serve in the community, but majority of staff do. Two senior pastors referenced the idea that because "they live this way, their staff live this way." The researcher believes the senior pastor is a microcosm of the macro, the church. How they live, the staff will live, whether in marriage, parenting, generosity, or in serving through presence. As the staff follows, the church then follows in kind. This is evident in 77 percent of church survey respondents who state they serve and are in the presence (4 to 6 ft.) of others when serving in the community.

Jesus was intentional about serving, and he communicated the importance of this to His followers. That society values presence is evident in its buildings, roads, and walkways, which center around human interaction by design. The church recognizes this as well, not only in its physical building design but also in its social design of strategically serving in the community through presence.

#### *The Principle of Touch When Serving*

Appropriate touch when serving in the community inspires church growth. Jesus lived with clear intent among the people and gave a clear definition of Immanuel which means "God with us" (Matt. 1:23). This phrase embodies His life of presence and use of

touch. The Gospels show Jesus repeatedly engaging in intimate interactions with everyday people through healing. One of Jesus' boldest interactions through touch is with those in the community who had leprosy (Matt. 8:3). This attention to touch was carried on by His disciples in the ministry of the early church as Peter called the lame beggar to "walk," helping him up by grasping his hand (Acts 3:7).

Touch, more often than not, intensifies the effect of being present with people. The research revealed that appropriate touch provides us with an oft-overlooked tool of communication that at times may be more powerful than language.

That touch is impactful and is evident among growing churches. Out of the 77 percent of people surveyed within the seven churches who reported serving in the community, 68 percent stated they use touch at one point or another while serving. Six out of seven senior pastors are involved in serving their community and at times use touch. Pastor Rick Stapleton in his interview said this about serving in the community: "We are more intentional and utilize presence and appropriate touch which builds relational credibility."

Jesus modeled touch and its impact. His disciples and early church Christians included touch as part of their ministry. In most cases, daily touch adds to positive interactions with others. Today's growing churches use touch in serving their communities.

### *The Principle of Serving Often*

Serving others on a regular basis through presence and touch impacts church growth. Early in Jesus' ministry, He was available to the public often, serving them through presence and touch. His serving was not like an eight to five workday. After teaching in the synagogue earlier in the day and healing Peter's mother-in-law, Jesus is

out after sunset healing many from the town (Mark 1:32). Due to the crowds and lack of time even to eat, Jesus calls the disciples away to a quiet place. The crowds follow Him and He has compassion on them. Instead of eating with His disciples, He teaches the crowd and goes a step further feeding them (Mark 6:30-37). This was common for Jesus, as throughout the Gospels He serves in the community. In the early church, the disciples restructured their ministry to ensure they could continue to care for the widows, which influenced church growth. This growth came from the widows and their communities seeing how the church cared for them and attracting them to the early believers.

This study revealed that the more a person experiences service through physical presence and touch, the greater the impact on their life. The frequency with which a person or group serves individuals or organizations increases the impact they have on those they are serving. Pastor Jeff Garland from Cornerstone Church gave a glimpse of this when discussing how his church is known for serving often in its community: “Stephanie from the sheriff’s office called Cornerstone because they needed a place for training. She stated, ‘We know Cornerstone is so involved and open to community things ... a church that is willing to help.’”

From pastor interviews, the researcher noted that six out of the seven senior pastors engaged in serving their community on average nine to ten hours per month. Each of these pastors could name specific organizations they serve on a regular basis, from police chaplaincy to coaching, homeless shelters to serving on a board. Out of the 77 percent of congregant survey respondents who stated they serve in the community, 46 percent do so between four to ten times per year and 31 percent at least one to three times per year. That 77 percent serve in the community, along with how often they serve, is

significant when the national average for volunteerism in 2018 was 30 percent.<sup>117</sup> As Pastor Ned Eerdmans stated, “It is part of our DNA. How I live, they live (referring to his congregation).”

Jesus served daily, oftentimes throughout the day. He didn’t punch a time clock; it was who He was. The early church followed this model, and it engendered growth of the church. Today, Christ-followers serve individually at random moments as well as through planned church programs, and they do it frequently. This lifestyle of serving often in their community generates church growth.

*The Principle of Presence and Touch on Conversions*

In chapter two, the researcher described how Jesus’ use of presence and touch converted people. His research further supported this biblical material, revealing a connection between presence and touch and conversions. This is affirmed with the woman at the well (John 4) and later within the early church as the Apostle Peter interacts with a Cornelius a Gentile (Acts 10).

Within the related literature, there is evidence of the correlation between presence and touch and church growth, but not a specific connection to conversions. The researcher did not find a study that specifically connected serving in the community to conversions, although the researcher’s survey did so.

When asked, 46 percent of survey respondents stated a church serving them outside its walls in the community influenced their confession of faith in Jesus. A higher number, 55 percent of respondents, know of an individual in their church who confessed

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<sup>117</sup> Samantha Jo Warfield, “Volunteering in U.S. Hits Record High; Worth \$167 Billion,” *Corporation for National and Community Service*, November 13, 2018, <https://www.nationalservice.gov/newsroom/press-release/2018/volunteering-us-hits-record-high-worth-167-billion>

faith in Jesus because of the church directly serving them in the community through presence and touch. In the research interview, seven of the ten stories of congregant conversions that the pastors shared demonstrated that the church influenced that conversion through its physical presence in the community.

Jesus serving in the community through presence and touch influenced conversions. Churches who serve in the community through presence and touch see results in conversions. Thus, the use of presence and touch in serving in the community inspires conversions and church growth.

#### *The Principle of Presence and Touch on Church Growth*

Jesus receives much acclaim during the time He spends preaching and teaching in Galilee. Great crowds from the Decapolis and beyond the Jordan follow the Christ, along with many citizens from Jerusalem and Judea (Matt. 4:24-25). The amazement that crowds held for Jesus' authority in every situation increased His influence and followership. The moment Jesus went public with His ministry through presence and touch, His influence and followership grew, so much so that in certain ministry contexts the crowd pressed into Jesus so completely that he had to separate himself to be able to minister to the people. In the Gospels, there are sixteen healings and ten teaching moments that result in more people following Jesus. The apostles continued this in the early church as they performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people and the Lord added to their number (Acts 5:12-14).

Churches today are strategically using community service that includes presence and touch as an opportunity to draw people into the church. They are not just talking about doing good works in their community and beyond; they have specific and intentional ongoing projects and partnerships. By being outwardly oriented and visible in



the community, they are attracting people. This is evident in churches that are drawing in Millennials through serving and missional practices in the community.

Based on the profiles of the seven churches in this project and interviews with their pastors, the churches served in the community twelve times per year on average. They perform this service within nonprofit partnerships or at random opportunities that come organically through an individual or church small group ministry. From survey responses, 93 percent of church congregants stated it was “important” to “very important” that their church served in the community. This reflects a high value on the church being in the community, with 77 percent living out their stated value by engaging in serving in the community through presence. When deciding to attend their current church, 60 percent of survey respondents were influenced “somewhat” to “very much” by the church’s involvement in the community. These significant numbers reflect the impact of presence and touch on church growth.

Jesus serving in the community influenced the people who followed Him. Churches today strategically implement serving in the community through presence and touch to draw people into the church. People chose a particular church more often than not based on whether that church served its community through presence and touch. Employing presence and touch when serving in the community results in church growth.

### **Conclusion**

The concept of presence and touch in community is established and modeled in the Trinity. Jesus’ ministry in the Gospels demonstrates the impact of presence and touch on conversions and church growth. Examining the early church in the Book of Acts shows that the Apostles and first followers lived the mission of touch and presence amidst their community, and daily God added more believers to their numbers.

The influence of presence and touch is evident in the review of related literature. The strategic design of buildings to encourage presence and touch in business, education, and health care reveal its importance and impact in society. The basic human need for presence and touch causes enough desperation in some people who will intentionally go to prison simply to fulfill these needs. Presence and touch is a communication tool that adds to words and often speaks beyond words. Presence and touch used while serving motivates change in people's lives.

The seven churches rated the importance of serving their communities as Jesus served His community through presence and touch as "important" to "very important." They live this value: three quarters of attendees serve in their community. The church-serving people in the community influenced almost half of respondents either towards conversion or to join the church. A church's allocated budget for community service did not play a factor in motivating people to serve, nor did it have any bearing on the people served. There is no evidence that the budget affected the amount of conversions and church growth. When it comes to church resources, the most significant resource is people who profess Jesus and as a result serve someone in their community through presence and touch. Based on the findings, this study supports the researcher's thesis that a church's impact in serving the community through presence and touch is evident and a catalyst toward conversions and church growth.

### **Further Observations**

The churches studied had on average five nonprofit partnerships they served in the community. Just over half the churches encourage community service to take place through their small group ministry. From the seven churches researched, there were fifteen interviews with senior and associate pastors. Ten of these pastors shared stories of

people coming to faith in Jesus because the church served them in the community. Of these ten stories, seven of the conversions were due to an individual from the church recognizing a need and meeting it as opposed to an organized community project. Church service budgets did not play a role in church growth, with the budget designated to serving in the community ranging from two percent to 28 percent.

Two of the seven churches studied did not grow numerically on Sundays over the last five years, but one saw growth in a Wednesday night children's ministry and the other by planting churches. These two churches had the lowest combined percentage (by ten percent or more) of people influenced toward conversion by a church serving them or of people who know someone in their church who came to confession of faith due to the church serving them. These churches also had the lowest percentage of people who decided to attend the church because the church serves in the community. In all the churches, the culture of actively serving in the community through presence and touch established by the senior pastor was evident in their associates and congregation.

The researcher asked the senior and associate pastor if they saw a correlation between serving in the community and its impact on church growth. Responses varied from "not at all" to "much." In the congregation survey, the researcher was able to identify church growth due to people choosing the church based on its service in the community.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of the Thesis**

#### *Strengths*

The researcher did not start with his pre-selection of churches but asked input from district leaders for a list of churches that have seen growth over the last five years. Out of a list of fourteen churches, the researcher contacted twelve church leaders whom

he had met at district events. This “purposive sample or choice” was due to what the researcher was exploring. The researcher knew those he approached would be typical examples of what he wanted to examine, they would be aware of the research problem, and they would be generally knowledgeable on the topic.<sup>118</sup> Nine churches started in the project; seven churches completed the required activities.

From the seven churches, the researcher conducted fifteen interviews with seven senior pastors and eight associate pastors. The researcher asked interviewees ranking questions, but also followed with open-ended questions that provided additional insight into the numerical data. By combining quantitative and qualitative data in this manner, the researcher employed a mixed-method design.<sup>119</sup> Through this approach, the researcher gleaned key words and themes.

Congregants responding to the survey numbered 358. Respondents’ tenure in the church ranged from one year to sixteen plus. The first question, “What church are you from?” allowed the researcher to gather information for each surveyed church and compare that information with the church’s senior and associate pastor interviews. The researcher shared insights drawn from the surveys, interviews, and comparisons with each individual church.

The research also identified vision saturation, i.e., did the associate pastor and congregation answer questions similar to the senior pastor? Did their reported behavior match that of the senior pastor? By asking the senior and associate pastors the same questions, the researcher was able to ascertain if the associate was adopting the vision of

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<sup>118</sup> Myers, *Research in Ministry*, 55.

<sup>119</sup> Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. 190.

the senior pastor. In similar questions within the survey to the congregation, the researcher could also determine if the church was embracing the vision, not only in words but also in deeds.

Another strength was the specific determination to connect a church's serving in the community through presence and touch with conversions. In this effort, the researcher found no specific data indicating churches that serve in the community experienced results in conversions. The researcher intentionally asked the senior and associate pastors for personal stories of people from their congregation who experienced conversion due to the church serving them in the community. The researcher also asked this in two separate ways to congregants identifying a connection between a person served by a church and their conversion decision.

This study presents a further strength by identifying a correlation between a church serving through presence and touch in its community and church growth. Churches who desire to draw more attendees can do so through a more robust community presence. The researcher provided numerous examples from the seven churches studied that other churches can employ as ideas for engaging their communities.

A final strength is the uniqueness of the research, coupling the impact of serving with presence (4 to 6 ft.) among people with the use of appropriate touch. This serving is not performed hands off or at a distance (e.g., dropping food at a food shelf), but instead involves directly engaging with people, being among them, and using appropriate touch. With all the emphasis on technology and its impact on socialization, being close in proximity to people and the use of appropriate touch adds a dynamic element to serving in the community. In the researcher's experience, extensive research that examines how a

church's presence in the community influences conversions and church growth is not available.

### *Weaknesses*

In gathering a sample group of churches, the researcher desired to research nine churches, three rural, three suburban and three urban. The researcher also wished to research churches across his Minnesota and Iowa district. The researcher optimistically expected more positive responses than what he received, and he ended up with a mix of rural and suburban churches among the seven researched.

A second weakness was sample size of the church survey. Gay, Mills and Airasian suggested ideal sample size is 20 percent of the number under 5,000 and or 400 for numbers over 5,000.<sup>120</sup> The total number of congregants in the seven churches totaled 4,500. The researcher planned to survey nine churches with a response rate of 50 surveys per church for a total sample size of 450. With only seven churches, the sample size ended up being 358 (the researcher discarded six incomplete surveys). The researcher did not meet the recommended sample size and its impact on the research findings is unknown. Along with this, sample size may play a role in the accuracy of suggested themes when looking at each individual church's results. Two churches selected a specific group of church leaders to take the survey instead of sending it out to the church as a whole. This thwarted the opportunity for a greater sample size for overall research and for those churches individually.

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<sup>120</sup> L. R. Gay, G. E. Mills, and, P. Airasian, *Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Application*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Pearson Education), 133.

Within the seven church sample size, two churches had a second satellite campus. Could this difference have affected pastor interviews and congregant survey responses? Since the other five churches did not have a similar situation, how much did this affect overall research? Is it critical to have exactly parallel samples?

The researcher identified an additional weakness specific to interview and survey questions. Questions six and seven in the pastors' interviews (Appendices C and D) were difficult for them to quantify. Asking pastors how their congregation's presence and touch in the community influenced conversions and church growth caused confusion, as pastors often did not know how to quantify their responses. In the congregant surveys, questions four and six (Appendix E) couched community service in a context with which most respondents were unfamiliar. Most people do not consider how being present and using appropriate touch impact their service, and these questions may have been confusing or uncomfortable. When asked in which statement best describes their church, ("fulfilling the second greatest commandment" or "because it impacts confessions of faith and church growth"), 73 percent of pastors and 83 percent of congregants chose the first choice. Due to the phenomenon of familiarity, the researcher wondered if presenting these choices in opposite order would have prompted different responses to this question.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: REFLECTIONS

### **Personal Growth**

Behind every educational degree lies a myriad of motives. It is no different for this researcher. When people would discover the researcher was pursuing a Doctor of Ministry degree, most did not understand and they would always ask, “Why?” This question challenged the researcher to reflect and crystalize an understanding of his motive for the degree. The researcher’s desire for a Doctor of Ministry degree comes from four motives, two negative and two positive.

When it comes to motives, there always seems to be a dark side to some extent. This is true with the researcher and the Doctor of Ministry degree. The researcher has identified two negative motivators. The first negative motivator was growing up with Bell’s palsy, a paralysis of one side of the face. It was challenging. It defined the researcher to those who saw him before they even spoke to him. The researcher recalls a story that occurred shortly after earning his Master of Divinity degree. Settling into his first ministry assignment in Cambridge, Minnesota, the researcher was in the checkout line to rent a movie. The cashier looked at the researcher and before even speaking to him, she inquired if he could write his name to sign for the movie.

In life, people will unfortunately speak negative words to you. Depending on who those people are, the words stick. Back in high school, the researcher was sitting at a friend’s kitchen table with his peers. The friend’s mother (who was a doctor) asked what the researcher’s career aspirations were and he responded, “To be a teacher and coach.”



Right in front of his peers she responded, “You will never be successful because people will not stand to look at your face.” The researcher felt with certainty that since she was a doctor, she must be correct. The researcher recognizes that this moment still holds a level of power in his life and serves a negative motivator. He has to check this feeling continually when deciding to pursue any big endeavor including this ministry degree: Does the researcher desire to be successful in his pursuits to glorify God or to disprove a careless and hurtful statement from 40 years ago?

The second negative motivator has to do specifically with ministry success. During the researcher’s first semester at seminary, he received back a paper with the statement written on the bottom from the professor, “Your writing skills are so poor you will never make it in ministry.” Again, the researcher assumes that since this was a professor, he must know the truth. The statement took root in the researcher’s mind and served as a motivator to graduating from seminary. It has also chased him ever since. In ministry and seeking the Doctor of Ministry degree, this motive needed to be checked. While pursuing the degree, the researcher did not need to prove that he can write and can be successful. Neither ministry degrees nor ministry success define the researcher; only what is said of him by God matters: “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well” (Ps. 139:13-14).

The primary positive motivator for pursuing the degree was for the researcher to commit to continual learning. Every year, the researcher sets goals in many areas of his life, including professional learning. The researcher recognized that pursuing a degree of this caliber would challenge him to read material he wouldn’t know of or choose on his

own. It would challenge him to seek new tools for research and writing. He would be compelled to look at the church world and the physical world in new ways. He also would interact with students from different denominations, theological perspectives, geographic locations, cultures, and personalities. As a student, he would have to submit to a different authority structure, take direction, and be humbled. It's easy to become insular in the rural society where the researcher lives and ministers. In his younger seminary years, after years of ministering to wealthy suburbanites, the researcher decided to minister in the heart of the inner city. He needed a change and a catalyst for new growth. He believed that a different world would shape the researcher in new ways, better ways. The people and experiences of the inner city church, in partnership with the Holy Spirit, did just that. It is the same motive for this degree — making a change to spur growth.

The second positive motive for pursuing the degree was the desire to equip the researcher for whatever comes after pastoral ministry. The researcher recognizes that the baton will someday pass to the next generation, and he has a succession plan in place. The researcher still wanted to offer value in God's kingdom, doing God's work — whatever that may look like. The Doctor of Ministry degree provides skills, knowledge, and character growth that will be of value as God leads him to his future. Even if his future assignment is just loving and mentoring his kids and future grandkids, this degree will serve him well.

The Doctor of Ministry goal has been hovering in the researcher's mind for the last 18 years. While he initially targeted age 45 for starting this degree, the researcher is now age 58. The time was never right to start the degree until Bethel Seminary offered

the Doctor of Ministry degree with an emphasis on missional effectiveness. This emphasis attracted the researcher enough so that, regardless of timing, he found the motivation to take a leap of faith and apply.

Unfortunately, the time and attention needed for the degree didn't mesh with what else was occurring in the researcher's personal life. From most students' perspectives, it probably never does. Over the course of study, the researcher developed and led three capital campaigns and is in the midst of a fourth as this project concludes. The researcher led a church plant and its move into its first building in 2015. A year later, the researcher invited a denominational church on the verge of closing to merge with his church. A remodeling project ensued and the church reopened Christmas Eve of 2016 as a second campus. In the fall of 2019, a third campus opened, and the church is in the beginning planning stages of a new building slated for 2021 for the second campus. Add in a variety of difficult family situations from deaths to defining moments in the researcher's adopted daughter's life, and there were ample opportunities and excuses to bail from the program. By nature, the researcher has experienced plenty of moments of procrastination, lack of discipline, and questioning his ability. Like all other students, there were five big things and a thousand little things on any given day that would call the researcher away from his pursuit. Regardless, the researcher had much at stake and persevered.

In order to afford schooling for the Doctor of Ministry Degree, the researcher raised money. To cover tuition and travel, the researcher invited multiple couples to invest equally in his education. By investing, they would be equipping and developing the researcher to better lead the church and out in the county as well as for whatever other purposes God has in His plan. The researcher made the first investment and others

followed after he made a promise: If he did not complete the degree, all money invested would be paid back. Even greater than this commitment, however, was the motivation to complete that which he started. The researcher has run marathons, so he understands physical and psychological vicissitudes of a long, hard journey. In all honesty, the reality of guilt and shame also played a role in motivation for completion. Those difficult twins of emotion are nearly always willing to present themselves in every endeavor.

What the researcher enjoyed most about the Doctor of Ministry experience was interacting with his cohort and professors. Humans need relationships, and the researcher enjoyed the presence and touch of those with whom he journeyed toward this degree. These people helped educate, shape, and encourage the researcher not only through the degree, but also through life events. Ministers often isolate themselves and forget they are not alone. There are many others in our shoes experiencing similar life events. Other people bring clarity that God is alive and well and at work around the world in His redemptive plan.

The second most enjoyable part of pursuing this degree was the sheer variety of classes, reading material, and assigned research projects. His studies showed the researcher a world apart from his current experiences. With every class, there was learning that carried over into the researcher's ministry, community involvement, and personal life. The researcher designed many of his course projects for use in his current ministry. He found this motivating and satisfying. The majority of his learning did not end up on a shelf; instead, he integrated it into real life.

Lastly, the researcher enjoyed the spiritual, mental, and physical challenge of the degree. Early on, Dr. Irving clarified that the work of the Doctor of Ministry degree was

to glorify God, not a solely academic exercise. At times, the researcher drifted from this pursuit and work became primarily academic or hampered with a just-get-it-done attitude. During difficult times, Dr. Irving's directive served as an anchor and corrected the drift. The mental fight of completing a doctoral program coupled with daily life is intense. In marathon running, certain mile markers call for a different psychological toughness. The doctoral degree did as well! The researcher encountered intimidating material, scholarly professors, and plain fear at times and had to work through each challenge. In any educational pursuit, there are long hours, sedentary days, disrupted and poor eating habits, sleep hours sacrificed, and family moments missed. The researcher experienced all of these difficulties. Nevertheless, the spiritual, mental, and physical challenges are part of the educational process of the doctoral degree, and successfully working through them will benefit the researcher in years to come.

While pursuing this degree, the researcher had to weigh his motives, walk through his ministry, and navigate his personal life while performing at a level required by Bethel Seminary. The ability to do this came through the power of Jesus, as the researcher often referenced his life verse tattooed on his wrist, "I can do all this through him who gives me strength (Phil. 4:13). With any academic degree, students learn so much more than they realized, and lessons will reveal themselves in years to come. The researcher looks forward to residual insights from this experience.

### **Topics for Further Study**

#### *Declining Churches*

Today many churches are experiencing decline. Is there validity in performing the same interviews and survey with seven churches that have experienced decline over the last five years? It may confirm results of two churches studied in this project. Two of the

seven churches studied did not grow numerically on Sundays. These two churches had the lowest combined percentage (by ten percent or more) of the number of people influenced toward conversion by a church serving them or of knowing someone in their church who came to confession of faith due to the church serving them. These churches also had the lowest percentage of people who decided to attend the church because the church serves in the community. Comparing answers between churches that experienced growth and those that did not could reveal greater understanding of the impact of presence and touch on conversions and church growth.

#### *Live Stream and Community*

More churches, regardless of size, are moving toward live stream as a means for engaging the outside world with the message of Jesus Christ. As this occurs, does the importance of serving the community through presence and touch become more powerful as people hunger for the interaction with others? If church attendance continues to decline to one or two times a month, will there ever be a revival based not on the need for repentance but instead on relationships in the physical community of the church? In separating ourselves from the physical church through live stream, is it really the church as Jesus intended?

#### *The Theology of Serving*

Describing why their church serves in the community, 73 percent of pastors and 83 percent of congregants believe they are fulfilling the second greatest commandment rather than pursuing confessions of faith and church growth. This is interesting since a good percentage of respondents in part came to conversion due to a church serving them, or they know of someone in their present church who experienced a conversion due to the church serving them in the community. With this, the researcher would assume more

people would have answered the reason their church serves is due to confessions of faith and church growth. There is further opportunity — both theologically and in research — to identify Jesus' desire for us to serve. Is the intention for serving others in the community purely Jesus' glory, simply to serve those in need, for the growth of the individual who serves, or to influence those who are served toward conversion and church involvement?

#### *Greater Church Sampling*

All churches in this research study ended up being in Minnesota. Due to this, it is uncertain if the research information would be applicable to urban churches or churches beyond Minnesota. A greater numeric sampling of churches, along with denominations and locations, would strengthen the validity of this study.

APPENDIX A PARTICIPATING CHURCHES IN THESIS PROJECT



**Cornerstone Church**

205 County Road 34  
 Litchfield, MN 55355  
*Lead Teaching Pastor Paul Jorgensen*  
*Care and Spanish Ministries Pastor Jeff Garland*

**CrossPoint Church**

1215 Roberts Road SW  
 Hutchinson, MN 55350  
*Senior Pastor Rick Stapleton*  
*Groups and Outreach Pastor Matt Troyer*

**Ignite Church**

925 39<sup>th</sup> Avenue S  
 Moorhead, MN 56560  
*Lead Pastor Steve Krier*  
*Executive Pastor John Rusten*  
*Discipleship Pastor Chase Selcer*

**The Journey North**

6785 Woida Road, N  
 Baxter, MN 56401  
*Lead Pastor Mark Bjorlo*  
*Campus Pastor Lynfield Hines*

**Northridge Fellowship**

12522 Main Street  
 Rogers, MN 55374  
*Lead Pastor Ben McEachern*  
*Missions Pastor Dan Monson*

**Crossroads Church**

629 E Channing Avenue  
 Fergus Falls, MN 56537  
*Senior Pastor Ned Eerdmans*  
*Director of Spiritual Growth - Adults Joey Kalan*

**Oakwood Community Church**

8805 Klein Drive  
 Waconia, MN 55387  
*Lead Pastor Jon Tolly*  
*Associate Pastor Andi Custer*

APPENDIX B: GENERAL CHURCH PROFILE

1. Name and City of Church?
2. Setting: Urban, Rural, Suburban/Exurban?
3. City Population?
4. Size of congregation?
5. Numeric growth over last 5 years. (Include attendance, church plant, multisite or building expansions).
6. Rough percentage of budget specifically designated to outreach in the community?
7. Partnerships with local nonprofits that your congregation serves through presence and touch? If so, just list (e.g., food shelf, pregnancy center)?
8. Does your church do any unique service projects during the year out in the local community? If so, please list and give a sentence description.
9. On average, how many times a year does your church serve in the community?
10. Estimate how many service hours a year congregants serve out in the community.

APPENDIX C: SENIOR PASTOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how important is it to you that your church is involved in serving in the community?

1 -----3-----7----- 10  
 Not important                  Somewhat important                  Important                  Very important

1a. Why?

2. How many hours a month are you involved in the community serving?
3. What specific organizations in the community do you as the senior pastor serve in?
4. Do you require your staff to serve in the community on a regular basis? If so, how often?
5. Which of these two statements would represent your church:

- A. Our church serves in the community because it fulfills the second greatest commandment.
- B. Our church serves in the community because it brings people to confession of faith and results in church growth.

5a. Why?

6. On a scale of 1 to 10 how influential has your congregation's serving through presence (4 to 6 ft.) and appropriate touch (e.g., hand shake, hand on shoulder, gentle hug) in the community impact confessions of faith?

1 -----3-----7----- 10  
 Not at all                  Somewhat                  Much                  Very much

6a. Why?

7. On a scale of 1 to 10 how influential is your congregation's serving the community through presence and touch impact your church's growth?

1 -----3-----7----- 10  
 Not at all                  Somewhat                  Much                  Very much

7a. Why?

8. Can you tell me a brief story of a person coming to confession of faith due to your church's serving in the community? (Please provide a first name)

APPENDIX D: ASSOCIATE PASTOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How long have you served in your position at your church?
2. On a scale of 1 to 10 how important is it to you that your church is involved in serving in the community?

1 -----3-----7----- 10  
 Not important                  Somewhat important                  Important                  Very important

2a. Why?

3. Which of these two statements would represent your church:

- A. Our church serves in the community because it fulfills the second greatest commandment.
- B. Our church serves in the community because it brings people to confession of faith and results in church growth.

3a. Why?

4. On a scale of 1 to 10 how influential has your congregation's serving through presence (4 to 6 ft.) and appropriate touch (e.g., hand shake, hand on shoulder, gentle hug) in the community impact confessions of faith?

1 -----3-----7----- 10  
 Not at all                  Somewhat                  Much                  Very much

4a. Why this answer?

5. On a scale of 1 to 10 how influential is your congregation's serving the community through presence and touch impact your church's growth?

1 -----3-----7----- 10  
 Not at all                  Somewhat                  Much                  Very much

5a. Why?

6. Can you tell me a specific story of a person coming to confession of faith due to your church's serving in the community? (Please provide a first name)



APPENDIX E: CHURCH SURVEY

My name is Bill Berg. I am the Senior Pastor at New Hope Community Church in Cambridge, MN. I am doing research for my Doctor of Ministry degree. Your participation provides valuable information for your church and the greater church in general. The focus of my project is on, “The impact of presence and appropriate touch on church growth.” This project is seeking to identify if, when churches move to be physically present in their communities and engage in appropriate touch (i.e. through service projects), there is a corresponding growth in that church and in confessions of faith. Presence here is defined as within 4 to 6 feet from others and appropriate touch for example could be a handshake, hand on shoulder, or gentle hug.

Part of my project includes primary research. I have chosen to conduct this research in the form of a survey, which is provided for you here. This survey is directed toward people who have made a confession of faith in Jesus. The survey is anonymous and takes three minutes or less to complete. Please know that by taking and submitting the survey you give consent to the use of your answers in my project. Thank you for taking time to help me learn and develop my project.

1. Please list the name of your church.
2. How long have you been attending your present church?
  - 1 to 5 years
  - 6 to 10 years
  - 11 to 15 years
  - 16+ years
3. How important is it to you that your church is involved in serving in the community?
  - Not important

- Somewhat important
  - Important
  - Very important
4. Are you involved with your church in serving in the community where you are in the presence (4 to 6 ft.) of others you are serving?
- Yes
  - No
5. If you answered, “yes” to the previous question how often do you serve in the community a year?
- N/A
  - 1 to 3 times
  - 4 to 6 times
  - 7 to 10 times
6. Are you involved with your church in serving in the community where you at times use appropriate touch (e.g., hand shake, hand on shoulder, gentle hug)?
- Yes
  - No
7. Was your confession of faith in Jesus influenced by a church directly serving you outside its walls in the community through presence and touch?
- None whatsoever
  - Somewhat
  - Very much
8. Do you know of an individual in your church that confessed their faith in Jesus as a result of your church directly serving them outside its walls in the community through presence and touch?
- Yes
  - No
9. To what degree was your decision to attend the church you are at due to the church’s involvement in serving in the community through presence and touch among people?
- None whatsoever
  - Somewhat
  - Very much
10. Which of these two statements would represent your church:

- A Our church serves in the community because it fulfills the second greatest commandment
- B Our church serves in the community because it brings people to confession of faith and results in church growth

APPENDIX F: SURVEY EMAIL OR TEXT COMMUNICATION

Email/Text Subject Line Options:

- Give us your 2 cents!
- We Need Your Input!
- Your church, your input!
- “Church Name” 3 minute survey!

Email/Text Content:

Dear “Enter Church Name” Attender,

Would you please take three minutes to do this survey below? It pertains to our church impact in serving in the community. Your input will provide “Church Name” valuable information on how we are doing with our mission along with the greater church in general. Thank you for your input and time!

Survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ZT2R8SJ>

APPENDIX G: CHURCH SURVEY RESULTS

<b>Church</b>	<b>Importance</b>	<b>Presence</b>	<b>Touch</b>	<b>Influenced</b>	<b>Know</b>	<b>Attend</b>	<b>Growth</b>
CrossPoint	100%	82%	78%	60%	53%	60%	290-400
Cornerstone	92%	69%	68%	48%	58%	60%	700-1300
Journey North	95%	75%	66%	51%	60%	60%	700-1100
Crossroads	84%	64%	54%	17%	32%	42%	200 same
Northridge	97%	81%	68%	32%	39%	55%	700 same
Oakwood	100%	100%	89%	22%	67%	78%	175-400
Ignite	100%	100%	84%	54%	53%	77%	200-420

Importance = How important is it your church serves in the community?

Presence = Are you serving with four to six feet of others in the community?

Touch = Do you use appropriate touch when serving in the community?

Influenced = Was your conversion influenced by a church serving you in the community?

Know = Do you know someone at church who had a conversion from being served?

Attend = Did you decide to attend this church due to its serving in the community?



APPENDIX H: CONFIDENTIALITY DISCLAIMER

All church names and pastoral staff in the research case studies were used by permission. Names used in conversion stories were changed due to confidentiality.

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