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BETHEL UNIVERSITY
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FROM APATHY TO MISSION: A CRITICAL TRANSITION FOR PASTORS AND
LEADERS OF FAITHFUL, YET CHANGING CONGREGATIONS

A THESIS PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY DEGREE
IN CONGREGATION AND FAMILY CARE

BY
DALE RICHARD STILES
SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA

MAY 2017

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make any sense. What on earth is God up to? The explanation is that God is building quite a different house from the one you thought of. You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage: but God is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself.

– George MacDonald paraphrased by C. S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*

This project has been developing over the past 14 years. After my first seven years of ordained ministry I had observed spiritual apathy and the need for more effective discipleship practices within the church. I enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry program at Bethel Seminary in 2002 in order to gain more understanding of what I had observed. I took a leave of absence after beginning a new call in a new church in 2003. After a ten year hiatus from my studies and serving this entire time at the same church, I re-enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry program. I am thankful for those ten years and how they shaped my ministry, learning, and understanding of discipleship. I have since begun another call and it too has molded my learning and understanding.

Three ministry site experiences have largely affected and determined the purpose of and reason for this research. I am thankful for the communities of faith at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Circle Pines, Minnesota; Fish Lake Lutheran Church in Stark, Minnesota; and Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Stillwater, Minnesota. The people of these congregations have made me into the minister I am today with their patience, encouragement, grace, and forgiveness.

The Bethel Seminary faculty and Doctor of Ministry staff have been supportive from the beginning. I thank Dr. Justin Irving and Ceallaigh Anderson Smart who helped me navigate through the Doctor of Ministry program process.

I thank the instructors who taught me and helped form my understanding and the premise of my research throughout the program. These mentors include Drs. Dan Rotach, Justin Irving, Sam Rima, Katie Friesen Smith, John Sanders, Jim Smith, Chris Gehrz, Steven Sandage, Carla Dahl, Thomas Correll, and the late and beloved Dr. G. W. Carlson. I value their wisdom and friendship throughout this spiritual journey of continued lifelong learning.

I thank my distinguished Thesis Advisor, the Rev. Dr. Drew Christian for his valued input, gentle encouragement, and enthusiastic response to reading my submitted drafts during the final stretch of my project. He kept me grounded and focused.

I thank those who worked their editorial magic on my work. My friends Sherri Larson, Kristi MacMillian, and Brenda Schwarz were always only an email or office door away to assist and advise me. They are deep wells of editorial knowledge and insight.

Lastly, I would especially like to thank my children – Caleb, Annica, and Tobie – and my wife, Carrie Jo. I dedicate this work to them. This writing project truly became a family experience, and I am so grateful for their support, patience, encouragement, and humor which kept me both humble and focused. This project has been a blessing for our family throughout a year of significant uncertainty as our “cottage” has literally and figuratively been rebuilt into a beautiful “palace” that we trust God Himself abides in.

Soli Deo Gloria!

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the researcher's 20 years of ordained ministry in the Lutheran Church he has continually been interested in the critical role effective biblical discipleship practices have on the 21st century church as well as the Church of the future. It is also of interest to many clergy and leaders of communities of faith, and with good reason. Many feel the discouragement when observing high levels of apathy within their churches and among the people they are called to serve. It is evident in many communities of faith and among individual believers that there is a problematic lack of passion, urgency, and interest in faithfully carrying out one's call to discipleship.

Our ways of reaching out to, honoring or following God have changed dramatically in recent years while God's way of reaching us remains the same. There are many reasons that contribute to this. These reasons include expectations, biblical literacy, evangelism, stewardship and worship – all concepts that are critical to fulfilling our call to be disciples but that are not very well, if at all, understood by disciples of the modern-day.

In many respects congregations seem to have lost sight of the biblical call to discipleship over the years, of which, the call is clear throughout Scripture. There is a sense of urgency and immediacy to respond that is not communicated or embraced in all communities of faith. This is unfortunate as the church has life-giving and life-

sustaining news to share with the world beginning with the local communities they serve.

This research project addresses and evaluates what many elected church leaders and professional clergy find themselves pondering about their communities all too often: “They just don’t get it.”

For this project five individual congregations and their pastors were studied and assessed as models that have bridged the gap from apathy to mission and from casual observer to faithful disciple. Data was gathered through general observation, open-ended questionnaires, face-to-face interviews, and surveys. Through grounded theory and a phenomenological approach to research, core concepts that can aide communities of faith in bridging the gap from apathy to mission were identified.

This project has potential to positively change the direction of congregations and of the leadership model of those who guide them. It will benefit clergy and communities of faith across denominational lines and will draw believers back to the foundation of discipleship – the Lord’s Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20).

CHAPTER ONE: FROM APATHY TO MISSION – A CRITICAL TRANSITION

The Problem and Its Context

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in this project is how apathy negatively affects the evangelistic efforts of the Church and overall individual and corporate fulfillment of its Lord's Great Commission. In response to this problem the researcher took five main steps. First, the researcher explored examples of apathy found among the original disciples and others throughout the Scriptures. Second, the researcher reviewed relevant literature addressing apathetic attitudes within the lives of individual Christians and congregations, as well as theoretical and practical approaches to teaching, modeling and encouraging discipleship. Third, the researcher developed interview and survey questions to be administered to selected pastors and communities of faith who have experienced the transition from low energy, low satisfaction and overall apathy among members to becoming a vibrant, mission-driven community of faith. Fourth, the researcher interviewed the selected pastors in person as a way of determining necessary decisions to make the transition from apathy to mission in the congregational context. Fifth, the researcher assessed gathered data while looking for themes in order to provide resources useful for clergy and congregational leaders to increase individual and congregational biblical discipleship practices.

The research was qualitative in nature, relying heavily on case studies and grounded theory research. The primary tools used were observational field notes, individual face-to-face interviews, printed surveys and a Church Assessment Tool (CAT) called Vital Signs, created and distributed by Holy Cow! Consulting in Columbus, Ohio. This tool had previously been administered by individual church pastors and leaders within the selected congregations.

The five steps of this research addressed and assessed the proposed problem of apathy in the Church. The first step included an in-depth review of relevant biblical and theological literature to thoughtfully define the concept of apathy as it relates to biblical discipleship practices. The second step included an in-depth review of relevant literature related to the problem to determine (a) complexities and seriousness of spiritual apathy within congregations and its effects on individual and overall biblical discipleship; (b) historical existence of spiritual apathy within the Church; and (c) potential effects healthy individual and congregational engagement has on reducing spiritual apathy within the Church. The third step involved developing interview and survey questions to be administered to active lead pastors of five selected congregations within the Saint Paul and Minneapolis Area Synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). The selected pastors are perceived, among colleagues in ministry from both synods, to have effectively guided their congregations through the spiritual transition from apathy to mission. The researcher also obtained, from the selected pastors, electronic copies of these congregations' final Vital Signs CAT report. The fourth step called for face-to-face meetings with the selected pastors. At these meetings, the researcher (a) conducted individual interviews

with the pastor; (b) conducted group interviews with elected leaders involved with the administering and analyzing of the Vital Signs CAT; (c) had the pastors each sign a participant consent form (Appendix G); and (d) observed the ministry context and interactions of staff, key leaders and members of the church. The fifth step involved collecting, organizing, analyzing and synthesizing all the discoveries and data gathered in order to make suggestions that might improve the process of biblical discipleship training within small to mid-sized congregations. The researcher compiled all results of the research and organized it, using a coding system consistent with the data.

Delimitations of the Problem

The research included congregations within the Twin City Metropolitan Synods (Saint Paul Area and Minneapolis Area) of the ELCA ranging in membership from 150-9000. These congregations are known to have experienced the transition from apathy to effective mission.

The biblical research was limited to pertinent passages that emphasized the importance of the call to faithful discipleship. Although such an emphasis is prevalent throughout the entirety of Scripture, the majority of the biblical research came primarily from the gospels and Paul's letters. Further research was limited to historical and modern-day discipleship practices and concerns.

Assumptions

The first assumption is that a significant number of congregations within the ELCA experience a lack of interest, enthusiasm, and concern for mission as they display apathetic attitudes towards one another (parishioners), elected leaders (Board

of Elders, Council, Vestry), called pastors, and employed programmatic and support staff. The second assumption is that employed church support and programmatic staff and pastors are becoming increasingly frustrated. Due to apathetic attitudes many are in need of helpful, supportive, and practical resources to decrease levels of apathy as they pertain to worship, evangelism, and overall biblical discipleship. The third assumption is that addressing the problem of apathy within our congregations and acknowledging its harmful presence will result in a positive change in individuals and congregations. This satisfaction would lead to more effective evangelism. The fourth and final assumption is that the Bible is the inspired and written Word of God that instructs and guides believers in what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Data and Methodology

Primary data collected included on-site personal interviews with pastors, programmatic staff members, and elected leaders; personal observations recorded in field notes; and the responses from the Vital Signs CAT administered to the selected congregations. Secondary data collected included biblical and theological literature addressing apathy in the Church and discipleship; secular literature addressing apathy in the Church and discipleship; and relevant church publications from on-site visits evidencing a healthy and vital understanding of evangelistic mission based on biblical discipleship practices.

Subproblems

The first subproblem is to study and compare examples of apathy found among the original disciples and others throughout the New Testament. Data includes insights, observations and conclusions from the Scriptures relating to apathy and

biblical discipleship practices. Acceptable data also includes acknowledged biblical scholars and the researcher's own insights gleaned through exegesis of Scripture. Data is found in the Scriptures, selected commentaries, theological works, journals, articles, and on the Internet.

The second subproblem is to develop a questionnaire used to collect information needed to determine levels of apathy, energy, satisfaction, and vitality within individual Christians and congregations. Data and criteria for the development of such a questionnaire includes insights, observations, and conclusions from popular press books, journals, articles, the Internet, and related literature. Data is drawn from authors, pastors, and scholars who are considered experts in the area of, or related to, the proposed problem.

The third subproblem is to review relevant literature and research addressing apathetic attitudes within the lives of individual Christians and congregations, as well as theoretical and practical approaches to teaching, modeling, and encouraging faithful, biblical discipleship practices.

The fourth subproblem is to assess discipleship growth models and practices within the selected ELCA congregations that have experienced low energy, low satisfaction, and overall apathy among members and who now are experiencing high energy, high satisfaction, and overall engagement among their members. The researcher's own questionnaire, combined with the Vital Signs CAT which had previously been administered in the selected congregations, serves as an effective means of measurement and analysis. This assessment requires use of data gathered according to methods outlined in subproblems one through three. Data gathered

includes (a) multiple representative small to mid-sized congregations that have completed the Vital Signs CAT; and (b) insights from those churches helpful to understanding the process involved in leading a congregation through the transition from apathy to mission. This data is secured by contacting pastors within the researcher's personal network and the networks of local Twin City Synods of the ELCA in order to select the representative congregations for the study. In those selected congregations, additional data is secured by observation, telephone or face-to-face interviews, and the reading of documents pertaining to the particular Vital Signs CAT being studied. The data is used to increase the researcher's knowledge of spiritual apathy within the Church and the negative effect it has on overall individual and congregational biblical discipleship practices and healthy engagement within those particular congregational contexts. The observations are applied to and determined to be supportive of the research problem in light of other data collected. Integration of all the data collected allows the researcher to discover common themes, problems, and challenges small to mid-size congregations face in creating communities of healthy engagement and faithful biblical discipleship practices.

The fifth subproblem is to analyze and assess the collected data in order to determine any future research and action needed to extend this area of study. The data needed consists of information and other data gathered according to methods outlined in subproblems one through four. The data may be used to inform clergy, congregational leadership, and individual Christians of common trends, insights, and possible solutions regarding healthy congregational engagement and biblical

discipleship practices in the midst of apathetic attitudes and behaviors within the Church.

The sixth subproblem is to summarize the practices and principles gathered from the research and how they might lead to the future development of a practical guide for increasing more healthy individual and congregational biblical discipleship. Such a resource would be one that clergy, congregational leaders, entire congregations, and the Church universal could benefit from. The data needed consists of information and data gathered according to methods outlined in subproblems one through five. It is intended to inform clergy, congregational leadership, and individual Christians of common trends, insights, and possible solutions regarding more healthy congregational engagement and biblical discipleship practices in response to apathetic attitudes and behaviors within the Church.

Setting of the Project

The foundational contexts for this project consists primarily of three distinct ministry settings in which the researcher has served as pastor throughout the past twenty years. These settings include: Our Savior's Lutheran Church of Circle Pines, Minnesota, a program-sized congregation of 2,300 members, where the researcher served as an associate pastor for nearly seven years (1996 – 2003); Fish Lake Lutheran Church of Stark, Minnesota, a small, rural, pastoral-sized congregation of 500 members, where the researcher served as a solo pastor for eleven years (2003 – 2014); and Our Savior's Lutheran Church of Stillwater, Minnesota, a program-sized congregation of 650 members, where the researcher has served for two years since December 1, 2014.

Each of these ministry settings provides a different on-site context for exploring and understanding apathy in the church as it relates to biblical discipleship practices and faithful living. Research for this project was dependent upon insight gained from each of these settings, as well as the selected congregations whose pastors, leaders, and other staff members were observed and interviewed as part of the methodology and data collection portion of this project.

The Importance of the Project

The Importance of the Project to the Researcher

The problem of apathy in the Church has intrigued and frustrated church leaders for generations as they have often found themselves asking, “Why don’t they get it?” This continuing and discouraging level of apathy in congregations consistently appears to lessen overall morale and levels of passionate, committed, and heartfelt biblical discipleship practices. This reality can leave clergy and congregational leaders discouraged as they conclude “this is just the way it is” among those whom God has called and entrusted his Church with.

This researcher believes there is evidence of less passion, urgency, or interest regarding faithful fulfillment of discipleship among individual believers and entire communities of faith. The role of the church in the lives of its members has changed. Contemporary secular opportunities seem to take priority over congregational involvement. According to this research and for the purposes of this research project, this shift is viewed as apathy toward a commitment to biblical discipleship. This researcher believes that there are various reasons for this rearrangement and apparent apathy toward congregational engagement. These include low expectations, low

biblical literacy, and poor understandings of evangelism, stewardship and worship – all concepts critical to fulfilling one’s call to and understanding of biblical discipleship. Scripture also reveals that these concepts were not entirely understood or embraced by even the original disciples, making this concern part of the fabric of the Christian faith and life. However, Scripture clearly defines discipleship and its purpose. At times the disciples understood the critical sense of urgency and immediacy of the call to make more disciples as they invited others to “come and see.” These instances are glimpses of effective, passionate evangelism still evident within a portion of the present-day Church. These instances, then and now, are areas this researcher explores further in this project, in order to better understand how and why biblical discipleship is happening effectively in some places and not others.

For this researcher, understanding the possible reasons that contribute to the proposed problem and determining effective solutions to the proposed problem was the goal of this project and was viewed as critical in order to further advance Christ’s Church on Earth.

This researcher believes the need for such understanding is as urgent as when Jesus originally called for it. Jesus’ urgent and immediate calls – “Come and see”; “Pick up your cross”; and “Follow me” – are commands that seem to be falling upon deaf ears. For this researcher this is disconcerting because there is life-giving and life-sustaining news to be obtained and experienced by all of God’s children. By not responding obediently to Jesus’ commands and invitations, believers are not fully benefiting from this good news and the abundant life it proclaims, presents, and promises.

It is clear to this researcher that to counter such apathy and indifference congregational members need passionate, authentic, heartfelt, and sincere teaching and preaching as a reminder of the scriptural call to discipleship. This researcher believes that congregational members need to be reminded of the reality of biblical discipleship and the seriousness of the call as well as the joy that comes from the fulfillment of the call. It is a goal of this researcher to look for effective, supportive and practical ways that encourage church members to move from a spirit of apathy to a spirit of mission with purpose. Through a spirit of doxological research, this researcher has committed to learning and teaching about the negative effects of apathy on evangelistic behavior and biblical discipleship practices. The problem of apathy in the Church is great and needs to be addressed, confronted, and communicated in a way that will inspire, motivate, and encourage people in their faith. To do otherwise, the Church will not fully answer its biblical call and commission to make disciples of all nations.

The Importance of the Project to the Immediate Ministry Context

This researcher believes that in order for congregational members to be open to the way Scripture promises God will be present and active in their lives, it is important that clergy and other church leaders communicate clearly. Church members must be assured of the relevance of the church and of God's work in their lives and in the world. Individual believers need practical and applicable ways to practice evangelism, stewardship, worship, Bible study, and outreach. Both leaders and parishioners need to be reminded of what faithful biblical discipleship has to do with their daily lives, why it is important, and how it is connected to their baptism.

This project helps to inform and equip this researcher in his current and future ministry setting. It is the prayer of this researcher that, as a result of this research project, ways have been discovered to inspire, encourage, motivate, and challenge the people of not only his current ministry setting at Our Savior's Lutheran Church but also among all congregations and communities of faith. This would inspire all to live lives consistent with the scriptural call to discipleship.

The Importance of the Project to the Church at Large

For congregations and their members to become actively engaged as biblical disciples, it is critical that the overall problem of apathy in the Church at large be addressed and not just within local contexts. If it is not considered how to counter it believers will not be as effective at living the call to faith as Scripture instructs. It is evident that to continue to allow the status quo in congregations we only contribute to the already disengaging and discouraging trend in membership decline in the Church at large.

This researcher employed specific and pointed questions to concerns, namely: believers are looking for engagement. Is the Church engaging them? People want to make a difference. Are congregations providing opportunities for them to do so? Church-goers are open to being held accountable for something they believe in. Are clergy and congregational staff and leadership holding them accountable and inquiring of their spiritual growth? These are some of the difficult questions clergy, congregational staff and leadership need to be asking in order to address this problem. This project asks such questions while providing the insight, resources and understanding for clergy and congregational staff and leadership as they seek ways to

move their people from apathy to mission by way of healthy evangelism and effective biblical discipleship practices.

Summary

This researcher believes that the biblical calls to discipleship (“Come and see”; “Pick up your cross”; and “Follow me”) are not received as calls to action for overall individual believers. The understanding could be had that one’s nets (things important to people and that have come to be relied on) are similar to the priorities in their lives that distract or remove the focus from Christ and the Church of which we are called to rejoice in and proclaim. These nets, whatever they might be, are often inconsistent with what Christ offers and continue to be far too important to us. Similarly, the invitation to “come and see” may not be extended enough anymore through evangelistic efforts, which likely results in a smaller harvest. This project is based in Scripture and supported with other respected research and literature that addresses ways to help the Church and its disciples identify those nets, release them, and reclaim the energy, enthusiasm, and purpose to which Jesus and the Holy Spirit originally called us. With renewed energy, enthusiasm, and purpose, the invitation to “come and see” will guide effective transition from apathy to mission by way of healthy evangelism and effective biblical discipleship practices.

CHAPTER TWO: A BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF MISSION-DRIVEN DISCIPLESHIP

Key Foundational Texts

Jesus not only commanded us to make disciples in His Great Commission (Matt. 28:19), He modeled how to do so. Paul consistently emphasizes what it means to live a life worthy of the gospel, presenting Jesus, other churches, and himself as models of discipleship. Scripture provides numerous accounts of Jesus calling, teaching, equipping and sending disciples. These disciples are then called to replicate Jesus' words and actions in their own lives. Paul proclaims in his first letter to the Corinthian church, "Imitate me, just as I imitate Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). Paul does not command direct imitation of Christ, but, instead, asks for an act of imitation that mirrors his own conformity to Christ.

This research refers to specific scriptural examples as opportunities for understanding the research problem defined. As a biblical foundation for this project, the researcher begins with John's gospel. The Gospel of John encourages and challenges, helping the reader connect daily life and living with faith in a way that results in effective and faithful biblical discipleship.

The bidding "Come and see" is central to this researcher's choice of John as a key text, as it is recorded in two instances. First, it records two invitations for the reader to "come and see" who Jesus is and for what purpose He was sent (John 1:29-

51). First, John the Baptist, being a man with a clear mission from God to prepare the way for the Messiah, when asked where he was staying, replied, “Come and see” (John 1:39).¹ In response to this invitation, Andrew, one of the men who had been following John, shared the invitation with his brother, Simon. D.A. Carson, in his commentary on John’s gospel notes the significance of this invitation:

The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother and announce, *We have found the Messiah*. He thus became the first in a long line of successors who have discovered that the most common and effective Christian testimony is the private witness of friend to friend, brother to brother.²

Both came to see and experience Jesus for themselves. Carson explains how Jesus’ invitation to these disciples constituted the beginning of their intimate relationship with Him.³ A second instance of this specific invitation happens the next day as Jesus meets Philip in Galilee and extends an invitation to follow. Philip decides to follow Jesus and immediately begins proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah – the One prophesied in the Scriptures as the Savior of God’s people. When asked by Nathanael if anything good can come from a small, insignificant town like Nazareth, Philip again, replies, “Come and see” (John 1:46). It is in response to this invitation that Nathanael encounters Jesus and becomes transformed in faith and life, acknowledging that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, stating, “You are the King of Israel” (John 1:49).

Though these examples share the specific words, “Come and see,” these are not the only words given in Scripture as God’s invitation to participate. There are no

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations are from *The New Revised Standard Version Bible*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1990).

² D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Apollos, 1991), 155.

³ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 155.

specific words one must say or no amount of steps one must follow in order to be a faithful disciple of Jesus. Rather, disciples of Jesus are clearly those who simply respond to His call. However the Scriptures note the invitation to discipleship, the foundation shown in Scripture is that Christ is intentional and persistent in his work to gather disciples, teach them, and equip them. This was the plan Jesus was sent to initiate. As disciples began responding to His call to follow, the invitation for others to follow continued to be extended, ultimately resulting in the Pentecostal experience that is known as the birth of the Church.

The invitation to “Come and see” is a practical and powerful model of evangelism that leads to faithful biblical discipleship. Using the biblical accounts as guides for what to expect when answering that call, one can interpret the fulfillment of that call leading to belief in Jesus and a desire to serve Him. Not unlike the early disciples, believers continue to hear in the gospel of John a call to align their lives with Jesus. John's text provides a model in which Christ employs compassion toward the disciples and their role in the Kingdom.

Faithful biblical disciples intentionally seek out other people in order to tell them about Jesus. For example, because Philip was not apathetic, Nathanael was able to walk with Jesus before His death and resurrection. He served faithfully in the early church and, according to church tradition, was eventually martyred for his lifestyle of discipleship and faith in Christ. It was about providing opportunities for others to encounter Jesus, which then leads to ongoing spiritual transformation, understanding, and comprehension.

Throughout this project, John's gospel proved to be an effective starting place when seeking to understand and to address apathy and the lack of passion and urgency that continues to exist among modern-day disciples and whole communities of faith. From this foundational place in Scripture, it is clear that the first step in discipleship is to encounter Jesus in a deep and meaningful way. John's gospel emphasizes that discipleship begins with specific interaction with a disciple-seeking Christ. Disciples do not inherit a relationship with Jesus. Church members do not become disciples by attending worship, doing good things, or avoiding bad things. Disciples are made through experiencing Jesus in a way that leaves them transformed.

One does not have to look very long to find other relevant and transformational accounts in Scripture that address apathy and mission in the Church and how it impacts faithful biblical discipleship practices – then, and now. Six helpful examples of this will be explored further in this chapter: Jesus' inaugural address (Luke 4:14-21); Jesus' original call to discipleship (Mark 1 and Matt. 4); the cost of discipleship (Luke 10:1-20; 14:25-33); Jesus' Great Commission (Matt. 28:16-20); Jesus' parable of the sower and the seed (Matt. 13); and the gathering of the harvest (Matt. 9).

Individually, these passages offer specific and varying models and instruction for discipleship; together, they provide a solid and useful understanding of biblical and mission-driven discipleship practices. They also promote individual and overall congregational engagement that leads to a healthy understanding of one's mission. A closer look at each of them provides the reason for, the urgency of, and the need for faithful and committed biblical discipleship practices in everyday living.

Jesus' Inaugural Address

The first words of Jesus' recorded in Luke's Gospel have been referred to as Jesus' "inaugural address" (Luke 4:14-21). These words of Jesus lay the groundwork for his mission. Robert Stein in his commentary on the Luke's gospel describes these first words of Jesus according to Luke as, "Quite important, for it is programmatic, and in it Luke provided his readers with Jesus' own description of his mission and ministry."⁴ These words are descriptive of God's kingdom on earth, proclaiming good news, promise, and the presence of God among God's people. They are bold mission statements; individuals and entire communities of faith are called to follow and obey these words. When these words were first spoken in the synagogue at Capernaum, Jesus publicly stood and announced to the religious leaders of the day, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19).

These first words of Jesus' in Luke's account are filled with purpose and challenge. It is important to consider why such an address needed to be given. The reason helps us understand the mission Jesus was called to accomplish. With these words Jesus was laying the foundation of his purpose and mission. As these words revealed who Jesus was as the Messiah and the mission He was called to, they also prepared any who would choose to follow Him and take up the commission that would be given later. Stein describes how Jesus is not just, "The herald but also the bringer of salvation and that He serves in this context as a model for Spirit-filled teachers and

⁴ Robert H. Stein, *Luke* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 1993), 154.

healers in Acts.”⁵ Individual believers and entire communities of faith are challenged to consider how these first words of Jesus call, invite and challenge them to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captive, to give sight to the blind and to set the oppressed free in the communities in which they live and serve. Such a mission has great potential to shape the ministry of individual believers and congregations as a whole.

The Call

Before any had a chance to choose to follow Jesus, He did the choosing. Jesus put his words into action immediately and began to go into the towns, villages and communities where he knew the poor, the hungry, the imprisoned, and the sick were living. As Jesus entered into these places, He came upon people who He needed in order to accomplish His mission. Matthew’s account of Jesus’ original calling of the disciples (Matt. 4) is key to understanding the importance of spiritual engagement and commitment regarding discipleship. Jesus gets at the heart of the matter quickly when he commands Simon, Andrew, James, and John, “Follow me” (Matt. 4:19). “Immediately” they left their nets and their boats and their father to follow Jesus. There was, seemingly, no apathy in that initial response. There was action and a presumed purpose and trust. Their initial response to immediately and literally “follow” Jesus was soon revealed as meaning also to learn from, study, obey and imitate. This becomes the model for discipleship. The disciples learned that Jesus’ invitation to follow included an invitation to learn from Him, to study His words and actions, to obey all that He commands, and then to imitate Him. This is what the

⁵ Robert H. Stein, *Luke* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 1993), 156.

original disciples were called to when invited to follow Jesus. Scripture tells specifically of twelve disciples, but it seems likely that many others were drawn to Jesus from his ministry to many crowds and locales. If the journey of the disciples is any indication, many around Jesus would soon have realized the simplicity of the call also had depth and complexity, obligation and responsibility. R.T. France in his commentary on Matthew's gospel explains how Jesus is no longer acting alone.

It is significant that his first recorded action is to gather a group of followers who will commit themselves to a total change of lifestyle which involves them in joining Jesus as his essential support group for the whole period of his public ministry. From this point on we shall not read stories about Jesus alone, but stories about Jesus and his disciples. Wherever he goes, they will go; their presence with Jesus, even if not explicitly mentioned, is assumed. While the Twelve will not be formally listed until 10:1-4, the stories from here on will assume a wider group of disciples than just these first four. They will be the primary audience for his teaching (5:1-2) and witnesses of his works of power, but they are also called to be his active helpers in the task of "fishing for people."⁶

No doubt, many disciples walked away when they discovered that Jesus' way was too hard, too demanding, or that the rewards were too few, however we know that these Twelve remained and pressed on in their learning, seeking to imitate Jesus' caring for the humble and the powerless and the poor. Even those twelve never fully understood or were able to comprehend the complexity of their calling. Fortunately, it did not matter to the success of the Church. They did learn that to be a disciple of Jesus one must examine the life of Jesus and be willing to pursue His path, no matter what the cost might be. The "follow me" discipleship model is deceptive in some sense and, as such, might contribute to apathy if perceived as too difficult.

⁶ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 145.

The Cost, The Reward

The German Protestant theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “Discipleship is not an offer that man makes to Christ” but rather “when Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”⁷ Bonhoeffer understood the cost of discipleship – the cost Jesus indicated there would be. As clear as Jesus seemed to be regarding expectations of discipleship, adhering to them is difficult. It was critical then, as it is now, to understand and embrace the importance and complexities of discipleship. Jesus was clear (Matt. 10 and Luke 10) as He commissioned and sent His disciples out to do what He explained in His inaugural address (Luke 4). Jesus identified the danger and the difficulty they will encounter, saying, “See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves.” He also added, “Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles” (Matt. 10:16-17).

Similarly, Mark’s gospel account extends a call to make necessary and important decisions of obedience. Jesus’ words to both the crowd and his disciples – though difficult – are clear: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it” (Mark 8:34-35). Thus, it appears clear in Scripture that there is a cost to faithful discipleship. Despite the cost, we are called to “go” and make known the gospel of Christ. Clergy and religious leaders need to reassure disciples of how faithful biblical discipleship is rewarded. To counter any apathy that may set in, Jesus continued with these reassuring words:

⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *The Cost of Discipleship*. (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 76.

When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I tell you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. (Matt. 10:19-23)

Jesus reassured the disciples that they will be provided with needed strength and insight; at the same time, Jesus minces no words as to the “cost” of discipleship – discord, conflict, persecution, even death. The Matthew text is difficult – a frightening call many may not find appealing. However, these same disciples found joy and accomplishment in their efforts to live out Christ's command to follow and even “returned with joy,” saying, “Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us” (Luke 10:17). This experience taught the disciples in a practical way that the Lord rewards faithful discipleship. They experienced the promised provisions of God as they responded faithfully to their call to follow. The church can turn to these scriptural references to promote this type of faithful discipleship. Discipleship leads to joy as a reward, and then prepares, equips and excites them for further discipleship and evangelism opportunities. Without these rewarding opportunities, apathy can easily overcome a disciple’s desire to serve. When one experiences the reward of discipleship as greater than the cost of discipleship, the individual believer and the Church as a whole benefits.

The Commission

Those early disciples experienced a wide array of emotions during the final weeks of His public ministry. His death, resurrection and ascension stirred feelings of

despair, joy, confusion and fear within the disciples. The now sobering reality for the disciples was that they were to carry out Jesus' mission in their world without the physical presence and leadership of Jesus. He, however, did not leave them ill-equipped. His inaugural address laid the foundation for what they now knew they were called to continue. Before Jesus' ascension, He gathered his remaining disciples to remind them of this call and to deliver his final instructions regarding their mission. This mission, in Jesus' final words in Matthew's gospel, is referred to as the Great Commission:

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matt. 28:16-20)

This Great Commission has not changed since it was initially given. It continues to present modern-day believers with what they are called to be – disciples of Christ.

France explains how the culmination of Jesus' mission and ministry is communicated and fulfilled in the Great Commission:

The proclamation of good news extends far wider now: it is no longer a mission simply to the "lost sheep of Israel" but to all the nations, as Jesus had already predicted. The almost imperceptible mustard seed is now about to grow into a mighty tree; the kingdom of heaven is to be established over all the earth. The baptism which John had originally instituted as a symbol of a new beginning for repentant Israel is now to be extended to people from all nations. And at the heart of this new community of faith is the risen Jesus himself, as he had said he would be: they are to be his disciples, obeying his commandments, and sustained by his unending presence among them.⁸

⁸ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 1108.

It is easy to offer hesitation, excuse, and compromise when confronted with Jesus' call to discipleship, but in the end, believers are left with the charge and the challenge to accept and fulfill it. Until they do, and until they address the problem of spiritual apathy, the Church of Christ will not be complete or function at its highest potential. Pastors and religious leaders must continually lift up and hold before church members this still foundationally relevant commission to go out into the world and make a difference in Christ's name. In the changing climate of the Church of the 21st century, acknowledging the importance of faithful biblical discipleship is critical. Stephen Lim, Dean and Professor of Leadership and Ministry at Assemblies of God Theological Seminary in Springfield, Missouri, explains:

In our culture fulfilling the twin goals of the Great Commission — evangelism and disciple making — to any significant degree requires strenuous spiritual and practical effort. Clear, lasting results require time. We are tempted to substitute more easily and quickly achievable human goals that offer visible impressions of success to validate our ministries. Because these goals have deeply rooted themselves in church culture, we need courage, wisdom, and perseverance to replace them with biblical paradigms that reflect Jesus' calling.⁹

Communities of faith are served well when they intentionally address necessary cultural changes in order to transition from apathy to mission using biblical discipleship practices.

Regarding the Great Commission, theologian Bill Hull says, "Jesus issued the Great Commission to give His followers both a reason (to save the world) and a plan

⁹ Stephen Lim. "Why Churches Don't Disciple and How Yours Can." *Enrichment Journal* (Winter 2008), accessed March 20, 2015.

(to find and make more disciples).”¹⁰ Hull asserts how the Great Commission is central to faithful biblical discipleship:

We like to tell people, the church is for discipleship, and discipleship is for the world. That means the church works to develop mature and healthy disciples who then reach others in daily life. Christlike people are the point, the primary strategy for reaching others and fulfilling the Great Commission. The Great Commission is the natural extension of why Jesus came. He came because the world needed saving, and that divine purpose as the focus puts all its supporting activity in perspective.¹¹

With this perspective in proper balance, there is an increased likelihood that communities of faith will be more effective at fulfilling the Great Commission. Expectations must be clear to individual Christians and entire communities of faith regarding discipleship and one’s important role in it. Without clearly communicated expectations, the risk of becoming apathetic becomes higher. The writer of Hebrews said,

For God is not unjust; he will not overlook your work and the love that you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do. And we want each one of you to show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope to the very end, so that you may not become sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. (Heb. 6:10-12)

This challenge and promise of assurance is for all God’s people, yet many are not aware of it. This Scripture text and others serve as assurance of God’s promises and provisions. It is important that the Great Commission is taken seriously and with a sense of full understanding and urgency. Jesus’ command in the Commission is active rather than passive. Jesus did not command His disciples to merely consider or think about the community and the world they were a part of; He commanded them to

¹⁰ Bill Hull and Bobby Harrington. “Evangelism or Discipleship: Can They Effectively Work Together?” *Exponential Resources*, (2014): 26.

¹¹ Hull and Harrington, “Evangelism or Discipleship,” 27.

change it. Jesus did not simply ask His disciples to say nice things about or to be considerate of different people or groups; He commanded His disciples to go and make a difference among those different people and groups. This doesn't mean abandoning everything for the sake of the call. Jesus is challenging His disciples, and all modern-day believers, to take an active role in spreading the gospel throughout local and global communities. The apathy about which this paper is concerned is borne in a lack of fully embracing Jesus' call to discipleship. These final words of Jesus' in Matthew's gospel leave no room for apathy among His future Church. The challenge for today's religious leaders is to communicate the urgency and importance of this Great Commission to the non-engaged and actively dis-engaged members of communities of faith in a way that they can understand and apply to their daily living.

The Great Commission provides a relatively simple process for discipleship, including to "Go," to "make disciples," to "baptize," and to "teach." What hundreds of years of theologians and teachers – and what the pages of this project also reveal – is that the church and its leaders can complicate the process and stumble over exactly what "make disciples" means. The answer might be as simple as returning to the other words: go, baptize, and teach, which can be done simply by proclaiming the gospel always and everywhere. The hope is that such proclamation will produce fruit – more disciples – which will then lead to baptism or if already baptized, to an affirmation of one's baptism.

While baptism is a reason to rejoice and give thanks, it is not the end of the process that the Great Commission provides. This most important part of the process tends to be where apathy is often seen or experienced within the Church. Baptism can

be viewed as an end, which prevents further growth and faith exploration and development. The Great Commission itself instructs us in this regard: “Teach them to observe everything I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:20). The teaching comes after the baptism. The teaching Jesus calls disciples to do is the basics of discipleship, involving helping people learn about God and God’s Word and often going beyond just the sharing of information. Central to faithful biblical discipleship practices is to connect with new disciples in such a way that models for them how to follow Christ.

Clergy and other church staff and leadership have the privilege of and the critical responsibility to build confidence among would-be disciples. Fear is often at the heart of spiritual apathy and reduces confidence. Fear holds people back from obeying Jesus and fulfilling His Great Commission. Apathetic disciples are often afraid of looking foolish, or not knowing the answers to biblical questions, or being rejected or being called out for their own sinfulness. In addition to being afraid, they don’t want to fail. This is an important part of the modeling that needs to happen for one another. People need to see that a faithful life of discipleship includes fear, failure, doubt and rejection – all of which Jesus demonstrated.

The Soil

How one overcomes fear, failure, doubt and rejection while striving to practice faithful biblical discipleship depends on the readiness of one’s heart and mind for such a mission. In Jesus’ parable of the sower and the seed (Matt. 13) there is a foundational lesson for believers who desire to be faithful disciples but find themselves apathetic towards the fulfillment of their calling. The parable speaks of seed which has been scattered, some on dry soil where it cannot grow, some among

the rocks with no depth, some among weeds and thorns where it can begin to grow but become overrun, and some among good soil where it can grow, multiply, and bear fruit. Therefore, how one overcomes fear, failure, doubt, and rejection while striving to practice faithful biblical discipleship depends on the condition of the “soil” of one’s heart. After Jesus shared this parable, the hearers were confused and not understanding, asking, “Why do you tell such stories?” In his explanation, Jesus confronts them and acknowledges their spiritual apathy:

You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive. For this people’s heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart. (Matt. 13:14-15)

Jesus continues, sharing with them how they can be that “good soil” that accepts the word – who takes on the challenge of discipleship. “But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty” (Matt. 13:23). It is critical then that fostering discipleship be the goal of all clergy and religious leaders. Church leaders are called to provide the means and the opportunities to inspire and motivate today’s believers. Disciples have hearts that feel, ears that hear, and eyes that see all that God is doing in, through, and among them. When the church can be this “good soil,” it can lead parishioners to increased congregational engagement, spiritual formation, and faithful biblical discipleship practices.

Pastors Thom and Joani Schultz share at length about how a congregation that provides and fosters such opportunities for engagement results in more faithful and effective discipleship as it becomes “good soil” for growing in faith and

understanding. According to them, a “good soil” church consists of four simple “acts of love.” These include a renewed sense of radical hospitality; more fearless conversation about and openness to the sharing of divergent ideas; true, elevated, and genuine humility; and a central focus on and divine anticipation of God’s providence in the modern era. These four acts of love lay the foundation for a community of faith rich in soil and abundant in harvest.

Thom Schultz said in an online interview, “I believe that the church can thrive again. It’s about changing the methodology and not the message.”¹² Faithful biblical discipleship involves paying attention to methodology in order to proclaim the message. Attention to one’s method can determine the size of the harvest.

The Harvest

When individual Christians and whole communities of faith become places of good soil where healthy discipleship practices can be taught, studied, modeled and observed, they will naturally yield good and abundant fruit. Such fruit is ready and ripe for the harvest. Jesus used this image before sending out the original disciples in Matthew’s gospel: “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Matt. 9:37-38). Again, this indicates the urgency and the readiness that exists in regard to one’s call to discipleship. Jim Peterson writes in reference to these verses, “Jesus made a statement that captures the essence of the basic problem in the world. The next thing we read about the Twelve is that they are paired up and traveling through the villages of

¹² Billy Hallowell, “Author Reveals 4 Reasons ‘Nobody Wants to Go to Church Anymore,’” *The Blaze*, October 23, 2013, accessed July 20, 2016.

Galilee. They had become the workers Jesus had told them to ask God for.”¹³

However, spiritual apathy can again overcome one’s desire to gather the harvest as one gives in to fear and failure. In addition to the fear and failure that apathy presents, division within the Church can also contribute to an incomplete fulfillment of the call to follow. Many churches, both within and between denominations, allow division, disagreement, and conflict to negatively impact the gathering of the harvest that Jesus says is ripe and ready. Paul alludes to this in his first letter to the Church at Corinth:

Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. What I mean is that each of you says, “I belong to Paul,” or “I belong to Apollos,” or “I belong to Cephas,” or “I belong to Christ.” Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power (1 Cor. 1:10-17).

A similar appeal could still be made today. Transitioning from apathy to mission within communities of faith is going to be dependent on imitating both Paul’s words and actions.

If individual Christians and entire communities of faith are to fully embrace their calling and most effectively serve as disciples of Christ, it is necessary that the proposed problem of spiritual apathy be addressed as a serious detriment existing within many communities of faith. Because division, which leads to conflict, directly affect a degree of passion and commitment toward evangelism, the problem of apathy

¹³ Jim Peterson, “A Disciple’s Vision: Seeing the World Through Jesus’ Eyes,” *Discipleship Journal*, July & Aug. 1997, 38.

needs to be addressed and thought of in healthy ways. The Psalmist assures us that there is a better and more effective way to be the Body of Christ in order to gather in the harvest: “How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity” (Ps. 133:1). The book of Acts emphasizes these positive effects of committed Christian community:

All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved (Acts 2:44-47).

This early Christian community, based on believers who took the bold risk to answer Christ's call to discipleship, can serve as a model for the church today. Darrell Bock in his commentary on the book of Acts explains how this is the only instance where the combination of “glad” and “generous” appears in the New Testament. This points out clearly that joy and sincerity are present among this early Christian community and that it extends over into praise to God and having favor with those outside the community of faith.¹⁴

History has proven what the early church experienced and what we still struggle with today: community of any type is difficult to attain without conflicts. We are simply divided over different issues or matters of concern. Yet, to allow such division that lead to conflict to continue will only result in diminished yield of the harvest, significantly decreasing one's effectiveness at furthering the Gospel of Jesus Christ in their homes, communities, and world.

¹⁴ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 154.

The problem of apathy in Christian community is not new; throughout his writings and letters, Paul expressed frustration with the apathy among followers while emphasizing again the importance of fulfilling God's Great Commission. His response, as it should always be, was prayer: "That your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God" (Phil. 1:9-11). Being consumed by distractions in the Church prevents disciples from fully reaching out and bearing witness to the gospel. David Platt shares Paul's passion:

I want to be a part of a people who really believe that we have the Spirit of God in each of us for the spread of the Gospel through all of us. I want to be a part of a people who are gladly sacrificing the pleasures, pursuits, and possessions of this world because we are living for treasure in the world to come. I want to be a part of a people who have forsaken every earthly ambition in favor of one eternal aspiration: to see disciples made and churches multiplied from our houses to our communities to our cities to the nations.¹⁵

A vision such as this for any community of faith filled with passion and purpose is the necessary goal of all clergy and church leaders if the Great Commission is to be fulfilled in a way that unites and not divides.

Understanding and managing conflict in healthy ways can enable individual disciples and entire communities of faith to hear Paul's prayer and focus on what really matters. This is going to continue to be critical for the Church as it keeps trying to figure out who it is and how to fulfill its calling in this ever-changing world. Doubtless, the harvest is still plentiful, but if laborers continue to be consumed with conflict, the Church will fail to reap it.

¹⁵ David Platt, *Follow Me: a Call to Die. a Call to Live.* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2013), 112.

Broadening the Scriptural Foundation

Beyond these key foundational texts that provide the core of scriptural understanding for this project, there are numerous others. There are examples of people throughout the New Testament who were called to fulfill important parts of God's plan. Despite their initial hesitation, these followers offered themselves to God and became engaged in the mission. They include Mary and Joseph, John the Baptist, Nicodemus, Philip, Simeon, and even Simon of Cyrene. In surrendering themselves to the Lord and to the mission he called them to, these people were able to fulfill critical parts of God's mission. They may have not been initially engaged in their calling, but they became transformed in their encounter with the Lord. Often, they started out not-engaged, actively disengaged, uninterested, indifferent or without a clear sense of purpose. With the help of angelic voices and visions, invitations to follow and to "come and see," people placed in their paths, and God's undeniable calling in dreams and visions they were inspired to answer the call that had been placed on them. Such scriptural accounts can serve to assure us of what God has done, that there is no template in regard to calling, and that God wishes to do great and extraordinary work through ordinary people.

Mark Mittelberg, when writing about different evangelism styles, explains the simplicity of discipleship as follows:

I learned I could effectively spread the message of Jesus Christ without having to fit a mold that isn't me. I found out I could become a more contagious Christian while still being myself. I'm convinced that one of the greatest barriers to Christians participating in personal evangelism is their misunderstanding of what it entails. So many of us are fearful of the dreaded "e-word" and view it as an unnatural activity. Well, here's the great news that is both freeing and empowering: God knew what He was doing when He made you. He custom-designed you with your unique combination of personality,

temperament, talents, and background, and He wants to use you to reach others in a fashion that fits your design.¹⁶

We know that Mittelberg's assessment of how God wishes to use us for mission and ministry is true and accurate from examples throughout Scripture. Mittelberg further writes about how God used six people specifically in the New Testament to spread His love and truth and how each had different styles to do so. He writes about "Peter's Confrontational Approach," "Paul's Intellectual Approach," "The Blind Man's Testimonial Approach," "Matthew's Interpersonal Approach," "The Samaritan Woman's Invitational Approach," and "Dorcas's Service Approach." After explaining these different styles of evangelism Mittelberg concludes by encouraging discipleship:

Nobody perfectly fits into just one of these styles. Every believer probably has a mix of several of them. And you might come up with style number seven or eight. These approaches are presented not to limit you, but to encourage you with the value of diversity on God's team. You can be yourself. So work within your style. Experiment with different approaches. Let God lead you to express your faith naturally to those around you. Team up with other Christians whose styles will complement yours. Take some risks in your relationships and let God work through you. In the process you'll enjoy the thrilling adventure of personal evangelism, and you'll make an eternal difference in the lives of people you love.¹⁷

Mittelberg's reminder, along with other scriptural accounts, emphasize the seriousness of the call to discipleship and how there is no room for apathy.

John envisions Jesus's response to apathy and indifference in his Revelation. Jesus addresses the Laodician church: "I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth" (Rev. 3:15-16).

¹⁶ Mark Mittelberg, "Discover Your Evangelism Style," *Discipleship Journal*, no. 95 (Sept. & Oct. 1996): 33.

¹⁷ Mittelberg, "Discover Your Evangelism Style," 36.

From such scriptural experiences, it can be concluded that the works God has for His people to accomplish may not happen until the invitation to “come and see” is accepted and one surrenders to this important calling. When spiritual apathy sets in and believers become lukewarm or indifferent in their faith, they hesitate, deem themselves as unworthy, or assume that others will respond instead or in their place. To counter this apathetic mentality and challenge believers and communities of faith to be more effective disciples for Christ, Pastor Eric Elnes, refers to the “three great loves” identified by Jesus: “love of God, love of neighbor, and love of self.” He writes, “Ultimately, it is these Three Great Loves that define best what the emerging Christian faith is all about. It is a faith that invites all people to a great and wondrous party – a joyful and daring celebration where the only ones not included are those who turn down the invitation.”¹⁸ These scriptural examples reveal that the work God has for disciples to accomplish may not happen until they surrender to the calling and accept the invitation. Scripture assures us that surrendering to God's calling and focusing on the three great loves and what really matters allows believers to see and experience the rewards of faithfulness and commitment to Christ and His Church. Until individual Christians and congregations come to that place of discipleship such rewards will be difficult to notice.

The Lord bluntly invites the reader to put Him and His promises to the test amidst any disbelief or doubt in His promises to provide. He speaks in reference to their tithes and offerings and how by withholding them they are robbing God. The prophet Malachi relays God's certain promises: “Bring the full tithe into the

¹⁸ Eric Elnes, *The Phoenix Affirmations: A New Vision for the Future of Christianity* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 101.

storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing” (Mal. 3:10). This text can be compared to the withholding of one’s heart and mind and soul. When disciples offer themselves, their time and their possessions to the Lord with pure intentions and purposes, overflowing blessings will fall upon them from heaven itself. This kind of trust and the complete offering of one’s self can be viewed as a scriptural model for individual and congregational engagement. This leads to faithful and effective discipleship.

Engagement happens when spiritual growth, faith development and Christian discipleship are first and foremost in a believer’s life. By becoming actively engaged in the life of one’s church and experiencing the rewards of faithful living believers become filled with a new sense of joy and satisfaction as the blessings of heaven are experienced. This is God’s promise and intention for all who believe.

Modern day disciples are, at times, not immediately willing to accept such a challenge or to offer such surrender. A mentality of contentedness within both individual and congregational levels of engagement can begin to determine discipleship practices. This can happen gradually as members of churches fall easily into routines of the status quo without a clear sense or understanding of the broader mission to which they have been called by God in Scripture.

Philip is an example of a faithful disciple in whose life and calling God repeatedly intervened. An angel of the Lord commands Philip to go south toward the wilderness road to Gaza, where He knew Philip would meet “an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury”

(Acts 8:27). This was a purpose that God had planned for Philip. God knew Phillip, and desired that the Ethiopian and countless others would come to know Him and His promises of forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation as well. Philip offers himself to the calling and goes. He ministers to the Ethiopian, which culminates with a baptism. Then as quickly as Philip arrived to fulfill his calling in that place, God's Holy Spirit "suddenly took Philip away" and led him to his next calling in the nearby northern town of Azotus, followed by several other towns before reaching Caesarea (Acts 8:26-40). None of this would have happened had Philip not responded faithfully to the Lord's Great Commission. Bill Hull wrote, "Discipleship fails to reproduce when it is disconnected from the great commission because it is self-absorbed and not about others."¹⁹ This comment only illustrates further the urgency and importance of faithful discipleship practices among individual believers and communities of faith. When an apathetic or lukewarm mentality occurs among the baptized the Church on earth suffers and God's transforming and life-giving message of hope is diminished or not even heard.

It is perhaps because of this mentality why Paul spoke so eloquently and passionately about what it means to be the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12). He makes it clear that in order for Christ's Church to prosper and for the promises of God to be revealed and experienced, believers must be fully committed, offering what they have, doing what they've been called to do, and doing it all out of delight instead of any misgiven sense of duty. All God's children are needed to accomplish the work of the Lord. Reminding today's believers of this, addressing the apathy in the pews, and

¹⁹ Bill Hull's Facebook page. Accessed July 18, 2016.
<https://www.facebook.com/discipleship.billhull?fref=ts>

talking about what it means to be engaged in the life and ministry of the local and global Church is now and will continue to be critically necessary in the life and well-being of the Church. For this to happen, believers must follow Phillip's example, making disciples and teaching them all about Jesus and the promises he offers through baptism. When individual believers and churches become apathetic in accomplishing this goal, they will not be what God knows they are capable of becoming. The writer of Hebrews asserts, "For God is not unjust; he will not overlook your work and the love that you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do. And we want each one of you to show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope to the very end, so that you may not become sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Heb. 6:10-12). Scripture's stories about Philip can embolden and encourage today's believers. Parishioners can embrace and imitate the acts of Philip, who showed up to walk alongside others, interpret Scripture for the curious, share faith, baptize, always with an ear for God's next calling. Without the "Philips" of the world many children of God will continue to end up never hearing the Word. Or they may hear but not understand. Hearing the Word and attempting to live according to it, but having no accountability to it, they may become complacent and ultimately dismiss it or ignore it altogether. When this happens, discipleship decreases and the Church suffers.

CHAPTER THREE: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Acedia and its Effects on Christian Discipleship

The word “apathy,” derived from the Greek word, *apatheia*, means absence of passion or emotion. It is synonymous with the word indifferent, implying a lack of interest, enthusiasm, or concern in regard to Christian living and discipleship practices. Research for this project has discovered that the spiritual apathy still experienced and observed today not only was present among the original disciples, but was later identified by the desert father, John Cassian, in the fourth century, as “acedia.” Cassian’s writings refer to acedia as “apathetic spiritual restlessness” and as his very own “noonday demon.” When studied carefully, Cassian’s concerns nearly 1500 years ago can continue to shed light on discipleship understandings and practices in the 21st Century.

A study of the term “acedia” reveals that the word can be understood and defined in many ways. An initial definition is this,

Acedia (also *accidie* or *accedie*, from Latin *acediā*, and this from Greek ἀκηδία, “negligence”) describes a state of listlessness or torpor, of not caring or not being concerned with one's position or condition in the world. It can lead to a state of being unable to perform one's duties in life. Its spiritual overtones make it related to but arguably distinct from depression. Acedia was originally noted as a problem among monks and other ascetics who maintained a solitary life.¹

¹ *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. “accidie” Ed. E. A. Livingstone. Oxford University Press, 2006. Oxford Reference Online. Oxford University Press. 1 accessed June 12, 2015, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t95.e35>

Other definitions say acedia is like a spiritual depression, a listlessness, an indolence or indifference, and has been compared to a spiritual or mental slothfulness. Some believe acedia to be the ancient depiction of a variety of psychological conditions or behaviors: primarily laziness, apathy, ennui or boredom.

Contemporary Benedictine Hugh Feiss describes acedia as a confused heart:

“The confused heart, having lost joy within itself, seeks consolation outside itself. The more it seeks exterior goods, the more it lacks interior joy to which it can return.”²

Perhaps the most telling description of acedia is by Kathleen Norris who discovered she had been living with it without knowing what it was:

Acedia is not a household word, unless your “house” happens to be a monastery or a department of medieval literature. At its Greek root, acedia means the absence of care, and in personal terms it means refusing to care, even that you can’t care. It is a supreme form of indifference, a kind of spiritual morphine: you know the pain is there, but can’t rouse yourself to give a damn. In the mid-twentieth century Aldous Huxley called acedia the primary affliction of his age, and its baleful influence still sours our relationships to society, politics, and our families. But how can this be, you may ask, when “acedia” is such an obscure term? Well, as any reader of fairy tales can tell you, it’s the devil you don’t know that causes the most serious trouble. When I first encountered the concept of acedia (pronounced uh-SEE-dee-uh) in a work written by a fourth century monk, Evagrius of Pontus, I was startled to find him describing something I had long experienced but had never been able to name. It was all there: acedia manifesting as both as boredom and restlessness, inertia and workaholism, as well as reluctance to commit to a particular person or place because of a nagging sense that something better might come along. Another group of people — surely not the lot I was stuck with now, my family or co-workers — might value me more highly and help me better fulfill my potential. The early Christian monks regarded acedia as one of the worst of the eight “bad thoughts” that afflicted them. It was ranked with pride and anger, as all three have the potential to lead people into deep despair. Acedia in particular could shake the very foundations of monastic life: once a monk

² Kathleen Norris, *Acedia and Me: a Marriage, Monks, and a Writer's Life*, (New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 2010), 124.

succumbed to the notion that his efforts at daily prayer and contemplation were futile, life loomed like a prison sentence, day after day of nothingness.³

These descriptions sound similar to modern-day spiritual apathy. The affects such apathy has on discipleship practices still today can are evident. Acedia, as Cassian many years ago and Norris very recently describe it, relates directly to one's lack of fulfillment of Jesus' Great Commission and the overall negative effects it has on Christian discipleship.

An anonymous quote says it well: "The nice thing about apathy is you don't have to exert yourself to show you're sincere about it." There is nothing nice about apathy, especially in the spiritual sense, which is why many pastors and spiritual leaders are intimidated, threatened, and fearful of it. Like a slow growing tumor, apathy eventually takes its toll on Christians and faith communities everywhere. It often leads to less frequent worship attendance and participation, a lack of interest in or concern for the poor and needy, a decline in concern for global missions and outreach, and perhaps even a disinterest in the next generation of believers and disciples. An understanding of acedia is helpful when trying to understand declining discipleship. Perhaps apathy is not the best choice of word when seeking to understand declining discipleship or to describe non-engaged or actively disengaged believers. Apathetic people don't care, have no interest, or are not motivated to make a difference. This is not generally true of the Church or even the majority of individual believers. Acedia, however, is a more widespread condition in the Church and affects all of a person and is part of the rhythm of spiritual growth and life and faith. Acedia is a much more appropriate word to use when describing one's frustrations with both

³ Kathleen Norris, "Got Acedia? Who Cares?," OnFaith, February 15, 2008, accessed June 25, 2015, <https://www.onfaith.co/onfaith/2008/09/16/got-acedia-who-cares/9005>.

early and modern-day discipleship practices. To neglect its presence and power in one's life is not only unfortunate, but it is somewhat dangerous, as acedia has a way of slowly entering into and minimizing the spirit while making individuals and congregations numb to the needs of the world.

In order to understand apathy as it affects discipleship, it is first necessary to understand acedia and its slow and consuming effects on spirituality. The two are similar yet very different and it is beneficial to spiritual leaders, the Church, and society as a whole, to understand apathy and acedia as distinctly different from one another. A lack of awareness of this distinction will only lead to ongoing frustration and disappointment among spiritual leaders and believers. Apathy is easy to point to and blame for one's lack of interest or passion in discipleship, largely because it is a word that is generally understood and used often. In contrast, acedia is a difficult word to define in today's vernacular. It is clearly the equivalent to the spiritual apathy that continues to be observed in the lives of believers and faith communities today and should be used when describing it. Andrew Crislip writes, "[T]he very persistence of the term 'acedia' betrays the fact that none of the modern or medieval glosses adequately conveys the semantic range of the monastic term." Crislip cites a French monk, Placide Deseille, who describes the word as, "so pregnant with meaning that it frustrates every attempt to translate it."⁴ Feiss similarly explains, "Of all the categories of sin and spiritual difficulty which the ancients called the eight principal thoughts and the Middle Ages the seven capital vices or sins none is more fluid and

⁴ Kathleen Norris, *Acedia and Me: a Marriage, Monks, and a Writer's Life*, (New York, New York: Riverhead Books, 2010), 2.

elusive than acedia.”⁵ Abbott Christopher Jamison offers this brief background and history of the understanding and vernacular use of apathy and acedia in an online article:

The Seven Deadly Sins are derived from the Eight Thoughts of John Cassian, the monk who, in the Fourth Century, systematically recorded the teachings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers. He described how monks and nuns were always afflicted by Eight Thoughts or Demons. The transformation from Eight Thoughts to Seven Sins begins with Pope Gregory the Great in the Sixth Century. Gregory began this process by removing one vice from the list: acedia, a Greek word which can be translated as spiritual apathy. The disappearance of acedia from ordinary people’s vocabulary deprived Western culture of the ability to name an important feature of the spiritual life, namely, loss of enthusiasm for the spiritual life itself. While the word has disappeared, the reality of spiritual carelessness is strongly present in our culture.⁶

It is helpful for believers and communities of faith to recognize that acedia is still affecting discipleship today and to consider ways to prepare for and possibly prevent it.

Jamison continues, with this word of warning,

Spiritual carelessness seems to me to underlie much contemporary unhappiness in Western culture. The word [acedia] is no longer used not because the reality is obsolete but because we have stopped noticing it. We are too busy to be spiritually self-aware and our children grow up in a culture that suffers from collective acedia. Acedia has so established itself that it is now part of modernity.⁷

This sobering truth exists among modern-day believers and faith communities as well, and emphasizes the importance of addressing its presence in and effects on the Church.

⁵ Kathleen Norris, *Acedia and Me: a Marriage, Monks, and a Writer's Life*, (New York, New York: Riverhead Books, 2010), 322.

⁶ Abbot Christopher Jamison, “Spiritual Apathy: The Forgotten Deadly Sin,” *Thinking Faith: The Online Journal of the Jesuits in Britain*, October 9, 2008, accessed May 25, 2016, http://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/20081009_1.htm.

⁷ Jamison, “Spiritual Apathy.”

There has been a gradual separation from God which has led to acedic tendencies and characteristics that have been labeled as apathy, lack of passion and boredom. To name acedia and call it out for what it is helps diminish its negative effects on discipleship practices. Jamison emphasizes this need:

One way of viewing our current situation in Western society is that we have suffered a catastrophic loss of understanding of the need for self-awareness leading to widespread acedia. Until the modern era, the Church and especially its religious orders provided a constant reminder to ordinary people of their need to examine their conscience every day and to reflect deeply on their way of life. The Church provided a series of exercises, some simple and some complex, to enable people of all kinds to live a self-aware life. At its worst, this provoked unhelpful guilt. At its best, these spiritual exercises enabled people to remain self-aware. Pre-modern European societies were often ignorant, poor and sometimes cruel, but they had a strong sense of the vital importance of the interior world of each human being. That interior world was the resource that enabled them to survive the horrors of their age.⁸

Theologian Petrut Ormenisan writes more about this idea:

Although the term acedia is unfamiliar to those who are not acquainted with the monastic or medieval literature, the reality revealed by this word has relevance for contemporary readers. Acedia is not a relic of the fourth century, but a state which, if we ignore, we expose ourselves to a huge danger. Wherever we are and whatever we do, acedia is present. Wherever we run to get rid of it, acedia is out there always suggesting us an alternative. Even when we are engaged in an activity, when we want to do a good deed, we might be touched by the spirit of acedia.⁹

Ormenisan then connects the danger of acedia to the Church as he warns, “Acedia also strikes in the Church constantly tempting it to lose its vocation. Touched by acedia, believers forget that are badged with the sign of the cross, that they are

⁸ Jamison, “Spiritual Apathy.”

⁹ Petrut Ormenisan, “Acedia Seen As Carelessness,” *Studia Theologia Orthodoxa*, no. 1 (2013), 278.

called not to win something, but to lose everything, not to be first, but last, not to live, but to die”¹⁰

Because of acedia, according to Ormenisan,

The self becomes the center of the world and of all actions. This attitude is natural up to a certain age, if it is fleeting, otherwise, if it take roots and it exacerbates, it becomes pathological. This state takes the form of what we might call the syndrome “I don’t care”. This syndrome is difficult to define, because the phrase “I don’t care” is so often used in everyday language that the association with the word syndrome seems surprising. We use this expression in order to circumscribe to its meaning the lack of involvement, unnatural passivity, indifference, disinterestedness.¹¹

As an example of this “I don’t care syndrome” Kathleen Norris shares an illustration from the life of Thomas Merton:

[Merton]once told a Louisville store clerk who had asked what brand of toothpaste he preferred, ‘I don’t care.’ Merton was intrigued by the man’s response. ‘He almost dropped dead,’ he wrote. ‘I was supposed to feel strongly about Colgate or Pepsodent or Crest or something with five colors. And they all have a secret ingredient. But I didn’t care about the secret ingredient.’ Merton concluded that ‘the worst thing you can do now is not care about these things.’¹²

The “I don’t care syndrome” to which Norris refers and Merton describes is increasingly prevalent among individual believers and within entire communities of faith. Norris then adds:

We should care that as the public sphere becomes increasingly chaotic and threatening, what we think of as freedom consists of retreat and insularity. Marketers welcome this development, but a consumerist mentality allows us to turn spiritual practices, which traditionally have been aimed at making us more responsive to the legitimate needs of the wider world, into self-indulgence. As

¹⁰ Ormenisan, “Acedia Seen As Carelessness,” 278.

¹¹ Ormenisan, “Acedia Seen As Carelessness,” 284.

¹² Kathleen Norris, *Acedia and Me: a Marriage, Monks, and a Writer's Life*, (New York, New York: Riverhead Books, 2010), 125.

we grow more reluctant to care about anything past our perceived needs, acedia asserts itself as a primary characteristic of our time.¹³

Because of this assertion, it appears that many have lost sight of the needs of the wider world as they have become reluctant to care about much beyond their own needs or the needs of their families and communities.

Recognizing and understanding the need for a renewed sense of immediacy and urgency regarding biblical discipleship practices, individual Christians and faith communities can begin to focus more on overcoming acedia. More time focused on overcoming and less time spent denying, will benefit individual believers, spiritual leaders and congregations as they seek to overcome the endemic culture of acedia today.

Until congregations shift their foci, reclaim important spiritual exercises that lead to spiritual and self-awareness, and remember their call and Great Commission, they will continue to suffer the effects of acedia. When acknowledged and approached with intentionality, acedia can be a motivating factor in spiritual growth and development that can then lead to more passionate and effective discipleship practices.

Kip McKean shared how such awareness of acedia became a motivating force in his journey of faith,

After reading what others had written about acedia, I too began to search the Scriptures. For me, Proverbs 13:12 sums it up best, “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.” In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul teaches that when one is not regularly inspired by the “body and blood of Jesus” during communion that this is the reason “people in the church” are “weak, sick... and [have] fallen asleep.”(1 Corinthians 11:30) The state of being “weak” most disciples comprehend, and “fallen asleep” of course means one has fallen away but still attends church. Yet, “spiritual sickness” is a term rarely used but it “fits” acedia! Perhaps from these two passages one begins to understand why “sloth” in time was substituted for “acedia.” When one is

¹³ Norris, *Acedia and Me*, 125.

physically sick, one is usually lethargic – “hurting” and thus unmotivated “to get out of bed.” So it is with “spiritual sickness” – one’s heart is hurting so badly that one “feels” that it’s just too hard “to get out of bed” to do the will of God. Sloth on the other hand is simply laziness – one “loves doing nothing” more than working for God. Acedia and sloth may look the same – no work done for God – but in fact they are very distinct. This seemingly subtle substitution on The Seven Deadly Sins List may have been the beginning of Satan’s scheme “to hide” the Biblical concept of acedia from our day and age.¹⁴

In addressing how this awareness impacted his faith and understanding of discipleship, McKean concludes,

I do believe that for most “remnant veteran disciples,” acedia is our “sin of choice” as our “hope” of a glorious church that would reach all nations was “deferred” by our sins! How do we repent of acedia – “the most troublesome of sins?” First of all, you must identify it in your life. Secondly, you must surrender to the sovereignty of God, embracing your hardships by asking what God wants you to learn.¹⁵

If allowed, acedia in the Church will continue to be confused with indifference, disinterest or lack of care or concern. Christians are generally caring and interested in the work of the Lord in their congregations, but it is often not evident in their actions.

It is clear from this research, that identifying, acknowledging and owning the presence of acedia in one’s life and among a faith community, will eventually pave the way to more effective discipleship and spiritual growth practices.

Engagement and Discipleship

Recent literature about discipleship tends to focus on the distinction between congregational involvement and engagement. The research shows that typical involvement in a community of faith does not necessarily provide the desired joy and

¹⁴ Kip McKean. “Acedia: The Forgotten Sin,” accessed July 12, 2016, www.dcicc.net/acedia-the-forgotten-sin/

¹⁵ McKean, “Acedia.”

satisfaction of serving within a community of faith. Excessive involvement can lead to individual burn-out, whereas consistent engagement will likely lead to increased joy, overall satisfaction, and more effective and faithful biblical discipleship practices.

This distinction is the foundation of Albert Winseman's book, *Growing An Engaged Church: How To Stop "Doing Church" and Start Being the Church Again*.¹⁶

Winseman asks in the book, "Why are some congregations and parishes flourishing while others are failing? What makes the difference?" Winseman answers, "The difference is engagement. Engaged members drive the spiritual health of every congregation in America. The more engaged members there are in your church, the healthier it is. A spiritually healthy church is the good soil that produces fruit in abundance – and engagement is the key."¹⁷

George Barna, while recognizing that most churches have many programs in place, states the obvious: "Stunningly few churches have a church of disciples."¹⁸ Many pastors fail to acknowledge this unfortunate reality, resulting in it becoming a serious problem for the Church, ultimately impacting everything it does. Barna continues, "The strength and influence of the Church is wholly dependent upon its commitment to true discipleship. Producing transformed lives, and seeing those lives reproduced in others, is a core challenge to believers and to the local church."¹⁹

¹⁶ Albert L. Winseman. *Growing an Engaged Church: How To Stop "Doing Church" and Start Being the Church Again*. (New York. Gallup Press. 2006.)

¹⁷ Winseman, *Growing an Engaged Church*, 67.

¹⁸ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ*. (Colorado Springs, CO, WaterBrook Press, 2001), 20.

¹⁹ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ*. (Colorado Springs, CO, WaterBrook Press, 2001), 24.

Churches that have experienced this commitment to true discipleship and transformed lives have benefited both in numerical and spiritual growth of members. Barna writes, “Churches that are most effective in discipleship have a philosophy of ministry that places daily spiritual growth at the core of the ministry.”²⁰ It is clear, therefore, from general observations and research that regular, spiritual growth and biblical discipleship practices lead to greater effectiveness within individual lives and entire communities of faith.

In agreement with Barna, Winseman explains,

The conventional wisdom is, ‘believing leads to belonging’ – that is, the deeper one’s faith (spiritual commitment) is, the more likely it is that he or she will desire to belong to a congregation (engagement). The reality is just the opposite: It is belonging (engagement) that leads to believing (commitment). So if you want your members to become more spiritually committed, help them become more engaged.²¹

Until a stronger engagement in the mission and ministry of congregations happen, acedia will only continue to navigate the direction of them. For faithful biblical discipleship to happen in communities of faith, consideration must be given as to how to implement more effective means and opportunities for engagement.

Adding to this Brennan Manning says, “Clearly, discipleship is a revolutionary way of living.”²² This is the understanding all Christians and churches must gain. If parishioners can live lives of faith with the revolutionary mindset of disciples, it will serve them and the Church well.

²⁰ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 31.

²¹ Albert L. Winseman. *Growing an Engaged Church: How To Stop “Doing Church” and Start Being the Church Again*. (New York. Gallup Press. 2006), 72.

²² Brennan Manning, *The Signature of Jesus* (Sisters, Or.: Multnomah, 1996), 114.

A realistic understanding of one's human limitations as sinners is also important to successful discipleship. Understanding that Jesus is constant and remains the same, as Manning continues to describe, is essential to becoming more fully engaged:

Personally, I take great comfort in the life stories of the first disciples. Their response was flawed by fear and hesitation. What they shared in common was dullness, and embarrassing inability to understand what Jesus was all about. Their track record was not good: They complained, they misunderstood, they quarreled, they wavered, they deserted, they denied. Christ's reaction to their broken, inconsistent discipleship was one of unending love. The good news is that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.²³

Manning's description is helpful as it communicates the ordinary means that God relies on to fulfill His mission. An understanding of this can assure believers that even when they fall short, God's mission remains the same and can be accomplished by all.

Michael Yaconelli takes the revolutionary approach a step further and calls for a new radical understanding of discipleship within the Christian Church. He too, emphasizes the urgency of the need for discipleship:

What happened to radical Christianity, the un-nice brand of Christianity that turned the world upside-down? What happened to the category-smashing, life-threatening, anti-institutional gospel that spread through the first century like wildfire and was considered (by those in power) *dangerous*? What happened to the kind of Christians whose hearts were on fire, who had no fear, who spoke the truth no matter what the consequence, who made the world uncomfortable, who were willing to follow Jesus wherever He went? What happened to the kind of Christians who were filled with passion and gratitude, and who every day were unable to get over the grace of God? I'm ready for Christianity that "ruins" my life, that captures my heart and makes me uncomfortable. I want to be filled with an astonishment which is so captivating that I am considered wild and unpredictable and ... well ... *dangerous*. Yes, I want to be "dangerous" to a dull and boring religion. I want a faith that is considered

²³ Manning, *Signature of Jesus*, 114.

“dangerous” by our predictable and monotonous culture.²⁴

Clearly, Yaconelli understands the original urgency of Jesus’ call. It is important that church members and congregations, as much as the original disciples, understand the immediacy and urgency of Christ's radical and revolutionary call to discipleship.

In order for this kind of individual and congregational engagement to occur, a sense of meaningful contribution and a gaining of spiritual growth need to occur. What one contributes and receives in return affects levels of engagement in direct ways.

Albert Winseman emphasizes how members of churches need to know they are valued and that they make meaningful contributions to the mission and ministry of their churches “not in terms of dollars and cents, but in contributing their greatest talents to accomplish something bigger than themselves.”²⁵ Many individual believers and communities of faith may not know what they have to offer or what it is they might need. Fostering ways for parishioners to meaningfully contribute will increase engagement and lead to more effective biblical discipleship practices. Increased attendance at worship and other opportunities for spiritual growth has to happen, in order for engagement to increase.

At one’s baptism, congregations promise to nurture and support the newly baptized in Christian faith and discipleship. Engaged communities of faith do this

²⁴ Michael Yaconelli, *Dangerous Wonder: the Adventure of Childlike Faith*, (Colorado Springs, CO, NavPress, 2003), 10.

²⁵ Albert L. Winseman. *Growing an Engaged Church: How To Stop “Doing Church” and Start Being the Church Again*. (New York. Gallup Press. 2006), 67.

well. Many not-as-engaged communities struggle more with how to provide for and fulfill this promise. Jan and Myron Chartier explain,

Some churches have so many scheduled activities that they seem to do more to drain the time and energy resources of families than to build them up. It often seems as though churches assume that faith nurturing in the family will happen automatically. A growing number of congregations and their pastors are expressing concern about the need for specialized family ministries to families in their congregations. Christian families need a theology to help them define what Christian family togetherness means. Opportunities offered by the church for family mission to the world provide a link which might otherwise be inaccessible to families. Healthy churches need full and enthusiastic participation by families that make up their membership. The church and the family need each other, for they give life to each other.²⁶

When a community of faith understands how best to encourage families and meet their needs, faithful biblical discipleship practices follow. Choices are made by families that honor God and their Christian faith and commitment to their faith. As the authors conclude, “If faith nurturing in the family is to happen in qualitative ways, persons must intentionally commit themselves to faith growth in themselves and in other family members.”²⁷ Intentional commitment: that's what discipleship is all about.

Disciple Making

Bill Hull explains that we are all “standing on the threshold of hope” and that we again, are continually invited by Jesus to “Come and see.”²⁸

As indicated, that is a powerful invitation that has the potential to reveal much about who we are, what we seek, and what we have to offer. It is an invitation to engagement, active and purposeful, that includes movement and observation. As

²⁶ Jan Chartier and Myron Raymond Chartier, *Nurturing Faith in the Family*, Judson Family Life Series (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1986), 34-35.

²⁷ Chartier and Chartier, *Nurturing Faith*, 35.

²⁸ Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ, Disciplemaker* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2004), 32.

people respond favorably to this invitation, they will begin to recognize the imperative nature of engagement. This will result in a renewed and revolutionary view of discipleship, helping them find what they are seeking. Congregational members must identify and understand what they are seeking in order to be actively engaged. Hull suggests changes in perception and practices lead to acedic attitudes toward church involvement. He states, “The consumer-based person believes that the ministry of the church is to meet his or her needs. ‘We are looking for a church that will meet our needs.’ Isn’t that what most of us say? What is the music like? How can I worship? Do the sermons feed me? Will the youth program take care of my kids?”²⁹ With this mentality, individual believers fall into the trap of treating worship like a product that exists to conveniently satisfy their every need. Unfortunately, as Hull explains further, the Church also falls into a similar trap. He explains, “The church then gets caught up in meeting expectations, fearing that people will not visit or stay, or ever worse, will leave after a while because their expectations were not met.”³⁰ The problem with this type of consumer-based mentality within the Church is that it does not produce “good soil” churches. Hull explains this tension:

Sure, we can run programs, have a wonderful small group ministry, and have an exciting curriculum that people attend in droves. But we cannot expect that people will truly be formed into the image of Christ. Our churches exist for others. We don’t do missions for ourselves; we do them for others. And then our needs are met – our real needs for purpose, joy, and knowing that our lives are right before God. That is why we must drive a stake through the heart of consumer Christianity, and this act must begin with our leaders.³¹

²⁹ Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Pastor: Leading Others On the Journey of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 36.

³⁰ Hull, *The Disciple-Making Pastor*, 37.

³¹ Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Pastor: Leading Others On the Journey of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 37.

Hull recognizes the urgency for individual and congregational engagement in order for effective discipleship to increase within the Church.

Hull's suggestion here provides all the more reason why responding positively to the invitation in John's gospel to "Come and see" is so important. Winseman agrees with Hull, pointing out the significant impact engagement has on overall life satisfaction. Winseman writes, "Among the general population only 43% 'strongly agree' that they are completely satisfied with their lives. Among those who are engaged in their congregations, that ratio is reversed: 61% of the engaged strongly agree that they are completely satisfied with their lives."³²

It is evident from this recent research and literature that individual and congregational engagement is the primary key to a church's spiritual health and well-being. The goal for pastors and religious leaders is to determine ways to achieve these more committed levels of engagement among the communities of faith they serve. Putting one's faith into action is necessary to achieve and experience this kind of engagement. Martin Luther once said of true biblical faith, "While others are debating whether faith produces works, real faith has already run out into the streets and is at work."³³ Luther knew that to believe in Jesus is to follow Him, and that true following is what makes a disciple.

Churches hoping to become "good soil" churches must offer ongoing opportunities. However, opportunities alone are not enough. More of Winseman's

³² Albert L. Winseman. *Growing an Engaged Church: How To Stop "Doing Church" and Start Being the Church Again*. (New York: Gallup Press. 2006), 73.

³³ Bill Hull and Bobby Harrington. "Evangelism or Discipleship: Can They Effectively Work Together?" *Exponential Resources*, (2014): 27.

research points out that while many congregations do a good job of offering classes, workshops, support groups and other opportunities for spiritual growth, there is not enough follow-up with members who take advantage of such opportunities. Pastors and religious leaders may not be challenging their members to grow or helping them find the best ways to grow. As Hull indicated, it will be up to religious leaders to be the change and to make the change that needs to happen regarding individual and congregational engagement.

In order for such change to occur in the church, individuals need to feel a part of something bigger. It is critical for people to feel as though they belong to a system, organization, club, or community if they are going to feel led to invest in it and its mission. This is equally important among individual Christians and entire communities of faith. Winseman explains how “We are created to belong with and to one another,” and how “the phrase ‘individual Christian’ is an oxymoron.”³⁴ Church members desire to know that they matter to their communities of faith, and to know that they’re important and that their contributions matter. Churches do not function at their fullest potential when their members feel insignificant or unnoticed. Too often, members might feel their opinions are unimportant and not taken seriously by church leadership. In an engaged community of faith, individuals’ opinions, though not always popular, are still invited and welcomed. This contributes to the sense of belonging that people are seeking and is critical to a congregation’s effectiveness and success at becoming faithful and effective disciples.

³⁴ Albert L. Winseman. *Growing an Engaged Church: How To Stop “Doing Church” and Start Being the Church Again*. (New York. Gallup Press. 2006), 67.

The Accountability Factor

The problem of acedia is not being addressed thoroughly enough, often enough, or seriously enough by pastors and church leaders. Too few pastors and leaders are teaching how to become what is needed in order to carry out the Great Commission. Dallas Willard points out the “great omission” in the Great Commission is the absence of accountability. He writes,

Ministers pay far too much attention to people who do not come to services. Those people should generally be given exactly that disregard by the pastor that they give to Christ. The Christian leader has something much more important to do than pursue the godless. The leader’s task is to equip saints until they are like Christ, and history and the God of history waits for him to do this job. If someone is anxious about the mission to seek and save those in need of Christ, the most important decision to navigate that anxiety comes from the pastor. What are his plans for the people of his congregation? That decision will determine what he does with his gifts, his time and his heart. The first accountability lies with the minister, pastor or leader. In Matt. 28:19-20, Jesus says that if you want Him to bless your effort—and stay with you to the end of it—then your effort must center on teaching people to obey everything He commanded.³⁵

It is this kind of relationship between church member and pastor and between members that accountability is experienced.

More of Winseman’s research points out the unfortunate reality that deep, meaningful relationships are not being formed in most congregations across the country. He states, “The best congregational environments are those in which there are many real, genuine friendships ... where members feel they can trust the people around them.”³⁶ This brings up the accountability factor that is key to effective and

³⁵ Bill Hull and Bobby Harrington. “Evangelism or Discipleship: Can They Effectively Work Together?” *Exponential Resources*, (2014): 28.

³⁶ Albert L. Winseman. *Growing an Engaged Church: How To Stop “Doing Church” and Start Being the Church Again*. (New York. Gallup Press. 2006), 104.

faithful biblical discipleship practices. Stephen Lim clearly identifies this problem while emphasizing the importance of acknowledging it:

We tend to produce members who support the church, instead of disciples who impact their world. During 30 years in ministry I observed that most pastors settle for appropriate behaviors and a zealous spirit on the part of their members. Much of the time I did the same. If members regularly attended church activities, accepted its basic doctrines, served in a ministry, and did not create waves, I felt satisfied. If they also tithed, contributed to missions, attended prayer meetings, and occasionally witnessed or invited people to church, I practically jumped for joy. Yet believers can do all of these and still live self-centeredly. They can endure miserable marriages, display un-Christlike behavior at church, and irritate their neighbors and coworkers — while making little difference for the kingdom of God. Too often we equate compliance and zeal with maturity. Compliance may be external, without transformation, and zeal simply human enthusiasm instead of deep conviction. Even when genuine, zeal without maturity fails to produce the fruit that it could. We cannot settle for less than continuing growth toward mature and fruitful discipleship.³⁷

Congregations that are more concerned with maintenance than mission, rules than relationships, or inreach than outreach, would fit this description. The fictional character Screwtape, in C.S. Lewis' classic, *Screwtape Letters*, warns, "A moderated religion is as good for us as no religion at all—and more amusing."³⁸ Such individual believers and sometimes entire communities of faith practicing a moderate or lukewarm religion are in need of discipleship that leads to spiritual growth and maturity. They are dependent on clergy and church leaders to provide opportunities for this transition to happen. Accountability is an important component of successful and effective discipleship practices.

³⁷ Stephen Lim. "Why Churches Don't Disciple and How Yours Can." *Enrichment Journal* (Winter 2008). http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200801/200801_048_WhyChDon't.cfm (accessed March 20, 2015).

³⁸ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (London: The Centenary Press, 1942), 96.

To emphasize the importance of accountability in faithful biblical discipleship, Hull wrote, “Accountability is to the Great Commission what tracks are to trains.”³⁹ Individual Christians are not called to “go it alone,” Hull states in his book, *Choose the Life*. As part of belonging to a community of faith, we should expect to be held accountable and to hold others accountable regarding discipleship practices and levels of engagement. Hull writes about the importance of belonging:

Attachment to at least one other person is absolutely essential. I hardly know a soul who has made significant breakthroughs without the help of friends. Many people have said, ‘I’m going to go deep with God,’ but unless they submit to the help of others, it is not likely to happen apart from suffering. The help of others is part of the road of discipline that makes transformation into godliness possible.⁴⁰

When one feels this kind of attachment and belonging within a community of faith, and is open to being held accountable in their faith, it will naturally lead to higher levels of engagement. Creating an atmosphere of belonging and accountability needs to become a priority among leaders, both lay and clergy, within congregations.

Clearly, higher levels of engagement among individual Christians produces more highly engaged communities as a whole, as Francis Chan explains:

Why is it that we see so little disciple making taking place in the church today? Do we really believe that Jesus told His early followers to make disciples but wants the twenty-first-century church to do something different? None of us would claim to believe this, but somehow we have created a church culture where the paid ministers do the ‘ministry,’ and the rest of us show up, put some money in the plate, and leave feeling inspired or ‘fed.’ We have moved so far away from Jesus’s command that many Christians don’t have a frame of reference for what disciple making looks like.⁴¹

³⁹ Bill Hull’s Facebook page. Accessed September 19, 2014.
<https://www.facebook.com/discipleship.billhull?fref=ts>

⁴⁰ Bill Hull, *Choose the Life: Exploring a Faith That Embraces Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2004), 69.

⁴¹ Francis Chan and Mark Beuving, *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: David C Cook, 2012), 30.

Without consideration of such questions or acknowledgement of the problem, the Church will only continue to struggle and will not be effective as it could be in reaching people with the gospel. Dietrich Bonhoeffer states, “So many people come to church with a genuine desire to hear what we have to say, yet they are always going back home with the uncomfortable feeling that we are making it too difficult for them to come to Jesus.”⁴²

Hull warns us of this reality as well, stating, “Because of the weak and shallow character (of the Church), we are not on schedule to the fulfillment of the Great Commission. The cure is to answer the call to the life because faith is more than doctrinal assent – it is action; it is actually following Jesus.”⁴³

It does come down to “actually following Jesus” and not merely saying the words. To be engaged means to be emotionally involved in, or committed to, a cause. Engagement includes more of the heart than the head. Discipleship is a call to put one’s faith into action. This is why research in this area and intentional study and teaching of and about discipleship is imperative to a successful future of the Church. Hull puts the responsibility of making this happen directly on the shoulders of religious leaders today:

The reason society has not been affected by people of faith is because their lives have most often not been accompanied by discipleship. It is like a disappointing baseball team whose farm system is so bad that they keep putting losing teams on the field. They have a nice stadium to play in, they

⁴² Bonhoeffer. *The Cost of Discipleship*. New York: Macmillan (1959), 86.

⁴³ Bill Hull, *Choose the Life: Exploring a Faith That Embraces Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2004), 79.

have the best uniforms, and the organ plays the national anthem, but when they say, ‘Play ball,’ it’s downhill from there.⁴⁴

The church, if it is to continue to grow and bear the fruit it was meant to bear, must pay special attention to “the product on the field.” It must equip, train, support, encourage, pray for and walk with the people in the pews who have been entrusted with a powerful and rewarding responsibility – to make known the mystery of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a world who is longing to hear and understand it.

Fortunately, Hull has seen positive signs of change and has been encouraged by some advancement and improvement he has observed in the area of discipleship over his years of study, while acknowledging that we still have a long way to go. He writes, “I have seen more intentionality to make disciples, even when churches stumble into it under another name such as *spiritual formation*. Discipleship is like the kid on the playground who is chosen last – others don’t realize what he can do until they are desperate and they give him a chance.”⁴⁵ However we do discipleship, encourage engagement, or observe the results of one’s efforts, it is important to be patient and understand that all of it includes a change in lifestyle. Intentional time, study, teaching, practice, and effort needs to be put forth with a sense of immediacy and urgency and as top priority if we are to reap the rewards of the harvest. Winseman acknowledges this as he emphasizes that “Engagement does not happen overnight, and there is no magic pill you can give each of your members to make them more engaged. However, if you stick to it and apply what you’ve learned ... you will succeed in

⁴⁴ Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Pastor: Leading Others On the Journey of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 208.

⁴⁵ Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Pastor: Leading Others On the Journey of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 208.

improving the soil of your church – and become a Good Soil church that produces amazing fruit.”⁴⁶ When this happens, the Church experiences perhaps what the original disciples experienced upon their return home from being sent out by Jesus – pure joy. Winseman affirms such a reward, saying, “You can improve your congregation’s engagement level, and not just ‘do church’ anymore, but experience the joy of truly *being* the Church.”⁴⁷

It is clear then, that when it comes to making disciples, to seeking and saving those who need God, accountability is the necessary missing piece. God has promised to be with His disciples to assure it happens. Jesus said, “And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20, NLT). Hull offers assurance:

The secret is well known and comes from a very old line in the life of Jesus. He told His disciples, “You know the saying, ‘Four months between planting and harvest.’ But I say, wake up and look around. The fields are already ripe for harvest” (John 4:35, NLT). The church’s mission is to make, empower and release an increasing number of disciples. For us, the question isn’t whether it will work. We know it will. God has promised that. The question is, will we do it? Will we lead our churches to do it? Will we fully embrace the revolution that will change the world?⁴⁸

Answering these questions honestly and faithfully, and being willing to accept the challenge they present, will lead to healthier congregations that are actively engaged in faithful biblical discipleship practices.

⁴⁶ Albert L. Winseman. *Growing an Engaged Church: How To Stop “Doing Church” and Start Being the Church Again*. (New York. Gallup Press. 2006), 114.

⁴⁷ Winseman, *Growing an Engaged Church*, 23.

⁴⁸ Bill Hull and Bobby Harrington. “Evangelism or Discipleship: Can They Effectively Work Together?” *Exponential Resources*, (2014): 30.

Healthy Disciples, Healthy Congregations

The *Healthy Congregations* Organization⁴⁹ teaches that healthy congregations are not always tranquil, peaceful, and at ease, as Paul depicted in the second chapter of Acts (Acts 2:44-47). Tension and conflict inevitably exists between individual believers or between congregations and the communities they serve. The presence of tension and conflict naturally can bring a community of faith down and lead to an overwhelming or even, subtle, presence of acedia. This, then, leads to non-engagement and less effective discipleship. Healthy congregations will allow for challenges such as these and do not give in to acedic tendencies when they arise. Instead, as Peter Steinke, founder of Healthy Congregations, Inc. explains,

Congregations exercise control over their reactions to stressful situations. They are governed more by insight, reflectiveness, and objectivity, rather than by instinctual survival reactions. They develop healthy behavior patterns that enable the congregation to analyze what is happening, evaluate the situation calmly, develop different responses, and decide what to do. Pastors and church leaders in healthy congregations keep conflict at a level where human reason and spiritual resources guide them. Healthy leaders avoid the situation where people only want to win rather than reason through differences.⁵⁰

Realistically then, congregations can manage conflict in a way that will lead to more effective and faithful biblical discipleship practices.

Such management hinges on responses to conflict, not reactions to it. Too much unresolved tension and conflict within communities of faith, or tension and conflict that hasn't been addressed in a healthy way, can result in an spirit of negativity and apathy that is difficult to overcome. This then creates, what Winseman

⁴⁹ Healthy Congregations, accessed September 5, 2016, <https://www.healthycongregations.com/>.

⁵⁰ Peter L. Steinke. *Healthy Congregations Facilitator Manual: A Training Program Providing The Skills To Conduct Healthy Congregation Workshops*. Workshop 2, Session 1 (Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, 2002), 17.

refers to as, “actively disengaged members,” as opposed to engaged members, who demonstrate genuine loyalty and commitment and are regularly inviting friends, family members and coworkers to church.

Actively disengaged members are physically present but psychologically hostile. These members have become unhappy with their community of faith and insist on sharing their misery with others, thriving on creating and feeding conflict. Their negativity is a drain on the effectiveness of a congregation’s mission and ministry and overall discipleship practices. This reality emphasizes the importance of focusing on engaged members and their positive efforts at creating a culture that demonstrates faithful biblical discipleship practices that lead to effective evangelism.

This is where the response – versus the reaction – to conflict becomes so important. It is tempting to focus time and energy trying to satisfy or placate the actively disengaged, when instead it is far more productive and useful to focus on creating and growing disciples among those who are engaged. When concentrating more on creating positive energy within communities of faith, it is the hope that disengaged or non-engaged members will have less of an impact on the overall health and vitality of the community. Steinke uses a medical analogy to understand these efforts:

Cancer cells need a host cell to grow and develop. The potential for conflict exists in every congregation. We simply need to invest energy and time on keeping positivity so that host cells have no power. Agents of diseases are not causes of diseases. At times of disequilibrium, an agent of disease may find the opportunity to develop in susceptible hosts. Therefore, strengthening the resistance of the host cells is paramount in treatment rather than focusing singularly on disease agents. Ask not what is causing Y, but what is the relationship between X and Y – the diseases agent and the host cell.⁵¹

⁵¹ Steinke, *Healthy Congregations Facilitator Manual*, 41.

A key word in Steinke’s analogy is relationship. It is interesting that he emphasizes the need to focus not on the individual, but rather on the relationship between individuals.

Winseman elaborates on this idea as well, saying, “The best chance for the actively disengaged to improve their engagement level is not through our attention; it is through their relationships with other engaged members as well as other actively disengaged members who are becoming engaged.”⁵² In light of this, it is not coincidental that Jesus focused less on relationships than on how to be in relationship with one another. Because Jesus knew His disciples so well, He was able to teach them deeply and from His heart. That kind of loving relationship Jesus had for his disciples is possible to miss in the Scriptures, but in the first few days Jesus spent with Peter, Nathaniel, John, Andrew and Philip, He revealed He knew their hearts and motivations. Hull explains:

Jesus gave His disciples what so many ministry leaders today are not willing to give—significant chunks of time. Some theologians estimate that He spent 90 percent of His time with the 12 men. A very private life in a way, but how He disciplined had a very public impact. Many effective leaders spend large amounts of time alone or with a few others. Remember Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane; He mentioned His followers more than 40 times. He knew he was entrusting the mission to them. In that prayer, He asked His father to take care of them (John 17:1-26). Because He considered them the key to His mission to redeem and restore the world, He made His most important time investment in His disciples.⁵³

These genuine relationships demonstrate unity, peace, forgiveness and love. Making this shift from negativity to positivity, from reaction to response, and from conflict to

⁵² Albert L. Winseman. *Growing an Engaged Church: How To Stop “Doing Church” and Start Being the Church Again*. (New York. Gallup Press. 2006), 112.

⁵³ Bill Hull and Bobby Harrington. “Evangelism or Discipleship: Can They Effectively Work Together?” *Exponential Resources*, (2014): 31.

consolation is critical if congregations are to be effective in their efforts at evangelism by providing opportunities for such genuine relationships to happen and to grow. It is this kind of positivity and consolation found in genuine and authentic relationships that lives of individual believers and entire communities of faith begin to flourish.

Eugene Peterson affirmed the importance of relationships in discipleship and ministry as a whole:

It's so important for pastors to understand the Trinity, because it shows that God is totally relational. There's no part of the Godhead that isn't in relationship to the other parts and with us. If we don't saturate ourselves in that relational reality, the values in this world just crowd in on us. It was a big deal for me to make the transition from the ambition of doing really well to entering into relational reality with my parishioners. When they would come to me with a problem, I really wouldn't deal with the problem. I got them talking about their lives in different ways, and it's surprising how many times, after two or three times together, there was no problem. I've decided I'm not going to be a counselor anymore. I'm going to be a man of prayer and invite other people into this.⁵⁴

At a time and in a culture that emphasizes number of churches more than the people in those churches it is helpful to heed Hull's words that caution us to remember what really matters. Hull states, "We like to tell people to 'focus on disciples, not steeples.' When you think of your community, your city, and your country and are describing the church, it's probably natural to think in terms of steeples."⁵⁵ It will be good for the church, for it to refocus on the disciples within it. To do this, is easier than many believe it is. Tom Ehrich comes to a similar conclusion:

An assembly that exists to help people shouldn't be so willing to hurt people — by declaring them worthless, unacceptable, undesirable or strangers at the

⁵⁴ Eugene Peterson, "The Relationally Grounded Pastor." *Leadership Journal* 36, no. 2 (2015). (accessed March 25, 2016) <http://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2015/spring/relationally-grounded-pastor.html>

⁵⁵ Hull and Harrington, *Evangelism or Discipleship*, 31.

gate. An assembly that should relax into the serenity of God's unconditional love shouldn't be so filled with hatred and fear. An assembly that should do what Jesus did shouldn't be so inwardly focused, so determined to be right, so eager for comfort, so fearful of failing. An assembly that follows an itinerant rabbi shouldn't be chasing permanence, stability and property. An assembly whose call is to oneness and to serving the least shouldn't be perpetuating hierarchies of power and systems of preference. Faith should be difficult, yes, because it inevitably entails self-sacrifice and renewal. When we bring our burdens to church, we shouldn't find ourselves feeling intimidated by the in crowds, caught up in conflicts about who is running things, budget anxieties, jousting over opinion or doctrine, or relentless demonizing of whoever is trying to lead. Church should be seeking to redeem humanity, to heal brokenness, to show better ways to live. The millions who are fleeing institutional Christianity in America aren't escaping bad doctrine, shoddy performance values or inconvenient calls to mission. They are escaping the institution itself. It doesn't have to be this way. God certainly doesn't want it this way. Church should be different from society. Instead, it plays by the same rules: get mine, be first, be right, punish the weak, exclude the different, reward the wealthy. Our society needs healthy faith communities.⁵⁶

If communities of faith continue to function this way, the Great Commission will continue to be unfulfilled. It is helpful for a community of faith to occasionally reassess its mission and ministry and to evaluate its effectiveness in the internal, local and global communities it serves. Lim concludes failure to do so will only result in continued ineffectiveness:

The large majority of American churches have accepted flawed ministry goals and approaches to disciple making. These must be exposed and replaced with biblical ones. While doing so poses many difficulties, God calls leaders to lovingly challenge the cultures of their churches. We do not need to change all of a church's ministry paradigms to improve the quality of disciple making. The implementation — even partial — of a single one can improve the process. Sometimes small changes result in visible and positive results, and the accumulation of small victories creates momentum toward progressively greater changes. Then one day, instead of a church that cannot disciple, we will have a church that regularly produces growing disciples.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Tom Ehrich, "Commentary: Church Shouldn't Be This Hard," *Washington Post*, January 7, 2014, accessed June 13, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/religion/commentary-church-shouldnt-be-this-hard/2014/01/07/1d869022-77c0-11e3-a647-a19deaf575b3_print.html

⁵⁷ Stephen Lim. "Why Churches Don't Disciple and How Yours Can." *Enrichment Journal* (Winter 2008). http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200801/200801_048_WhyChDon't.cfm (accessed March 20, 2015).

From Lim's assertion, it is clear that something must change if the transition from apathy to mission is going to happen. For some congregations, a change in culture will need to happen first. While individual believers and communities of faith may be faithful in their service, they may not be mature in their discipleship. Spiritual maturity is a result of choices that honor God. The choices believers make are a determining factor in one's level of spiritual maturity and must be considered when evaluating discipleship practices.

Life-Enhancing, Life-Diminishing

William A. Smith, Certified Spiritual Director and Professor Emeritus of Pastoral Care and Counseling at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, was known for asking, "Is it life-enhancing or is it life-diminishing?" Smith understood the demands of parish ministry, both among leadership and lay membership. He understood the diminishing effects unhealthy conflict and tension could have on a congregation. The word "enhance," in its original Latin form, means, "to raise up or make high." A modern understanding of the word is "to make greater, increase in value, to improve, raise up or to augment." As modern-day disciples of Christ it is critical that Smith's question is continually asked in order to assure choices made are life-enhancing and not life-diminishing. If actions and words were to consistently make greater, increase in value, improve or augment others or situations around us, the Lord's ultimate call to discipleship in His Great Commission would be fulfilled.

Theologian Leonard Sweet offers a comparable distinction between work and play. Much of Sweet's descriptions adequately reflect the difference between daily life-enhancing and life-diminishing choices. Sweet writes, "Play brings faith to life.

We were created to be a risen people. Christians are not those who ‘make life work.’ We are those who make life fun.”⁵⁸

Life-enhancing choices help in discovering purpose and meaning in life. They offer discernment about who we are what we were created to be and do, by and for God. Conversely, life-diminishing choices affect who we are and what God has called us to as much as do life-enhancing choices. Dallas Willard concludes that life-diminishing choices can, and do, lead to a life of non-discipleship and acknowledges it as “the elephant in the church.”⁵⁹ Sweet also emphasizes the need to acknowledge and address this alarming state of discipleship in our individual and communal lives of faith:

It’s time abolish work. It’s time for a theology of play. After five hundred years, the Protestant work ethic has not made us better disciples, only weary and cranky human beings struggling in vain to snag the unattainable dangling carrot we have named ‘assurance’ or being driven forward by the damning stick of ‘eternity.’ Whether stick or carrot, the donkey’s dilemma is the same. How can we move from ‘My life is in my work’ to ‘My life is in my play’?⁶⁰

To understand this further Sweet inquires more deeply:

How many epitaphs could read, “He lived eighty years, but died forty years ago.” So many die intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, years before their physical deaths. The world is filled with the living dead: joyless, passionless, zeal-less, lifeless Christians. The heart can stop living long before it stops beating. The work ethic that would consume us has put some in the grave far too early. “I shall not die, but live,” the psalmist sings in one of the Passover hymns. Have you decided to live and not die? Too many are dying years ahead of their deaths.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Leonard I. Sweet, *The Well-Played Life: Why Pleasing God Doesn't Have to Be Such Hard Work* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2014), 1.

⁵⁹ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (Harper San Francisco, 1998), 301.

⁶⁰ Leonard I. Sweet, *The Well-Played Life: Why Pleasing God Doesn't Have to Be Such Hard Work* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2014), 2.

⁶¹ Sweet, *Well-Played Life*, 9.

From Sweet's perspective and observations, much of the reason modern-day disciples are not eager, enthused or excited to grasp hold of and follow Christ's call to higher living is because they have become accustomed to making choices that diminish themselves, other people or situations around them. "They have died years before their deaths,"⁶² he adds. A prayer Sweet suggests on social media is a simple one: "O Lord, keep me alive while I am still living. Amen."⁶³

A life-diminishing decision is one that reduces enthusiasm, makes smaller the joy experienced in everyday living, and weakens relationships with others. Individual Christians and perhaps entire communities of faith are experiencing the effects of life-diminishing choices and behavior that can, and do, lead to a lack of discipleship as Christ has called us to. Such choices also prevent from experiencing the reward of abundant life and joy that the early disciples experienced. Sweet cautions, "not take life too seriously so that we do not become work-focused, disillusioned, rigid and joyless."⁶⁴ To not pay special attention to the choices that are made every day by members of congregations will likely lead to continued disillusionment and joyless lives of faith.

Eugene Peterson shares this encounter he had with a member of his congregation one Sunday morning:

I bristle when a high-energy executive leaves the place of worship with the comment, "This was wonderful, Pastor, but now we have to get back to the real world, don't we?" I had thought we were in the most-real world, the world revealed as God's, a world believed to be invaded by God's grace and turning

⁶² Sweet, *Well-Played Life*, 9.

⁶³ Leonard Sweet's Facebook page. Accessed July 2, 2016.
<https://www.facebook.com/lensweet>

⁶⁴ Sweet, *Well-Played Life*, 10.

on the pivot of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. The executive's comment brings me up short: he isn't taking this seriously. Worshiping God is marginal to making money. Prayer is marginal to the bottom line. Christian salvation is a brand preference.⁶⁵

What Peterson is lamenting is the fact that this man and many others like him are making life-diminishing choices that impact their understanding of faith and discipleship. To become disciplined at making life-enhancing choices enables us to experience joy in "the real world" and not only in the safety and confines of communities of faith.

Christian theologian Marva Dawn understands and explains,

As we well know, the pressures of life put us out of touch with our deepest feelings and inner desires. A day of Sabbath rest satisfies our profound need for time to allow ourselves to feel, to be sensitive, to experience all the gifts of life more thoroughly. We discover all the emotions that have been buried in the rush of work, and then we can appreciate those deepest feelings that are the genuine components of our personhood.⁶⁶

Dawn agrees with Sweet, that joy and play get buried in the pursuit and rush of work. Life-enhancing choices are critical to experiencing and feeling the abundant life that Jesus promises as he calls us to daily discipleship. Too much work, leadership and administration can remove the joy of faithful biblical discipleship.

Sweet wrote,

While the Bible emphasizes discipleship, most modern day believers focus on leadership, pointing out that the word "disciple" occurs 269 times in the New Testament, "Christian" three times, and "leader" one time ("kubernesis" literally translates "captain of ship"[1Cor.12:28], which we translate as

⁶⁵ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub., 1993), 27.

⁶⁶ Marva J. Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 77.

“leader” or “administer”). The biggest problem of the church today? It’s filled with “Christians” and “leaders,” not “disciples”.⁶⁷

To convince individuals and congregations to focus on mission and faithful biblical discipleship, will make the difference needed in fulfilling the Lord’s Great Commission.

Jim Peterson challenges believers in this way when he writes in relation to Matthew 9 and the harvest metaphor, “We who are Christ’s need to open our eyes and see what is happening. Jesus’ analysis still stands. The harvest is plentiful, and the workers few. His solution also still stands. Go stand on your porch. Pray for the people in the houses around you, even if you don’t know their names. Ask God to send someone to them. Make this a habit. See what happens! It’s your mission as a disciple.”⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Leonard Sweet’s Facebook page. Accessed July 2, 2016.
<https://www.facebook.com/lensweet>

⁶⁸ Jim Peterson, “A Disciple’s Vision: Seeing the World Through Jesus’ Eyes,” *Discipleship Journal*, July & Aug. 1997, 39.

CHAPTER FOUR: PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND RESEARCH METHODS

Data and Methodology

The problem this project addressed is how apathy negatively affects the evangelistic efforts of the Church and overall individual and corporate fulfillment of its Lord's Great Commission. The project was qualitative in nature and relied mainly on five selected case studies. The first three steps of the research involved a thorough review and analysis of relevant biblical, theological and other related literature as well as the development of the necessary tools used to gather information. The primary tools used were observational field notes, individual face-to-face interviews, printed and online open-ended questionnaires for selected churches (Appendices B and C); a printed congregational assessment survey distributed only to Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Stillwater, where the researcher is Lead Pastor (Appendix E); and a church assessment tool (CAT) called Vital Signs created and distributed by Holy Cow, Inc. (Appendix D).

This researcher determined that a phenomenological and grounded theory approach to researching the proposed problem was necessary for gaining the most appropriate understanding of both individual believers and whole communities of faith. Given that faith, spirituality, and understanding of discipleship are significantly affected by and determined by roots and places of origin, this researcher determined this path of research to be most effective. Such grounding and places of origin dictate

who people are, how they act, and how confident they are at fulfilling God's call to discipleship in their lives. This path of research speaks of individual, ordinary, and common experiences, or what Edmund Husserl described as one's "life world" and how that world and the experiences people have had in it and have learned from has shaped them and made them into the people they are.

Congregations too have their own common or shared experiences which shape them into a community of faith. Within the congregational context, this is sometimes referred to as "local theology." Congregations and individual members of congregations are affected by these common experiences and relationships. Such local theology, grounding, and deep rootedness determines the understanding of, the commitment toward, and the fulfillment of Jesus' call to all disciples. Participants in this research were required to consider the significant difference between being and doing in regard to their understandings and practices of discipleship.

Throughout interviews and observations, the researcher was able to get a sense of existing theories and practices of discipleship within each context observed. Individual believers' lives as well as larger communities of faith and discipleship were examined. John Creswell explains the relevance of qualitative research: "[It] empowers individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimizes the power of relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study."¹ Creswell further explains, "This can only be established by talking directly with people, going to their homes or places of work, and allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in the

¹ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2013), 48.

literature.”² For this project, the majority of the participants’ voices were heard through an open-ended questionnaire format which allowed freedom for individual and personal expression and opinion.

This researcher also considered the phenomenological perspective of the proposed problem. The phenomenological goal of research in general is what Paul Leedy and Jeanne Ormrod define as “an attempt to understand people’s perceptions, perspectives, and understandings of a particular situation. In some cases, the researcher has had personal experience related to the phenomenon in question and wants to gain a better understanding of the experience of others.”³ However, to best understand the individual life worlds or local theologies of the individuals and congregations participating in this research, it was necessary to experience it from within and be willing to learn. This researcher understood how difficult the needed separation of one’s self from related experiences was in order to gain proper perspective of the research. Erazim Kohak explains,

Every subject operates within a different horizon; or, simply, even though two humans consider the same experience, they do it against the background of vastly different memories, concerns, and anticipations, so that one person’s meat may be another’s poison. No two perceptions can ever be fully identical, nor can two streams of experience be fully identical. In other words, each of us, including the phenomenologist, starts out within “his own perspective”⁴

² John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2013), 48.

³ Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 9th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2010), 141.

⁴ Erazim V. Kohak, *Idea and Experience: Edmund Husserl’s Project of Phenomenology in Ideas I*, New ed. Univ of Chicago Pr (Tx, 1980), 142.

The importance of recognizing this separation and honoring different perspectives of the proposed problem served as a strength throughout the research. While the researcher's perspective was helpful as a starting point, other points of view helped shape his perspective and guide the research.

A grounded theory perspective was important in this research, as it includes the process that Leedy and Ormrod explain as “people’s actions and interactions related to a particular topic, with the ultimate goal of developing a theory about that process.”⁵ To address the proposed problem, honor the process Leedy and Ormrod describe, and measure it in a way that proved to be valid and reliable, the researcher was selective in which churches to include among the final five case studies. The churches selected were Faith Lutheran Church, Waconia, St. Andrew’s Lutheran Church, Mahtomedi, St. Peder’s Evangelical Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, Faith Lutheran Church, Coon Rapids and Resurrection Lutheran Church, Woodbury. These five churches needed to meet the following criteria: each had experienced a notable transition from apathy to mission; each had experienced a significant time of conflict in recent or past history; each was transitioning towards a healthy, vibrant and growing congregation according Healthy Congregations, Inc.⁶; each had participated in the Holy Cow! Vital Signs Congregational Assessment Study (Appendix D); each was either a member of the Saint Paul or Minneapolis area synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; and each had between 150 – 1200 members. Participants interviewed included the lead pastors of these congregations. Other support staff and elected

⁵ Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 140.

⁶ Healthy Congregations, accessed September 5, 2016, <https://www.healthycongregations.com/>.

leaders of these congregations completed printed questionnaires (Appendix B). A scaled-down online version of the printed questionnaire was made available to members of all five congregations (Appendix C).

To perform a phenomenological study, this researcher knew that face-to-face interviews with the pastors of these congregations would be necessary in order to achieve a representative and qualitative assessment. These interviews, between two and three hours in length, followed Leed and Ormrod's method of phenomenological study and were similar to "informal conversation, with the participant doing most of the talking and the researcher doing most of the listening."⁷ Throughout the interview, the same nine questions (Appendix C) were asked of each of the five interviewed participants. The nine open-ended questions asked were: "When I first joined my church, one thing that impressed me the most about it was ... and what impresses me the most now is ..."; "If a friend asked me, 'What are the best things about your church?' I would list these strengths ..."; "The ways my church has changed in the last five to ten years include ..."; "I remember feeling especially close to God at my church when ..."; "My role in my congregation is to ... and my pastor's role is to ..."; "My congregation has helped to encourage me in my life and vocation by ..."; "As a member of my congregation, I am expected to ... and my pastor is expected to ..."; "In my congregation, discipleship (or following Jesus) means ..."; and "When conflicting concerns or issues arise in our congregation we are good at ...". These questions were designed to get the participants thinking about ways their communities of faith have made a positive impact in their lives. Being reminded of ways the church

⁷ Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 141.

provides for and makes a difference in one's life is helpful when determining ways to overcome apathy and indifference within a church.

These foundational questions guided and gave focus to the conversations. The discussions revealed the intersection of many thoughts around discipleship theories and practices. The informal conversations that followed resulted in clarifying follow-up questions. Additional questions were added to the printed questionnaires, allowing for a more in-depth opportunity of sharing for those who were not going to be interviewed. All of the questions asked of participants, whether in person or through completed questionnaires, were open-ended, asking "How?", "What?" and "Where?" Determining what types of questions to propose affirmed that a collective case study design among the five selected congregations would be an appropriate form of research method. According to Robert Yin, "In general, 'what' questions may either be exploratory (in which case, any of the methods could be used) or about prevalence (in which surveys or the analysis of archival records would be favored). 'How' and 'why' questions are likely to favor using a case study."⁸ Such a collective case study approach helped to provide what Leedy describes as triangulation, defined as "clear and multiple sources of data or evidence collected with the hope that they will all converge to support a particular hypothesis or theory."⁹ Using this method, the researcher was able to draw from various sources of information including interviews, survey, questionnaire, and field notes which led to multiple, reliable, and consistent conclusions about the proposed problem.

⁸ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 5th ed. (London: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2013), 11.

⁹ Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 99.

Because this researcher has an interest in the problem of apathy in the church and how it diminishes overall discipleship practices in the Church, it was important to acknowledge this and to “suspend any preconceived notions or personal experiences that may unduly influence” what was heard throughout the interviews, referring to what Leedy and Ormrod explain as “bracketing.”¹⁰

Sequentially, for each case, there was a data collection stage, a data analysis stage, and a data interpretation stage of the project. Data included observational field notes, interview transcripts and completed questionnaires. The researcher gave care and consideration when analyzing the collected data before making any conclusions. The data analysis stage was the longest of the three stages for each case and included careful reading and re-reading of data collected and a color-highlighting system of common and repetitive words for coding. Then, from all the information gathered, analyzed and coded, six needs emerged: (1) events or activities that provide community and fellowship; (2) opportunities for mission and service; (3) learning and spiritual growth through hearing God’s Word proclaimed and taught; (4) congregations to deal effectively and compassionately with one another when conflict arises; (5) clearly defined expectations regarding discipleship practices from congregations and congregational leaders; and (6) quality and genuine worship opportunities.

To arrive at these core concepts, the researcher narrowed down an extensive list of themes that had arisen from the data collected and classified them into what Creswell calls “categories, themes, or dimensions of information that are broad units

¹⁰ Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 141.

of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea.”¹¹

Based on the categories that had arisen and per Creswell’s suggestion, the researcher looked for prevalent code segments (or labels) that could be used to describe the gathered information and develop core concepts.¹² The core concepts (Table 1) were identified by using both *in vivo* labels¹³—use of exact words used by participants including, community, fellowship, compassion, genuine, opportunity, defined, and expectations—and labels the researcher composed that seemed to best describe the information gathered.

Table 1. Six Core Concepts

1. Community and Fellowship	2. Mission and Service	3. Learning and Spiritual Growth
4. Compassionate Conflict Resolution	5. Defined Expectations	6. Authentic Worship

The validity of this project, both internal and external, was not difficult to obtain. Internally, the conclusions this researcher came to were sufficient and clearly warranted by the data collected and analyzed. The instruments created and distributed were also valid and allowed for various and differing perspectives from participants. Externally, generalizations can confidently be made about the proposed problem beyond the individual case studies observed within the project. Strategies employed,

¹¹ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2013), 186.

¹² Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 186.

¹³ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 185.

such as extensive time spent in the field, obtaining feedback from others and obtaining positive respondent validation,¹⁴ assured the researcher that the six core concepts are generally viewed as necessary within congregations of the ELCA and likely true in all mainline denominational contexts. This affirms the external validity of the project, which in turn will help other pastors and leaders of their own communities of faith. Research conducted in “real life settings” is, according to Ormrod and Leedy, “more valid in the sense that it yields results with broader applicability to other real-world contexts.”¹⁵ The researcher agrees, understanding the six core concepts that arose primarily as key to overcoming spiritual apathy are necessary in any community of faith. If implemented, these concepts will undoubtedly result in mission-driven ministries. The participants interviewed and surveyed provided a strong representative sample from which the final core concepts were determined. This was in part due to the type of qualitative research questions used on the distributed instruments, per Creswell’s suggestion. He suggests, “These questions are open-ended, evolving, and nondirectional. They restate the purpose of the study in more specific terms and typically start with a word such as ‘what’ or ‘how’ rather than ‘why’ in order to explore a central phenomenon. They are few in number (five to seven) and posed in various forms, from the ‘grand tour’ that asks, ‘Tell me about yourself,’ to more specific questions.”¹⁶ This type of questioning helped set the tone for casual and mutual conversation that led to better understanding. There are likely other effective approaches of interpreting data collected for this project and arriving at the

¹⁴ Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 100.

¹⁵ Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 99.

¹⁶ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 138.

conclusions drawn, but the phenomenological approach and its grounded theory foundation made the most sense, proved to be most effective, and was conducted with ease for the researcher. This approach opened up the life-worlds of the participants and enabled the researcher to see into their individual and communal contexts of ministry and discipleship and to observe the effects apathy has had within them.

CHAPTER FIVE: PROJECT ANALYSIS

A complete analysis of data collected through interviews, questionnaires, contextual observations and each congregation's church assessment tool (CAT) summary was concluded and is reported in this chapter. Through careful analysis of the CAT results, this research determined that all of the findings in this study, including the six core concepts, can be included in one of two general categories: Culture and Ministry Impact.

Culture Category

The Culture category (Table 2) includes references to and assumptions regarding how healthy a congregation's local culture is including areas of Hospitality, overall Morale, and Conflict Management.

Table 2. Culture Category

Culture
Hospitality
Morale
Conflict Management

Hospitality

The Hospitality Index seeks to measure the degree to which members perceive that the congregation is engaged in offering themselves and their resources to others who are

new, different, or in need. Persons generally expect that churches will be inviting and supportive communities. The perceptions of visitors and members vary widely. It can be difficult for members to gauge this accurately since some may have a network of relationships that others do not. If scores in these indices are low, it is important to give it priority.

Morale

Morale is the positive, passionate, and persuasive engagement of members in the mission of the church. Morale is positive in that people find energy generated in their experiences with the church. It is passionate in that it engages people emotionally and not simply conceptually or in dutiful behavior. Finally, morale is persuasive in that people sense the need to bring others into the experience. Developing high morale must be a critical long-term strategy. It is not as easily changed as the Hospitality Index. It requires clear direction, the ability to set goals and meet them, and the development of a sense that the work of the church is relevant and meaningful.

Conflict Management

The Conflict Management Index measures the degree to which members believe conflict is appropriately managed and, when possible, resolved.

Ministry Impact Category

The Ministry Impact category (Table 3) includes references to and assumptions regarding how effective a congregation's ministry carries out their mission and practices discipleship. Areas within this category include overall Spiritual Health and Vitality, Readiness for Ministry, engagement in Learning and Education, and participation in Worship.

Table 3. Ministry Impact Category

Ministry Impact
Spiritual Health and Vitality
Readiness for Ministry
Learning and Education
Worship

Spiritual Health and Vitality

The Spiritual Health and Vitality Index measures the degree to which members believe that their faith is central to their lives rather than peripheral or episodic. It is an important index in that it correlates mildly with the Hospitality Index. In addition, the Spiritual Vitality Index relates strongly to the percent of household income members give to the church. This contemporary research-based reality confirms what Jesus said: “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6:21). Spiritual Vitality appears to be lived out through specific generosity of members.

Readiness for Ministry

Over the years, a shift has taken place in the church’s understanding of ministry and one’s readiness for ministry. Some churches call it lay ministry, some lay leadership, others, the ministry of the baptized or the priesthood of all believers. In each case, the basic concept is that all members of a church are called to ministry, and it is the responsibility of the church to help members identify their gifts and connect to ministries that best fit those gifts. The Readiness for Ministry Index measures the

degree to which the church helps members make this transition in their understanding and equips them for their own particular ministry.

Christian Learning and Educational Engagement

Christian education is a life-long process that enriches a person's spiritual life and better prepares him or her for service in the world. The Learning and Educational Engagement Index measures the degree to which members share in that understanding. It also gauges the degree to which the church provides developmentally appropriate education across the entire span of life. In addition, this index recognizes that members live with a variety of schedules. As such, Christian education must be provided in ways that adapt to member needs.

Worship and Music

The worship experience is central to the vitality and growth of a congregation. While members are often engaged in a wide variety of activities, worship is the one experience that every member shares. Research suggests that worship is a primary factor in the morale of a congregation. When the worship experience of a congregation is vibrant, members also tend to feel energized about the work of the church. The Worship and Music Index seeks to capture the congregation's feelings about the quality of the worship experience.

A Closer Look

Following is a more detailed look into each of the five individual congregational case studies the researcher observed and how they compare to one another in each of the Culture and Ministry Impact categories. A summary of the

findings within each area of these two categories and the areas within them provides the foundational outline for each of the five case studies.

Case Studies

Resurrection Lutheran Church, Woodbury, Minnesota

Resurrection Lutheran Church (RLC) of Woodbury was founded in 1996 in an effort to provide a contemporary Lutheran community and worship option to Woodbury, Cottage Grove and the surrounding suburban areas. The congregation was officially organized and became a member of the ELCA in 1998.

In the early years of this congregation, members met for worship at nearby Middleton Elementary School in Woodbury. An associate pastor of youth and family was called in 2000. As the need for space increased, planning for a church building began. Its current 13,000 square foot building was constructed in 2003 and includes a 350 seat sanctuary, offices, nursery, and education space. The master plan for the congregation's 24-acre site includes additional phases which will allow for expanded main worship space and education areas. Resurrection's founding pastor left in 2009, and a new pastor was called and served them until 2015. RLC is a member of the Saint Paul Area Synod and is currently led by their interim lead pastor, Steve Molin, until the congregation's next settled pastor is called. Even while in transition, RLC continues to add new ministries to further their mission to call all people to a vibrant life of faith in Christ.

Culturally, according to their CAT (168 respondents) when compared to other congregations observed, RLC ranked higher in all areas with the exception of their

overall morale. From a Ministry Impact perspective, RLC is strong compared to other congregations observed when carrying out their ministries and mission.

In the area of hospitality, RLC ranked just above average in the 54th percentile. This area of a congregation's culture refers to how valued, well-received, and accepted people feel within their congregation. It also is an effective indication of how supportive the congregation is by offering its resources to others when in need. Overall, RLC felt affirmed in their expression of welcome and hospitality. They ranked near average in response to questions such as, "Our church welcomes and is enriched by persons from many different walks of life" (48.1% agree); "A friendly atmosphere prevails among the members of our church" (48.4% strongly agree); and "Members in our church have been prepared to personally welcome guests in worship services" (40.5% agree). However, RLC ranked low when asked if "Being part of this church community has given new meaning to my life" (26.1% agree); and again only average when asked if we "sense an atmosphere of genuine care and concern among our members in time of personal need" (45.3%). This is notable for RLC, because they identified their top priority as "To develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to reach new people and incorporate them into the life of the church."

In the area of Conflict Management, which measures tolerance within congregations, RLC ranked above average (63rd percentile) when responding to questions such as, "There is a disturbing amount of conflict in our congregation" (47% disagree); and "Problems between groups in this church are usually resolved through mutual effort" (49% agree). Members of RLC have addressed conflict in healthy ways throughout their life together and seem to welcome a diversity of experiences while

tolerating a difference of opinions. In fact, the overwhelming impression in their CAT is that they do not have any current presence of conflict. Respondents perceived the ability to resolve conflict in a healthy way if and when it arises.

In the area of overall Morale, which indicates how likely a member of a congregation would tell others about their congregation and to invite others to worship, RLC ranked below average (41st percentile). Morale is also an indicator of how engaged a member of a congregation is in the mission of their congregation. Questions RLC members ranked highest in regarding morale included the following: “It seems to me that we are just going through the motions of church activity. There isn’t much excitement about it among our members” (30.1% agree); “The whole spirit in our congregation makes people want to get as involved as possible” (37% agree); and “On the whole, I am satisfied with how things are in our church” (38% agree).

RLC’s CAT indicated that members of RLC are “fence-sitters” regarding the excitement level and enthusiasm to get involved in the ministries and mission of the congregation. Their interim lead pastor, Steve Molin, recommends that the congregation review their communication methods and consider how they are communicating the story of their mission and ministry work. He states, “Perhaps we need to grow in the area of talking about the relationship between ministry and mission, and the resulting impact on the people being served or serving.”¹

Within the second category of Ministry Impact, RLC scored well below average (27th percentile) in Spiritual Vitality. This area assesses if the congregation understands their mission and carries it out in their life as a community of faith. It

¹ Steve Molin, interview by author, Woodbury, Minnesota, November 21, 2016.

evaluates if people integrate faith into their daily life and measures the degree to which members believe their faith is central to their lives rather than peripheral or episodic. Of the areas within Ministry Impact, this is their weakest. Their response to questions within this area included the following: “My spiritual experiences often impact the way I look at life” (41.6% strongly agree); “My spirituality is really the basis of my whole approach to life” (35.6% agree); “I experience the presence of God in my life” (48.8% strongly agree); “I work to connect my faith to all the other aspects of my life” (44.7 agree); and “Although my faith is important to me, I feel there are other things more pressing in my life right now” (32.2% tend to disagree).

While the raw data suggested RLC to be a healthy congregation in several ways, their ranking compared to the other churches is in the “very low” category. Molin suggests, “This section seems to be slanted in favor of ‘conservatives,’ while the congregation self-identified as ‘progressive.’ Conservatives tend to measure faith in feelings and experiences; Progressives measure faith as the things we do (faith in action.) We are stronger here than the survey would suggest.”²

The Readiness for Ministry area of the Ministry Impact category is important to determining levels of and reasons for apathy within congregations. This area of evaluation begins with the assumption that all members of a congregation are called to ministry. It is the responsibility of the church to help members identify their gifts and help them connect to ministries that best fit those gifts. Members of RLC as a community ranked above average (54th percentile) in this area answering such questions as, “Our church does a good job helping each member understand that he or

² Steve Molin, interview by author, Woodbury, Minnesota, November 21, 2016.

she is called to ministry” (35.3% tend to agree); “Our church prepares our members for ministry by helping them discern their gifts” (32.1% agree); “Our church provides opportunities for members to engage in active ministry within the church and to the world” (43.3% agree); “Our church does a good job supporting persons in ministry by reminding them that they are making a difference” (45.6% agree); and “In our congregation the laity work with the pastor in leading and planning worship services” (45.1% agree). Molin believes, “While members from RLC agreed that many ministry opportunities exist for them to become involved and engaged in, there is a lack of confidence in their sense of call and the recognition of their unique gifts.”³

An apparent area for growth at RLC moving forward is in the Learning and Education area, ranking only in the 37th percentile of churches studied. Data for this rating came from question such as, “Members understand that they have a spiritual responsibility for life-long learning and formation” (40.7% tend to agree); “Our church provides opportunities for education and formation in a variety of ways so that I can find one that fits my complex lifestyle” (38.9% agree); and “Our church provides high quality education that is appropriate to every age and stage of life” (36.5% agree). It is evident that Christian education and learning is an important and lifelong process of faith development. While it appears that members of RLC do not firmly hold that they have a spiritual responsibility for Christian lifelong learning and faith formation, Molin believes, “Inherent in this low ranking surely is a byproduct of a building that is inadequate to provide space for education for all.”⁴

³ Steve Molin, interview by author, Woodbury, Minnesota, November 21, 2016.

⁴ Steve Molin, interview by author, Woodbury, Minnesota, November 21, 2016.

A final area of the Ministry Impact category affecting overall individual and congregational discipleship practices is the area of genuine worship opportunities. An assumption here is that worship is central to the vitality and growth of any congregation. RLC ranked slightly above average (59th percentile) in the area of worship, responding to questions such as, “The music at our church is outstanding in quality and appropriate in style to our congregation” (44.1% strongly agree); and “The worship services at our church are exceptional in both quality and spiritual content” (45.6% agree). Molin explains, “Our contemporary style is attractive among most, yet there remains a portion of our church that desires traditional Lutheran trappings, as found in liturgy and hymns. Overall, there is the sense that the quality of music is excellent, yet there is a desire for more genuine and stronger spiritual content in the services.”⁵

RLC recognizes it is a congregation continuing to be transformed to meet the needs of its members, surrounding communities, and world. As a church that is continuing to transition from a spirit of apathy towards mission, it is finding a renewed sense of meaning and purpose. As their interim pastor, Molin reports the following as areas they are committed to focusing on in order to improve their overall sense and understanding of discipleship. Molin concludes,

We value our worship experiences, and want them to be exceptional in both quality and spiritual content. Leaders who serve should be representative of the membership and should be genuinely concerned to learn what people are thinking when decisions need to be made. For important decisions, adequate opportunity to consider different approaches should be provided. We need to have more people actively involved at RLC and RLC-sponsored activities. We need to increase our energy level by placing our focus on creating a spirit in our congregation so people want to get involved. Energy and satisfaction work

⁵ Steve Molin, interview by author, Woodbury, Minnesota, November 21, 2016.

hand in hand. By increasing one, the second typically increases as well. Increasing both energy and satisfaction is what will drive RLC to becoming a transformational church. A healthy congregation is an engaged and active congregation. We express the desire to be this kind of congregation. We need the input, ideas, and time of people in this congregation to make this happen.⁶

RLC is providing solid, faith-based ministry and mission and is already making effective and faithful discipleship happen among their members and within their community.

Faith Lutheran Church, Waconia, Minnesota

Faith Lutheran Church of Waconia (FLCW) began in 1968 when a few parents of children nearing Confirmation age felt the need for a local Lutheran congregation that would nurture their children, welcome all, and serve the entire community. As a result of their conversations, a steering committee was formed. With the help of area pastors, arrangements were made for the first service of a new worshiping community. The service was held in the auditorium of Waconia High School on June 16, 1968. By September of that year, members rented a temporary facility for their regular use at the Izaak Walton League clubhouse on Lake Waconia. The congregation continued to grow in spirit and in size. On August 2, 1970, 80 members signed a charter which recognized them as a congregation of the Lutheran Church in America. This congregation was officially named Waconia Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church. The historical records state, “‘Faith’ was chosen because faith was all that early group had to go on! Their faith was well founded as God has brought forth life, growth and opportunities for ministry ever since.”⁷

⁶ Steve Molin, interview by author, Woodbury, Minnesota, November 21, 2016.

⁷ Faith Lutheran Church. Accessed December 15, 2016.
<http://www.waconiafaithlutheran.com/history/>

FLCW has continued to flourish throughout the years in new settings and with new opportunities for worship, learning and fellowship. Subsequent building projects have been undertaken to meet the changing needs of the congregation. The latest project includes the renovation of an education wing and addition of office space and a fellowship hall which was completed in December 2013.⁸ The vision for ministry and mission continues to expand at FLCW. They have been in constant growth since their beginning and continue to be a place of welcome and nurture; they are a congregation striving to make a difference both inside and outside their walls. FLCW states clearly their mission as they understand it: “Using the gifts, skills and contributions of each of our members is important as we follow the leading of the Holy Spirit into a future of gospel-based mission and ministry in Waconia and beyond.”⁹ FLCW is a member of the Minneapolis Area Synod and is currently led by their lead pastor, Dale Peterson.

Culturally, according to their CAT (344 respondents), when compared to other congregations observed, FLCW ranked higher with the exception of their hospitality (36th percentile). From a Ministry Impact perspective, FLCW is also strong compared to other congregations observed when carrying out their ministries and mission with the exception of their Spiritual Vitality (30th percentile).

In the area of Hospitality, according to their CAT, FLCW scored lower than average as they answered questions such as, “Our church welcomes and is enriched by persons from many different walks of life” (46.3% agree); “Being part of this church

⁸ Faith Lutheran Church. Accessed December 15, 2016.
<http://www.waconiafaithlutheran.com/history/>.

⁹ Faith Lutheran Church. Accessed December 15, 2016.
<http://www.waconiafaithlutheran.com/history/>.

community has given new meaning to my life” (34.0% tend to agree); “A friendly atmosphere prevails among the members of our church” (38.9% strongly agree); “I sense an atmosphere of genuine care and concern among our members in time of personal need” (43.1% agree); and “Members in our church have been prepared to personally welcome guests in worship services” (43.4% agree). Pastor Peterson feels the FLCW community is strong in this area as he reflects, “One of my mentors, Bill Starr, the former president of YoungLife, often said, ‘You are the sum total of your relationships.’ When all within our community have a relationship with one another the sum total is a powerful force for Jesus Christ in the Waconia area.”¹⁰

In the area of overall Morale, according to their CAT, FLCW ranked just above average (52nd percentile) answering the questions, “It seems to me that we are just going through the motions of church activity. There isn’t much excitement about it among our members” (29.9% tend to disagree); “The whole spirit in our congregation makes people want to get as involved as possible” (36.2 tend to agree); and “On the whole, I am satisfied with how things are in our church” (46.3% agree).

In the area of Conflict Management, FLCW scored well on their CAT (68th percentile). They responded to questions in this area as follows: “There is a disturbing amount of conflict in our congregation” (44.2% disagree); “Problems between groups in this church are usually resolved through mutual effort” (46.1% agree); “Among most of our members there is a healthy tolerance of differing opinions and beliefs” (42.8% agree); and “There is frequently a small group of members that opposes what the majority want to do” (34.4% tend to disagree).

¹⁰ Dale Peterson, interview by author, Waconia, Minnesota, November 17, 2016.

In regard to their Ministry Impact category, FLCW ranked above average in each area except Spiritual Vitality. In this area, respondents answered the following questions as follows: “My spiritual experiences often impact the way I look at life” (41.5% strongly agree); “My spirituality is really the basis of my whole approach to life” (35.8% agreed); “I experience the presence of God in my life” (50% strongly agree); “I work to connect my faith to all the other aspects of my life” (39.9% agree); and “Although my faith is important to me, I feel there are other things more pressing in my life right now” (22% disagree).

FLCW ranked highest in the area of Readiness for Ministry (77th percentile) responding to these questions: “Our church does a good job helping each member understand that he or she is called to ministry” (38.2% agree); “Our church prepares our members for ministry by helping them discern their gifts” (37.2% agree); “Our church provides opportunities for members to engage in active ministry within the church and to the world” (48.4% agree); “Our church does a good job supporting persons in ministry by reminding them that they are making a difference” (49.3% agree); and “In our congregation the laity work with the Pastors in leading and planning worship services” (55.6% agree).

FLCW also ranked above average (62nd percentile) in their desire for continued Christian Learning and Education. They responded to these questions as follows: “Our members understand that they have a spiritual responsibility for lifelong learning and formation” (38.3% either tend to agree or agree); “Our church provides opportunities for education and formation in a variety of ways so that I can find one that fits my complex lifestyle” (42.7% agree); and “Our church provides high quality

education that is appropriate to every age and stage of life” (39.5% agree). Peterson emphasized the importance they place on this area:

We have a place and opportunities for our members to learn, serve and share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We have opportunities for them to make a difference in the life of an individual and to make a difference in the world. We are intentional in practicing inclusive grace and contagious love. We will continue to provide multiple opportunities for learning and engagement at Faith that members can commit to. This is how they connect with others, grow in their faith, and make a difference in the world.¹¹

FLCW ranked just over average (53rd percentile) in the area of genuine Worship and Music opportunities responding to questions in this area with these results: “The music at our church is outstanding in quality and appropriate in style to our congregation” (43.5% strongly agree); and “The worship services at our church are exceptional in both quality and spiritual content” (40.2% agree).

As a result of their CAT report, Dale Peterson, the lead pastor at FLCW concluded,

Our priorities at Faith have now included the need to form meaningful small groups where people can hear from one another stories of faith, where people get a chance to share their story of why it’s meaningful to them. People must have chance to share how they live out their lives as disciples. Three years ago we were talking budget and staff cuts. Now we are doing well and are financially stable having developed a sense of spiritual generosity.¹²

Peterson believes their prosperity and improved financial situation is due to increased focus on service and mission opportunities as he believes in the motto, “money follows mission.”

St. Peder’s Evangelical Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota

¹¹ Dale Peterson, interview by author, Waconia, Minnesota, November 17, 2016.

¹² Dale Peterson, interview by author, Waconia, Minnesota, November 17, 2016.

Since 1884, St. Peder's Evangelical Lutheran Church (SPLC) has had a strong Lutheran presence in south Minneapolis, moving to their current location near the Mississippi River Parkway in 1961. Begun by Danish seminary students, this congregation's roots are in the Grundtvig tradition, which follows the teachings and practices of Danish pastor Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig. SPLC still cherishes some long-time activities that celebrate that heritage. As their congregational history recalls,

Originally, and still to some degree, our congregation is influenced by these principles of Grundtvig's philosophy: affirming life and rejoicing in creation, respecting the world and caring for it because we are part of nature, claiming the beauty and goodness of ordinary life and the integrity of working with one's own hands, and engaging in lifelong learning and education (not just biblical learning, but engaging in the world).¹³

There are families with third generation presence who remain active in this small but socially active congregation. SPLC draws its members from both the immediate neighborhood and the southern metropolitan area. This congregation is proud of where they have been and, equally importantly, where they are going. Bolstered by a strong sense of community, SPLC welcomes all as their mission statement proclaims, with "open hearts, open hands, and open doors." SPLC is a member of the Minneapolis Area Synod and is currently led by their pastor, Julie Ebbeson.

According to their CAT (77 respondents), in the Culture category, SPLC ranked above average in overall Morale (66th percentile) and Conflict Management (77th percentile), while ranking significantly lower in Hospitality (35th percentile). More specifically, in the area of Hospitality, respondents answered questions as follows, "Our church welcomes and is enriched by persons from many different walks

¹³ "Our History." St. Peder's Evangelical Lutheran Church. October 22, 2014. Accessed November 20, 2016. <http://www.stpeders.org/who-we-are/our-history/>.

of life” (33.8% agree); “Being part of this church community has given new meaning to my life” (36.4% either tend to agree or agree); “A friendly atmosphere prevails among the members of our church” (44.2% strongly agree); “I sense an atmosphere of genuine care and concern among our members in time of personal need” (48% strongly agree); and “Members in our church have been prepared to personally welcome guests in worship services” (30.6 tend to agree). Pastor Julie Ebbeson explains, “We scored fairly well on Hospitality, with most members agreeing that we exhibit a friendly, caring atmosphere, however we could do better with having members prepared to welcome guests personally.”¹⁴

In the area of overall Morale, SPLC ranked above average answering questions as follows: “It seems to me that we are just going through the motions of church activity. There isn’t much excitement about it among our members” (41.9% tend to disagree); “The whole spirit in our congregation makes people want to get as involved as possible” (42.3% tend to agree); and “On the whole, I am satisfied with how things are in our church” (41.9% agree). Regarding their average ranking of overall Morale Ebbeson explains, “Our members feel that the spirit of the church encourages involvement. While some members felt we were ‘just going through the motions,’ most are generally satisfied with the overall Morale at St. Peder’s.”¹⁵

According to their CAT, respondents of SPLC answered favorably in the area of Conflict Management in the following ways: “There is a disturbing amount of conflict in our congregation” (54.9% disagree); “Problems between groups in this

¹⁴ Julie Ebbeson, interview by author, Minneapolis, Minnesota, November 16, 2016.

¹⁵ Julie Ebbeson, interview by author, Minneapolis, Minnesota, November 16, 2016.

church are usually resolved through mutual effort” (52.7% agree); “Among most of our members there is a healthy tolerance of differing opinions and beliefs” (48.6% agree); and “There is frequently a small group of members that opposes what the majority want to do” (41.4% tend to disagree). In response to this higher ranking, Ebbeson shares, “We did quite well in Conflict Management with a general agreement that we resolve our differences constructively, that we are tolerant of differences in opinion and belief, and that our leadership fairly represents the interests of our members, and welcomes alternative approaches.”¹⁶

In the Ministry Impact category, SPLC ranked consistently below average in the areas of Learning and Education (44th percentile), Readiness for Ministry (42nd percentile), and most notably Spiritual Vitality (6th percentile). In the area of genuine Worship and Music ministry opportunities, they ranked above average (69th percentile).

Respondents to questions in the area of Spiritual Vitality answered as follows: “My spiritual experiences often impact the way I look at life” (42.9% agree); “My spirituality is really the basis of my whole approach to life” (40.3% agree); “I experience the presence of God in my life” (42.1% agree); “I work to connect my faith to all the other aspects of my life” (38.7% tend to agree); and “Although my faith is important to me, I feel there are other things more pressing in my life right now” (32.4% tend to disagree). Regarding this low ranking, Ebbeson explains,

Spiritual Vitality measures the degree to which members believe that their faith is central to their lives. We scored lower in this area than the typical church, even though most members agree that spiritual experiences shape their approach to life, and most members work to connect faith to other aspects of

¹⁶ Julie Ebbeson, interview by author, Minneapolis, Minnesota, November 16, 2016.

their lives. This disparity with other churches may reflect influences of our Scandinavian culture, which discourages “wearing one’s faith on one’s sleeve.”¹⁷

SPLC ranked slightly lower than average in the area of Readiness for Ministry. The results show respondents answered questions in this area in these ways: “Our church does a good job helping each member understand that he or she is called to ministry” (39.1% tend to agree); “Our church prepares our members for ministry by helping them discern their gifts” (34% tend to agree); “Our church provides opportunities for members to engage in active ministry within the church and to the world” (52.7% agree); “Our church does a good job supporting persons in ministry by reminding them that they are making a difference” (42.9% agree); and “In our congregation the laity work with the Pastor in leading and planning worship services” (50% agree). Ebbeson explains, “The Readiness for Ministry Index measures the degree to which the church has equipped members to participate actively in the ministry of the church, as opposed to reserving ministry for pastoral staff. Many members of St. Peder’s feel somewhat prepared and empowered to participate in ministry, though a significant minority do not. We could do a better job of helping members recognize their gifts and letting them know they are called to ministry.”¹⁸ This realization has inspired Ebbeson and other elected leaders and staff at SPLC to provide opportunities for spiritual gift discovery and implementation.

SPLC ranked below average in the area of Christian Learning and Education. The results of the CAT report respondents answered questions in this area as follows,

¹⁷ Julie Ebbeson, interview by author, Minneapolis, Minnesota, November 16, 2016.

¹⁸ Julie Ebbeson, interview by author, Minneapolis, Minnesota, November 16, 2016.

“Our members understand that they have a spiritual responsibility for life-long learning and formation” (43.1% agree); “Our church provides opportunities for education and formation in a variety of ways so that I can find one that fits my complex lifestyle” (39.4% agree); and “Our church provides high quality education that is appropriate to every age and stage of life” (39.1% tend to agree). Ebbeson agrees that, “Our members generally feel a responsibility for lifelong learning and believe the church provides a variety of opportunities for education in all stages of life, however, compared to other churches that took the survey, we are just a little below average for this metric.”¹⁹ This understanding has increased Ebbeson’s commitment to providing ongoing faith formation opportunities at SPLC.

SPLC ranked higher than average (69th percentile) answering questions related to this area as shown in these responses: “The music at our church is outstanding in quality and appropriate in style to our congregation” (66.7% strongly agree); and “The worship services at our church are exceptional in both quality and spiritual content” (31.6% agree). Ebbeson is affirmed by this as she states, “A majority of our members taking the survey feel that St. Peder’s provides outstanding music and worship experiences.”²⁰

As a relatively small congregation, SPLC is an exceptionally healthy and vibrant community of faith. According to Pastor Ebbeson, they have developed a strong sense of mission within and beyond their walls and their CAT Vital Signs report accurately depicts who they are. Based on these results she concludes,

¹⁹ Julie Ebbeson, interview by author, Minneapolis, Minnesota, November 16, 2016.

²⁰ Julie Ebbeson, interview by author, Minneapolis, Minnesota, November 16, 2016.

Our members get satisfaction from our welcoming of persons from many walks of life, from a sense that our leadership represents our members well, and from our many opportunities to engage in ministry inside and outside the church. Our energy comes from our welcoming of persons from many walks of life, our high-quality education for all ages, and our exceptional worship services. Overall, our members agree fairly well on what our priorities should be, including reaching new people and incorporating them into the life of the church, attracting young families with children and youth, and developing ministries that work toward healing those broken by life circumstances.²¹

SPLC is a model for small communities of faith of how to effectively transition from apathy to mission. Pastor Ebbeson has been instrumental in guiding this transition and has proven to be an effective leader of change and growth.

Faith Lutheran Church, Coon Rapids, Minnesota

Faith Lutheran Church (FLC) of Coon Rapids was founded in 1955. It began in January of that year when the Board of Home Missions sent Harold Tollefson, a young seminary student, to survey the area to determine the level of interest in starting a new Lutheran congregation. In March of 1955, 82 persons gathered for the first worship service in a vacant store. In July, there were 117 members and at the end of the year, 169. Currently the membership has grown to over 4000 baptized members. FLC began as a Lutheran Free Church. Congregation members voted to merge into the American Lutheran Church in 1961, and FLC became a part of the ELCA in 1988. FLC is a member of the Minneapolis Area Synod and is currently led by their lead pastor, Kevin Doely.

The CAT Vital Signs report (541 respondents) shows FLC ranking below average in all three areas of the culture category including Hospitality, overall Morale and Conflict Management. Most notably, in the area of Hospitality, they ranked only in the 24th percentile. Respondents' answers to the questions in this area are reported

²¹ Julie Ebbeson, interview by author, Minneapolis, Minnesota, November 16, 2016.

as follows: “Our church welcomes and is enriched by persons from many different walks of life” (44.1% agree); “Being part of this church community has given new meaning to my life” (35.9% agree); “A friendly atmosphere prevails among the members of our church” (37.9% agree); “I sense an atmosphere of genuine care and concern among our members in time of personal need” (44.2% agree); and “Members in our church have been prepared to personally welcome guests in worship services” (33.9% agree).

In the area of overall Morale, according to their CAT report, FLC ranked just below average in the 46th percentile. Responses to questions in this area included: “It seems to me that we are just going through the motions of church activity. There isn't much excitement about it among our members” (27.7% tend to disagree); “The whole spirit in our congregation makes people want to get as involved as possible” (36.2% tend to agree); and “On the whole, I am satisfied with how things are in our church” (37.9% agree).

In the area of Conflict Management, according to their CAT report, FLC also ranked just below average in the 44th percentile. Respondents provided these answers: “There is a disturbing amount of conflict in our congregation” (36.5% disagree); “Problems between groups in this church are usually resolved through mutual effort” (44% agree); “Among most of our members there is a healthy tolerance of differing opinions and beliefs” (41.4% agree); and “There is frequently a small group of members that opposes what the majority want to do” (29.6% tend to agree).

The CAT Vital Signs report for FLC shows that in the Ministry Impact category FLC ranked below average in the areas of Spiritual Vitality (47th percentile)

and Readiness for Ministry (43rd percentile). However, in the areas of Christian Learning and Education (68th percentile), and Worship (64th percentile), they ranked above average. Pastor Doely reflects:

As the pastor of FLC one of my biggest responsibilities is the spiritual care of this church. I often wonder what kind of church God is calling us to be? I know we are a church where all are invited to come and receive the good news of God's love and to grow in faith, but can we be more? I wonder if we will become increasingly a church where you don't just come to receive only, but to be equipped to share God's light with others and to bring good news to extended families, workplaces, and neighbors.²²

Pastor Doely's strong practice of pastoral and spiritual care has helped FLC in their transition from apathy to mission. His leadership skills and ability to equip others can be credited for the transformative ministry and mission FLC continues to experience.

In the area of Spiritual Vitality, respondents answered questions as follows:

“My spiritual experiences often impact the way I look at life” (42.4% strongly agree); “My spirituality is really the basis of my whole approach to life” (38.0% agree); “I experience the presence of God in my life” (50.8% strongly agree); “I work to connect my faith to all the other aspects of my life” (38% agree); and “Although my faith is important to me, I feel there are other things more pressing in my life right now” (37% tend to disagree).

In the area of Readiness for Ministry, respondents answered questions as follows: “Our church does a good job helping each member understand that he or she is called to ministry” (36.2% tend to agree); “Our church prepares our members for ministry by helping them discern their gifts” (33% both tend to agree and agree); “Our church provides opportunities for members to engage in active ministry within the church and to the world” (50.6% agree); “Our church does a good job supporting

²² Kevin Doely, interview by author, Coon Rapids, Minnesota, December 1, 2016.

persons in ministry by reminding them that they are making a difference” (44.3% agree); and “In our congregation the laity work with the pastor in leading and planning worship services” (38.9% agree).

In the area of Christian Learning and Education, respondents answered questions as follows: “Our members understand that they have a spiritual responsibility for lifelong learning and formation” (41.5% agree); “Our church provides opportunities for education and formation in a variety of ways so that I can find one that fits my complex lifestyle” (41.4% agree); and “Our church provides high quality education that is appropriate to every age and stage of life” (38.7% agree). Doely believes that FLC does an exceptionally good job in this area of Education ministry. He reflects,

Faith Lutheran Church offers diverse learning experiences and the church’s constituents stay informed about them and engage in them at a higher rate than the average church that has completed the survey. In addition, those who completed the CAT report that the education offerings of the church are high quality and meet the needs of people at a variety of life stages. This strength reflects well the church’s Lutheran heritage as well as the need to help people grow in faith in a variety of ways.²³

Doely has intentionally focused on providing high quality and applicable learning opportunities that reach not only long-time Lutherans, but also those new to the faith, including the millennial generation. Doely’s weekly online podcast is another significant component of the congregation’s effectiveness in this area.

In the area of Worship, respondents answered questions as follows: “The music at our church is outstanding in quality and appropriate in style to our congregation” (51.7% strongly agree); and “The worship services at our church are

²³ Kevin Doely, interview by author, Coon Rapids, Minnesota, December 1, 201

exceptional in both quality and spiritual content” (38.7% agree). Doely shared about FLC's worship and music ministry:

Our worship and music at Faith is a “stand out” ministry. There is a large number of musical groups who apply their talents with dedication and energy. High quality and diverse styles are hallmarks of the music ministry of Faith. People come to worship expecting to be inspired and they are seldom disappointed. This strength is essential to the vitality of any church and the central mission to change lives through music and the sharing of God’s Word.²⁴

FLC offers authentic, diverse, and relevant worship opportunities for believers of all ages. This is an important component of the overall effectiveness in promoting faithful biblical discipleship practices at FLC.

Doely feels like all of the CAT results confirmed his own observations, stating:

“There is a lot to celebrate at Faith. In my time here I have experienced dynamic worship, effective education programs, a deeply caring community, and a lively and faithful passion for the mission of Jesus Christ.”²⁵ In addition to this overall affirmation of FLC, Doely credits their adaptability and resilience for the level of mission and discipleship that exists among them. He concludes,

The people who make up this congregation deal with change more effectively than people in the average church. While tradition is important, the church is also open to innovation and new ideas that can improve its mission. This strength is essential to any church in the 21st century when all churches must strike a balance between the way things have been and the development of ministries that renew the church.²⁶

²⁴ Kevin Doely, interview by author, Coon Rapids, Minnesota, December 1, 2016.

²⁵ Kevin Doely, interview by author, Coon Rapids, Minnesota, December 1, 2016.

²⁶ Kevin Doely, interview by author, Coon Rapids, Minnesota, December 1, 2016.

FLC is an example of a large community of faith that has effectively transitioned from apathy to mission. They provide solid and relevant transformative ministry and mission opportunities for members of all ages and generations.

St. Andrew's Lutheran Church, Mahtomedi, Minnesota

St. Andrew's Lutheran Church (SALC) in Mahtomedi, like most churches, had humble beginnings in 1922 as local residents in the area felt the need for starting a new congregation. SALC has been blessed in unique ways since their beginning, growing at a rapid pace ever since. They have expanded in membership and physical size consistently throughout the years, with a current membership of nearly 9,000. SALC is known throughout the ELCA and the Saint Paul and Minneapolis Area Synods as a dynamic, engaging and active worshiping community. They are known for their active youth group and energizing worship and music program. The expanding campus of SALC now has school options, senior living, and a separate youth building. SALC is a member of the Saint Paul Area Synod and is led by Pastor Michael Carlson.

According to their CAT Vital Signs report (1100 respondents), SALC ranked above average in all areas of ministry within both Cultural and Ministry Impact categories. In the area of Hospitality it ranked in the 63rd percentile. In the area of overall Morale, SALC ranked very high in the 89th percentile. In the area of Conflict Management the congregation ranked just above average in the 53rd percentile.

In the area of Hospitality respondents answered questions as follows: "Our church welcomes and is enriched by persons from many different walks of life (41.1% agree);" "Being part of this church community has given new meaning to my life

(36.6% agree);” “A friendly atmosphere prevails among the members of our church (42.7% strongly agree);” “I sense an atmosphere of genuine care and concern among our members in times of personal need (45% agree);” and “Members in our church have been prepared to personally welcome guests in worship services (41.4% agree).”

The lead pastor at SALC, Michael Carlson, shared,

Practicing radical hospitality can be a gift for you and for others. You don't know who you might meet when you extend your hand, how that person could shape your life or how you can shape theirs. Christ has called us into this community. I believe that by the power of the Holy Spirit, each of us is here on purpose and it is up to us to get to know each other, to open ourselves up and welcome all who come to our community and to our worship.²⁷

Carlson is wise to point out the need to extend a hand and word of welcome within the exceptionally large community of faith at SALC. Despite the physical growth they have experienced throughout the years, SALC has been able to maintain a strong sense of community. This has been a continued strength, modeled by leadership, that has helped with their transition from apathy to mission throughout the years.

In the area of overall Morale, respondents answered questions as follows: “It seems to me that we are just going through the motions of church activity. There isn't much excitement about it among our members (41.1% disagree);” “The whole spirit in our congregation makes people want to get as involved as possible (39.9% agree);” and “On the whole, I am satisfied with how things are in our church (44.2% agree).”

SALC scored lowest of all areas of ministry in the area of Conflict Management. Respondents answered questions in this area as follows: “There is a disturbing amount of conflict in our congregation” (48.6% disagree); “Problems between groups in this church are usually resolved through mutual effort” (44.5%

²⁷ Michael Carlson, interview by author, Mahtomedi, Minnesota, December 1, 2016.

agree); “Among most of our members there is a healthy tolerance of differing opinions and beliefs” (45.9% agree); and “There is frequently a small group of members that opposes what the majority want to do” (31% tend to agree).

In all four areas of the Ministry Impact category, SALC scored significantly above average. In the area of Spiritual Vitality, they ranked in the 88th percentile. In the area of Readiness for Ministry, SALC ranked in the 89th percentile. In the area of Christian Education and Learning, they ranked in the 91st percentile. Most notably, in the area of worship they ranked in the 99th percentile.

In the area of Spiritual Vitality, respondents to the CAT answered as follows: “My spiritual experiences often impact the way I look at life” (56.2% strongly agree); “My spirituality is really the basis of my whole approach to life” (39.7% strongly agree); “I experience the presence of God in my life” (60.6% strongly agree); “I work to connect my faith to all the other aspects of my life” (40.1% agree); and “Although my faith is important to me, I feel there are other things more pressing in my life right now” (31.7% disagree).

In the area of Readiness for Ministry, respondents answered questions as follows: “Our church does a good job helping each member understand that he or she is called to ministry” (42.5% agree); “Our church prepares our members for ministry by helping them discern their gifts” (39.7% agree); “Our church provides opportunities for members to engage in active ministry within the church and to the world” (47% strongly agree); “Our church does a good job supporting persons in ministry by reminding them that they are making a difference” (48.8% agree); and “In

our congregation the laity work with the lead pastor in leading and planning worship services” (44.2% agree).

In the area of Christian Learning and Education, respondents answered questions as follows: “Our members understand that they have a spiritual responsibility for life-long learning and formation” (44.7% agree); “Our church provides opportunities for education and formation in a variety of ways so that I can find one that fits my complex lifestyle” (40.9% agree); and “Our church provides high quality education that is appropriate to every age and stage of life” (39% agree).

In the area of Worship, respondents answered questions as follows: “The music at our church is outstanding in quality and appropriate in style to our congregation” (83.1% strongly agree); and “The worship services at our church are exceptional in both quality and spiritual content” (49.6% strongly agree). Carlson explained the importance SALC puts on this area of Worship and Music, and how it continues to shape who they are as a faith community:

We invite people to worship because we believe worship changes and transforms lives. How, you may ask, can one hour change and transform lives? It is about what we gather around that changes us. We gather around the Word. The Word is the Bible, the word is Jesus, the Word is the structure that holds the whole universe together. We are people of the Book. Gathering around that Book is much like gathering around the family table where our family stories are told. It is where we find our place and our identity. Gathering around the Word is where we find our sense of purpose. We also gather around sacraments, two of them. A bath and a meal. Baptism and Holy Communion. We experience together the forgiveness of sin, the washing into new life and the promise of the Holy Breath of God moving into the lives of human beings. We break bread and drink wine in a powerful, cosmic moment when the Triune God and humanity dance in one cosmic timeless moment. We worship because God has gifted us with a call to be in communion with the Divine and others in community.²⁸

²⁸ Michael Carlson, interview by author, Mahtomedi, Minnesota, December 1, 2016.

Carlson's solid understanding of worship promotes a nurturing community and strengthens the congregation's discipleship practices.

Reflecting on the results of their overall CAT findings Carlson concludes,

We want to engage and equip members. We have created a discipleship model for all ages, a Center for Christian Leadership, and a robust plan for children, youth, and family ministries so we can continue to present engaging programming and ways for kids and youth to grow in faith. Under the guidance of our Discipleship Pastor John Straiton, we have a plan and a process for deepening our congregation's commitment to following Christ.²⁹

SALC is exceptional in physical size and available resources. They are fortunate to have a pastor in charge of discipleship on their pastoral staff. This would be ideal for communities of faith that can afford such a blessing, but not typical for small to mid-size congregations.

Research Findings

In addition to analyzing the individual CAT reports of the five churches, three other research instruments were analyzed. These instruments included a printed open-ended questionnaire distributed to staff, elected leaders and pastors of the five churches (Appendix B), an online open-ended questionnaire that distributed through email and social media (Appendix C), and a printed and online worship and engagement survey for Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Stillwater where the researcher serves as lead pastor.

Only six of the printed open-ended questionnaires were returned, all from staff members at Faith Lutheran Church in Waconia, Minnesota, making this instrument ineffective to the project as a whole. The length (24 questions) might have contributed to the low response count. In comparison, 31 online questionnaires were completed

²⁹ Michael Carlson, interview by author, Mahtomedi, Minnesota, December 1, 2016.

which only asked nine questions, making it more useful, though still not completely reliable by itself. Because the online respondents to the open-ended questionnaire were anonymous, associating them with a specific congregation was not possible. A larger participation response regarding the worship and engagement survey came from the researcher's own congregation of Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Stillwater, Minnesota. A total of 169 worship and engagement surveys (both printed and online) were completed. These surveys addressed both questions about worship preferences (time and style) and congregational engagement. The researcher is confident that the combined minimal data collected from the open-ended questionnaires and survey, added to the 2,230 total respondents to the CAT studies previously administered in the five selected churches, still provides the necessary and adequate information to affirm the findings reported.

The common themes noted in the previous chapter were consistent throughout all the data collected and were found within each research instrument used. Several themes emerged and the top six were selected as core concepts relating specifically to managing the transition from apathy to mission among individual believers and entire communities of faith. These six core concepts explored needs in the following areas: (1) events or activities that provide community and fellowship; (2) ongoing and various opportunities for mission and service; (3) learning and spiritual growth through hearing God's Word proclaimed and taught; (4) congregations to deal effectively and compassionately with one another when conflict arises; (5) clearly defined expectations regarding discipleship practices from congregations and congregational leaders; and (6) quality and genuine worship opportunities.

As the CAT reports affirmed higher percentages of satisfaction in areas related to these concepts, so did individual responses from the other research instruments used.

Core Concepts

Community and Fellowship

Opportunities for community and fellowship within churches are necessary and can be a key factor in increased engagement and faithful discipleship practices. Common words such as community, fellowship, people, relationships and friends were noted numerous times throughout the data analysis. This is demonstrated in the question, “If a friend asked me, ‘What are the best things about your church?’ I would list these strengths ...” Some answers included, “the people,” “the friendliness,” “the family feeling,” “the community,” “our time of fellowship,” and “the personal connection.” Such responses affirm Albert Winseman’s belief that belonging (engagement) leads to believing (commitment).³⁰

Opportunities for Mission and Service

A popular theme emerging among the responses to the questionnaires was the need for opportunities in mission and service. This theme was prevalent in the response to the question, “In my congregation, discipleship (or following Jesus) means ...” Representative individual responses included, “to serve and engage with members of our church and community”; “more action and less talk”; “community involvement”; “to expand oneself to live for others”; “to serve”; “being the hands and

³⁰ Albert L. Winseman, *Growing an Engaged Church: How to Stop* (New York: Gallup Press, 2007), 47.

feet of Jesus”; “doing for others”; and “to actively participate in the mission of my church.” To overcome apathy opportunities for mission and service are important to developing and nurturing discipleship within congregations.

Opportunities for Spiritual Growth and Learning

Two different open-ended questions resulted in respondents indicating a significant need for spiritual growth through Learning and Education. One question addressed the pastor’s role in the congregation. Respondents answered, “to provide me opportunities to grow in my faith through teaching and Bible study;” “to help me study the Bible and apply the lessons it teaches to my life today;” and “to equip me for ministry through teaching the Word.” A second open-ended question asked, “My congregation has helped to encourage me in my life and vocation by ...” Many responded similarly answering, “allowing me to wonder, ask questions, and share doubts;” “encouraging me to learn;” “the teaching;” “offering opportunities to learn more about my Lord and Savior;” and “inviting me to a neighborhood Bible study when I was new to the congregation.” These responses reveal a connection between spiritual growth through Learning and Education and effective biblical discipleship practices.

Effective Conflict Management

The data affirmed the way in which communities of faith handle conflict can directly affect levels of apathy or engagement. Of those participating in this research, the majority experienced that transition from apathy to mission was related to the healthy ways they have dealt with conflict. In response to the open-ended question, “When conflicting concerns or issues arise in our congregation, we are good at ...” a

consistent and positive theme among answers arose, including the following: “looking to Jesus as an example of understanding”; “focusing on what brings us together”; “keeping our commitment to Jesus first”; “open communication”; “addressing conflicting concerns and working through them instead of ignoring them”; “dealing with conflict in loving and respectful ways”; “praying and listening for God’s guidance”; and “prayer and resolution – prayer first as a congregation, then resolution as God leads us.” This core concept was also affirmed in the biblical and literature review of conflict and its effect on faithful biblical discipleship practices.

Clearly Defined Expectations

Clearly defined expectations of both members of churches and their pastors are also indicated in the research as an important factor to effectively transitioning from apathy to mission within individuals and congregations. Two open-ended questions were asked of participants in the study, one regarding expectations of church members and one regarding expectations of pastors. Though distinctly different, the responses were not surprising to the researcher. The first open-ended question asked was, “My role in the congregation is to ...” and responses mostly focused on some form of participating especially in the areas of serving, learning and worshiping. Specific responses included, “be involved”; “participate”; “be the church”; “worship and to serve”; “learn”; “use my gifts to help the church”; “serve”; “support the church wherever needed”; “live an authentic life”; and “be an active participant in our mission.” In response to the second question, “My pastor’s role in the congregation is to ...” participants clearly noted what they expect of their pastor, including “keep people connected”; “to welcome others”; “to encourage me”; “to teach, uplift, serve,

worship and engage personally with members”; “teach”; “guide us”; “provide opportunities to grow in faith”; “lead”; “equip me for ministry in daily life”; “challenge me to grow in my faith and love for Jesus”; “to provide vision on how our church can reach more people with the gospel”; “give us hope for the week”; “comfort and lead”; “help inspire us to be good people”; and “nourish me.” The churches studied in this research have experienced positive transition from apathy to mission because their pastors and leadership have communicated clearly what is expected of them just as their pastors have clear definitions of what is expected of them.

Authentic Worship

The need and desire for authentic opportunities for worship and praise was a recurring theme throughout responses to the open-ended questionnaire and congregational engagement and worship survey. Responses to the open-ended question, “I remember feeling especially close to God at my church when ...” included the following: “I participated in a healing worship service”; “worship is real and relevant”; “the congregation is singing”; “receiving Holy Communion”; and “the pastor brings Word and sacrament and teaches salvation through Christ in worship.” These, and more responses similar to them, affirm the research that suggests worship is a primary factor in the morale and missional understanding of a congregation.

Summary

Each of these concepts, when intentionally provided for within communities of faith, has shown to create an atmosphere of discipleship and mission. When congregations are focused on their mission and call to discipleship, as defined by

Christ in Scripture, the result is effective for both the individual and the community.

Church Wellness Consultant J. Russell Crabtree explains:

If we worry too much about how people in the church are doing, it will simply accelerate the trend toward an inwardly focused, consumer-driven church where members are preoccupied with their own needs and oblivious to the needs of the world. The exact opposite appears to be the case. The better members feel about their life within the body of Christ, the more likely they are to focus upon the needs of the world outside the church. This would suggest that one of the best ways to get people engaged in the needs of the world is to develop a church where members give evidence of high levels of satisfaction and energy.³¹

When individual believers, church staff, clergy and elected leaders give attention to these six core concepts the bridge from apathy to mission can be crossed and faithful and effective biblical discipleship practices begin to take shape.

The data gathered from each of the instruments used provided evidence of the connection between use of these six core concepts and faithful discipleship practices.

What was most notable among the core concepts was the need for community and fellowship within congregations and among individual believers. Crabtree affirms this finding:

Any effective leader realizes that relationships are the way that things get done in an organization. In a church, relationships have the power to get you an appointment in someone's busy calendar; catalyze and attract resources (time, talent, money) to new endeavors; mobilize a critical mass of people in support of a project; and hold detractors in check who otherwise might sabotage what you are trying to accomplish. Relationships, not administration, are the key to long-term efficiency.³²

These "relational networks" to which Crabtree refers are really what individual believers and congregations are seeking in community and fellowship. As evident in

³¹ J. Russell Crabtree, *Owl Sight: Evidence-Based Discernment and the Promise of Organizational Intelligence for Ministry* (Columbus, OH: Magi Press, 2012), 180.

³² Crabtree, *Owl Sight*, 58.

the research, investment in relationships and the community as a whole is necessary in order to overcome apathy and move toward mission. The case studies show that regardless of the size of the community of faith, this is true. A smaller congregation, because worship itself is intimate, provides connectedness within its larger gatherings; a large congregation must downsize its gatherings to a size in which the members feel connected.

Beyond the need for community and the difference it makes in transitioning from apathy to mission, the other concepts have proven to be equally necessary and effective. Among the congregations and individuals participating in this research, opportunities for mission and service, spiritual growth and learning, and authentic worship were all available and communicated as key to the overall health, well-being, and effectiveness of their ministries. Effective Conflict Management and clearly defined expectations were also indicative of overall congregational engagement and discipleship practices. Where expectations are not clearly defined, communities of faith find themselves immersed in the apathy and conflict that tend to diminish overall effectiveness and discipleship.

Crabtree warns of the danger of dissonance that can set in within communities of faith who do not have a clearly defined purpose:

Webster defines *dissonance* as inconsistency between the beliefs one holds or between one's actions and one's beliefs. Scaled up to the level of a congregation, I define *dissonance* as wanting two different things that are mutually exclusive. This dissonance is usually sustained by a disconnect between faith and action, which makes it a spiritual issue as well. For this reason, I call it *spiritual dissonance*, which I define as a state in which a congregation desires two different things that are mutually exclusive and that is sustained by a disconnect between faith and action. Spiritual dissonance is at

the heart of the suffering for many churches, and it manifests itself in a number of different ways.³³

What Crabtree describes is perhaps another way of explaining the apathy or acedia that this research has highlighted within individual believers and congregations. The most notable expression of spiritual dissonance might be the contradiction between the congregation's priorities and the needs of the community it is called to serve. If the priorities and needs are not clearly defined and aligned overall Morale and faithful discipleship practices will suffer.

The core concepts emerging as necessary for missional work and discipleship within congregations were not surprising to the researcher, nor would they be surprising to most clergy or church leaders. Still, the findings did affirm the basics of faithful biblical discipleship as noted in Scripture. Specifically they bring the believer and the church leader back to what might be considered Jesus' "inaugural address"—the proclamation of the mission for which He was sent (Luke 4:18-19).

³³ Crabtree, *Owl Sight*, 96-97.

CHAPTER SIX: EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

Practicality of the Project

The project is practical for both lay leaders and clergy who struggle with the proposed problem of apathy within congregations. It is not difficult to interpret, and the findings are applicable to all ministry contexts. Apathy among believers and within communities of faith is an often overlooked concern. Pastors, church staff members, and elected leaders experience the struggle that comes with the lack of engagement and faithful biblical discipleship practices within their congregations. This project provides for them an explanation for what is being experienced and the opportunity, encouragement, and permission to identify it and claim it. The proposed problem of apathy in the church and its negative effects on discipleship in and of itself is practical. It involves action, or in the case of the proposed problem, inaction. However, one's response to the problem is equally practical. This project is intended to provide the practical guidance and direction needed to help overcome the disinterest and non-engagement of members within communities of faith and can be accomplished in ways in which both lay and clergy can participate.

This research and the findings associated with it enables leaders of congregations and individual believers to bridge the transition from apathy to mission. When the core concepts described within the research are clearly communicated and

implemented with intention, it is the hope of this researcher that congregations will experience renewal.

Strengths of the Project

The researcher was able to evaluate his own ministry, understanding of discipleship, and style of leadership throughout the research process for this project. The case studies provided unique opportunities for the researcher to visit other congregations and observe how ministries—including service, worship, education, and hospitality—are carried out within them. This has helped the researcher determine best practices for his own ministry and how members of the congregation he serves might more favorably respond to their own call to discipleship. The project has provided new opportunities for networking and a resource base to be drawn from in the future as questions or concerns of ministry and mission arise. The pastors of each of the congregations studied are confident in their senses of call and strong in their ability to faithfully carry it out. They each were inspired by the subject of this research and appreciated the time the researcher devoted to address it. It is important that clergy have opportunity to review research such as this and a resource base to draw from as they navigate the sometimes rough waters of ministry in their own communities.

An additional strength of the project is that the researcher has also come to understand that his understanding of discipleship sometimes differs from that of his parishioners. Church members look to their pastors, elected leaders, and paid staff to model, educate, and inform them of what they need to know to fulfill their own call and the community's call to faithful discipleship. From the research it was learned that a more informed and well-communicated mission can help congregations evaluate

current and previous models and curricula of discipleship to be more effective. To reach individual believers and congregations in this new way, pastors and church leaders must faithfully consider the current culture and society they minister to and within. The individual churches studied within this research have considered this and have responded effectively. It is helpful for pastors and church leaders to recognize the many demands on time and limitations on commitments congregation members might feel that lead to less involvement. The findings of this research help acknowledge this reality while providing insight into how to live within the current culture and still be faithful to one's call to discipleship.

A more complete understanding of discipleship can lesson feelings of guilt, shame, or unworthiness many followers of Christ have toward their own lack of involvement and engagement. With this understanding churches can then begin to transition from apathy or acedia to mission and more effective discipleship practices. This would allow for passion once again in the Church. It would provide a sense of purpose in the lives of church members. It would generate an interest not just in doing church but in being the church. It could validate people's current attempts at discipleship while shedding light on what or how to improve on those attempts or that desire. For these reasons, the project was strong in its findings and potential for spiritual transformation and transition from apathy to mission.

Weaknesses of the Project

Throughout the research project, the researcher noticed that initial responses to the topic were somewhat defensive in nature. This was not observed among the clergy interviewed or noted within completed questionnaires and surveys. It was most

notably observed among acquaintances and church members expressing a general interest in the topic. It seemed to stem from assuming that apathy in the church was a personal and negative reflection on them or their community of faith. If there is any sense of denial or unwillingness to acknowledge that spiritual apathy exists within individual believers and congregations, the collected data might not be reflective of the reality of spiritual apathy in the church. The data collected and analyzed appeared to be sincere and is believed to be adequately reflective of the existing problem. Negative emotional response from some participants demonstrated a definite need to study spiritual apathy and to provide ways to overcome it. Perhaps because of such a response, the validity of the research is strengthened even further.

An unfortunate weakness of the project was the small number of completed open-ended questionnaires received that were handed out to staff members and elected leaders of the five selected case studies. The researcher acknowledges that a reason for this may have been that there were too many questions on the questionnaire. There may also have been some initial resistance to the topic believing or sharing that one's church was apathetic. The researcher attempted to communicate clearly through the letter of inquiry (Appendix A) that the congregations were believed to have overcome apathy, but respondents might still have felt reluctant to criticize. There was a better yet still relatively small response to the online open-ended questionnaire which included only nine questions (Appendix C).

Suggested modifications for improvement might include a different approach to gathering the same data. There could have been more intentional participatory action research by the researcher among and within the churches studied. More time

could have been spent observing and participating in events or activities making these churches vital and missional. The researcher might have attended a congregational staff meeting or scheduled church leader meeting, perhaps interviewing the group as a whole using questions from the same instrument that was not well received from individuals. Additional site visits to each of the congregations studied would also have been beneficial in order to further observe general interactions between staff members, elected leaders, church members, and pastors. Casual interactions like these reveal a lot about the overall Morale and mission of a community of faith.

The researcher seeks to always participate in and model faithful biblical discipleship practices within the ministry contexts he has served in. Based on the findings of this research, the need for such participation on the behalf of the pastor or church leader was affirmed. As leaders participate in discipleship alongside of members, it becomes understood that discipleship is something that is done not only individually but as a community. Individual believers begin to realize that they are qualified and called, just as their leaders and pastors are, just as biblical figures were, just as all children of God are. More intentional participation with the selected churches studied might have affirmed this theory and these findings even more.

Reflection on Findings

The researcher believes the findings of this research are valid and were in alignment with what previous research has shown, namely that intentional engagement in the mission and ministries of communities of faith is key to overcoming spiritual apathy. Congregations struggle with how to encourage and provide for engagement. Pastors, leaders, and communities must enter into this struggle together in order to

overcome the apathy and spiritual acedia among them. Another important reflection on these findings is to distinguish between “involvement” and “engagement”. Many who are *involved* in mission and ministry are quick to volunteer for a task but do not find joy or satisfaction in it, whereas, engaged members find fulfillment, joy and satisfaction in their work.¹ It is possible for congregations to experience high levels of involvement while experiencing low levels of engagement. A focus on engagement will be key to transitioning from apathy to mission.

As demonstrated in the historical literature review, acedia is real. Acedia is what the Church continues to experience, often not realizing it, and can only be overcome by intentionally acknowledging its debilitating effects on discipleship and by creating a culture of individual and communal engagement. Congregational leaders and clergy must recognize the acedia in their midst in order to intentionally address and rectify it.

This research has identified six core concepts that can serve to help congregations address the problems associated with acedia. These findings show that if individual Christians and churches as a whole intentionally evaluate their own levels of engagement using these concepts as a guide, more effective discipleship practices will begin to emerge.

This researcher believes churches must employ strong evaluation practices of discipleship training. This could require a church to carefully evaluate what may have been longstanding definitions of and understandings about discipleship. For too long, pastors and churches have responded to the lack of passionate or committed

¹ Albert L. Winseman, *Growing an Engaged Church: How to Stop* (New York: Gallup Press, 2007), 75.

discipleship among believers, instead of helping members understand what discipleship means in the modern world. Based on these findings, it is important to consider the factors that shape people's current understanding of discipleship. In what directions are people being pulled? How do potential disciples experience limitations and demands on time, energy and resources that draw them away from serious church commitment? Some church communities have already been asking these questions. In places where they have been, new and effective ideas and practices are being developed and practiced already. In some instances they're gaining traction among the larger Church as new ways of doing discipleship with the development and publication of resources aimed at teaching discipleship. There seems to be a liberating sense of relief and an overdue sense of renewal present in communities of faith that have transitioned from apathy to mission in this way. This researcher believes that a renewed perspective of discipleship needs to be shared and discussed within churches. Through his efforts and the findings of this research, it is hoped that he has contributed to an evolution of thinking about and working towards a new understanding and implementation of discipleship practices.

This researcher believes that in some ways discipleship hasn't changed at all from the first century, while in other ways it most definitely has. This researcher hypothesized that the need to go and make disciples is as important as ever in today's Church and must be understood and embraced as such. The core reason for this belief is the increasing number of options people have for communities and belonging; the church is far from the only gathering place. If congregations are not growing disciples and growing as a community of disciples, then they potentially might find difficulty in

making disciples. If growing as a disciple is not a priority for church leaders and members, than making disciples will not be a priority and the Church as a whole suffers. The findings from this research affirm that growing disciples will result in making disciples.

Pastors and church leaders may struggle to promote discipleship while also encouraging families to seek well-rounded, healthy, balanced lives. Understanding that a well-rounded lifestyle and a broad base of experiences are important, if not critical, in the development of all, is part of reevaluating what discipleship might look like in the modern-day church. It may be as simple as re-prioritizing for individuals and communities and for pastors and church leaders to help with it. With this understanding Jesus' reminder to us is timely: "But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well (Matt. 6:33). Perhaps discipleship is a matter of priorities being in the right place and it is the challenge for church leaders to encourage a reading of this scripture that includes discipleship and church involvement as a key way to "strive for the kingdom of God."

In matters of faith and discipleship people are mostly content with the status quo and might not ever challenge the culture that at times implies everything else is more important than church. Despite potential fallout from family, friends, and employers, people would have to reconsider what they have come to be so content with in life, in order to be effective disciples and disciple-makers. If discipleship practices were understood in this new way believers may begin to realize or observe God's blessings in their lives in ways that they may not have noticed before. Trusting in Scripture than assures that blessings will likely abound as all other things might be

added to the lives of faithful believers and congregations. This is a large challenge to propose but it seems like a natural next step in this research—to pursue a study of priorities and how they might negatively affect faithful discipleship practices. Such a study would nicely supplement the findings of this research.

Now might be as good of time as any to pursue additional research in this post-modern world and how the church can learn to serve within it. It feels as if the time is ripe to engage with and challenge the powers to be, in regard to determining the current state of discipleship. From the literature review of this study, it is evident that there has been much written, talked about and practiced over the years about discipleship. However, while some do not regard discipleship as central in their lives there are others who are longing for new perspectives and understandings that will challenge the status quo. This researcher is cautiously optimistic that the research and the six core concepts could help both define and teach discipleship in a way that could be more effective in contemporary society. This lends itself well to additional study and research that challenges understandings and practices of discipleship.

Conversations shared throughout this research project were welcomed, refreshing and encouraging. These conversations questioned and reconfigured long-held understandings of faithful discipleship practices led to a renewed sense of hope for the future of Christ's Church. Congregations must help their members find a relevant and rewarding way for discipleship to be practiced. To determine this in the local ministry context mutual conversations about discipleship, the need for discipleship, the purpose of discipleship, and how to be and make disciples, all need to happen.

Redefining discipleship in local ministry context will require education and conversation. This can be done through sermons, Bible studies, educational forums, and simple one-on-one conversations. If clergy and church leaders can impart the knowledge needed for believers to make different choices in their lives faithful discipleship will likely follow. Effective teaching and preaching can help work toward a healthy redefinition and re-application of the idea of discipleship in today's world. Through mutual conversations, education, and learning individuals and entire communities of faith will have felt heard and a part of the decision-making process that determined what discipleship looks like in their ministry context. This can then help bridge the gap and smooth the transition between apathy and mission.

This research ultimately concludes that however discipleship is viewed, understood, or practiced, one's efforts must always point to Christ and making a difference in His name. This is a realistic way of approaching the research. Engagement and positive spiritual experiences all contribute to one's understanding of discipleship practices, but one must look beyond those experiences and consider the ultimate purpose of discipleship. The ultimate purpose of being a disciple and making disciples is all about making a difference in the name of Jesus Christ in large and small ways. Jesus communicates this to the joyous disciples upon their return from mission: "Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20). All want to make a difference in this life. All want to make an impact on the communities in which they live and work. All want to leave a legacy of good and fruitful labors behind. Why? It is about transformation and seeing the desired change and being happy and satisfied. There is a

visible difference in people when they begin to understand and experience discipleship and the role it plays in their journey of faith. This is the engagement and understanding of vocation that theologian Frederick Buechner explains: “By and large a good rule for finding out [vocation] is this: the kind of work God usually calls you to is the kind of work (a) that you need most to do and (b) that the world most needs to have done. The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.”² Similarly, this is what engagement looks like. Engagement happens when one's gifts are matched up with another's needs; when that happens in the church—that individuals feel both valued and needed—engagement will occur and will be the first step to discipleship.

A true disciple is engaged and finds joy, fulfillment and satisfaction in doing what she is ultimately called to do. When she discovers that she can fulfill her calling as a disciple in the midst of the demands of life it is a joy to witness and observe and be a part of. The realization that it doesn't have to be either/or, but both/and, is powerful. That people can live both in this world but not be of the world, is helpful to embrace. That people can be a disciple for Christ in the midst of their regular and daily routine of life and living is an important understanding. This understanding of discipleship will be what draws believers into a deeper practice of discipleship. These findings conclude that discipleship and mission are ultimately about the need to make a positive difference and the joy, fulfillment, and satisfaction that accompanies doing so.

² Frederick Buechner, *Wishful thinking: a theological ABC* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 118-119.

Possible Applications of the Project

What should happen as a result of this research is intentional and specific planning toward making disciples. All church programs should include an element of each of the six core concepts proven to encourage and result in more faithful biblical discipleship practices. If church programs can include components of community, fellowship, education, service and worship in a context that clearly defines expectations and fosters respectful conversation, engagement and discipleship will follow. Church leadership must model these concepts. Educational opportunities also should be provided that teach the six core concepts and how individually believers might practice them in their daily lives. This too, would lead to increased engagement and more effective and faithful biblical discipleship practices. A closer look at implementation of each concept within a community of faith is helpful.

Communities of faith that seek to overcome apathy might begin to specifically plan events or activities that promote and encourage community building and fellowship. Perhaps churches already do this without realizing the impact of intentional efforts. Community building and opportunities for fellowship should not be considered a “given” within congregations. Intentional programming includes specific events or activities that meet this purpose. Ideally these opportunities would include events for all ages and some specifically planned for inter-generational interaction. Many churches are already providing community building opportunities within individual program areas (children, youth & family, senior citizens, young adults, etc.), but they must also provide opportunities for the whole of the community to gather and grow together. Such opportunities have been provided in the selected case

studies and within congregations experiencing a healthy transition from apathy to mission.

Similarly, congregations should provide specific opportunities for spiritual education and growth. Again, these opportunities are often included within individual program areas, but could be expanded to the wider community as a whole and should assume a basic understanding of discipleship, Scripture, and denominational history, doctrine, and tradition. Intentional efforts could provide opportunities for book studies, small group Bible studies, adult confirmation, and regular faith formation classes that cover a variety of topics related to faith and life. Data collected and reviewed in this project reveal the importance such educational opportunities provide not only the learning desired but also the safety, acceptance, and openness needed by those who possess only a basic understanding of matters related to the Bible and one's faith. This research affirms that communities of faith need to invite learning and welcome questions of faith. The more spiritual education and growth opportunities provided, the more engagement and effective discipleship will follow.

Perhaps the most practical application of this research is to provide opportunities for hands-on service and mission within the actual community of faith, the wider community and perhaps even nationally or globally. Each of the five congregations studied for this project provides both local and global mission opportunities. When members of churches participate in such mission opportunities, they are able to experience what it feels like to put faith into action. Volunteering for community needs or on mission trips are ways to educate about and demonstrate biblical discipleship. This core concept is transformative in ways that individuals and

communities of faith can feel and observe almost immediately. Service and mission opportunities could be the spark that it will take in churches to overcome apathy and move towards mission and discipleship.

Often as a way of celebrating what churches are doing in Christ's name through mission and service, a time of worship is provided. Weekly worship is exactly that – opportunities to gather together as community to give thanks and praise to God in celebration of what has been done through God's disciples for the sake of the world. From the research it is evident that worship must be authentic in order for engagement to increase and for discipleship to follow. Intentional planning must go into worship so that the focus remains on Christ and not on those leading or participating. Well-planned, authentic worship leads to higher levels of engagement and more passionate discipleship practices among individuals and throughout the community as a whole.

Once programming has been planned to create and nurture more faithful discipleship practices, the expectations of members must be communicated and understood. The research showed the need for clearly defined expectations for both clergy and lay members of congregations. Responses to the open-ended questionnaires were clear that there were distinct differences between what was expected of clergy and church members. It is equally important that leaders and pastors understand their roles and what is expected of them by members. As in any organization, it is important to communicate expectations of pastors upon being called or members upon joining. When members join a congregation, it needs to be acknowledged that just as people expect many benefits from their membership in a church community, so too does the church expect benefits from these members' involvement. To make expectations clear

from the beginning will help with deeper engagement and faithful discipleship along the way. At Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Stillwater, where the researcher serves as lead pastor, there is a covenant that is responsively recited at every new member reception during worship. Within the covenant, the pastor addresses the new and continuing members: "We have expectations of you, and you of us. We expect that in every way, you will strive to become a responsive, responsible member of Our Savior's Lutheran Church, as you daily strive to become a more acceptable Child of God." Specific expectations are then named in the areas of worship, leadership, education, service and financial stewardship as follows:

We expect to find you at worship and at the Lord's table with us regularly; and that you will take part in our education program; that you will be open to involvements in our servant forms of ministry in and beyond this congregation; that you will assume a leadership role in the congregation when possible; and that you will set aside a responsible portion of your income for the financial support of our ministry in and beyond our local area.

The covenant continues by expressing what the members can also expect from their new faith community:

You may expect of us, your fellow members, that we will provide you with every feasible opportunity for spiritual, personal, and social growth. To facilitate this, we will share with you all of our congregation's resources: material, human, and divine. In your times of decision and stress, you may expect us to be by your side. You may expect us to want to be with you, in your times of celebration and joy. From our pastors, you may expect sincere preaching, informed teaching, and a willingness to listen and share. What we give you as fellow members is our trust, and we ask for yours in return.

Communicating expectations in such an open and natural way sets the tone for open and natural communication across the board between members and church leadership. Once programming is in place that encourages engagement and expectations have been communicated, members begin to feel a sense of ownership of the ministry and mission with the community. Open and transparent lines of communication help

individuals feel that sense of ownership. Such communication is especially beneficial when it seeks to address or avoid any potential conflict with the community. This summary and review of these findings demonstrate how effectively implementation of the six core concepts can transition from apathy to mission. There is a natural connection between them that flows smoothly from one to another. If this natural inclusion of the six core concepts can be a part of regular and on-going programming, communities of faith will likely begin to observe and experience positive overall discipleship practices.

CHAPTER SEVEN: PERSONAL REFLECTION

New Insights

In the early stages of the development of this proposed project, which later was determined to study apathy in the church, this researcher, out of frustration, asked the question in regard to church members, “Why don’t they get it?” At the conclusion of this project, this researcher now asks, “Why didn’t *I* get it?”

It has become clear to this pastor and researcher now that transitioning a community of faith from apathy to mission must begin with him and his pastoral guidance and leadership if the people are going to “get it.” The “it” referred to is a healthy, passionate, committed and vibrant understanding of discipleship. As a result of this project, this researcher has a renewed understanding of and confidence in his call to ministry. Rather than getting discouraged and focusing energy on why church members are not responding as passionately as he would expect, energy will instead be used making sure programming and pastoral care includes each of the six core concepts discovered within this research. This pastor will work more intentionally on preparing individual believers for living lives of faithful discipleship, understanding this begins wherever they might be in their journeys of faith. J. Russell Crabtree affirms this understanding using a ballroom dance analogy:

A leader develops ways for people to move toward the destination by beginning where they are. A number of years ago, I met a ballroom dance instructor who always began his lessons by having the men simply walk across the floor. After they traversed the thirty-foot room he would simply say to

them, “Congratulations, men. If you can walk, you can dance.” The secret of his success, and he had success aplenty, was that he began where people were.¹

This is the type of authenticity respondents in this research evidently were looking for. If a community of faith can provide community, education, service, and worship in a way that connects the people to the mission, spiritual apathy will be overcome and discipleship will flourish. Crabtree develops his ballroom dance analogy even further as he explores an incarnational component within it:

This follows the pattern established in Jesus, who brings the kingdom of God into people’s lives beginning where they are. Sometimes leaders will discern that they are called to go more or less in the direction that people are already pointed. Other times leaders will discern that they must set the sail in a different direction, even though the wind be across their bow. In those situations, they will make the case for why change is necessary, with the goal of losing as few people as possible in the turning.²

This researcher and pastor is now more committed to set sail in a different direction understanding better the need for the change in order to develop, encourage, challenge, and promote faithful biblical discipleship practices within the community of faith he serves. This requires an understanding of the community, its history, its local theology, and its sense of its own identity.

The way the researcher is grounded in his life and ministry largely shaped how he chose to approach, study, and evaluate the concepts of apathy, discipleship, mission and how they are all inter-connected. A sense of his own understanding of identity helped him in understanding the identity of those who participated in the study. This sense of understanding himself and the individual participants and selected churches as a whole contributed to the overall effectiveness of this project. The experience of

¹ J. Russell Crabtree, *Owl Sight: Evidence-Based Discernment and the Promise of Organizational Intelligence for Ministry* (Columbus, Ohio: Magi Press, 2012), 178.

² Crabtree, *Owl Sight*, 178.

studying this topic created a desire to ask more questions. This is good. It is known and understood among pastors and church leaders that discipleship among believers and within communities of faith has not been wholly effective since the original calling of the first disciples. The obvious question is, “Why?” The researcher is committed to asking more foundational questions about mission and ministry such as, Why, after so much research and development of practices, is discipleship still not working in the Church? Does discipleship seem to be changing in the Church? Are there advancements in the area of discipleship in the Church? If so, where and in what ways? What are the underlying reasons for such an on-going lack of commitment towards discipleship in our churches? and What will need to happen in order for the Church to finally understand discipleship? Pastor Michael Carlson warns of this new reality as he shared,

Common responses to why people attend church will not cut it for this new generation. “Because it is what we have always done,” or “We go because our friends go,” or “we go because our family has always gone” will not resonate with a new generation of religious seekers in the next age of the church. Our world is now filled with more religious options, but also more non-religious children who grew up in homes where organized faith was not practiced. Families are busier than ever with everything from both parents working to school events to sports that demand practice on Sundays. All of it is creating a formula for disaster. And yet, a deep and penetrating longing is reported among people in the world. A longing for connection, longing for meaning, a hunger for an experience with God, and a way to orient our lives. In the center of all this longing, we are seeing growth. The growth is not bound up in some radical marketing plan but in a new-found invitational spirit in which our regular attenders have been engaging. In the end the Gospel spreads person to person.³

This has been a challenging and rewarding experience for the researcher. The hope is that other pastors and church leaders can also be challenged in their efforts to engage

³ Michael Carlson, interview by author, Mahtomedi, Minnesota, December 1, 2016.

disciples in mission in order to experience the fullness of reward with a renewed sense of purpose and satisfaction.

It is also hoped that this research can supplement in a unique way the deep and wide foundation of research that has already been done in this area of study. From this study, individual believers and congregations as a whole can have a better understanding of the “Why?” of discipleship – specifically why discipleship is hard to inspire. As this researcher has struggled with questions related to apathy and discipleship in the church, he hopes to encourage others with similar struggles. Such encouragement might provide a renewed sense of purpose, mission and calling that ultimately will bring about joy, fulfillment and satisfaction as all names are written in heaven for the glory of God.

Where Do We Go From Here?

Much has been written and researched about the topic of discipleship in the Church. There is no shortage of books to read and study on the subject. They are all helpful at informing one’s understanding of discipleship and provide useful and practical suggestions for increasing discipleship. However, they can also be understood as quick fixes that will result in instant and dynamic discipleship within one’s community of faith. The temptation to implement such strategies in any given ministry context, expecting immediate positive results, is always before church leadership and clergy for consideration and implementation. Newly ordained pastors especially turn to and lean on such resources when developing and implementing curricula or church programming. This is expected since, in this researcher’s

experience, traditional Lutheran seminary training does not have discipleship as a primary focus.

Rather than six quick fixes, this researcher hopes that the six core concepts can serve as intentional, effective, and lasting building blocks, built on the strong foundation of Scripture and practice.

The six core concepts discovered and explored within this research are not that different from what Jesus originally called people to and modeled how to do. Jesus developed, encouraged, and nurtured community and fellowship when He called and gathered His disciples together creating the first community of faith. Among them and others, Jesus provided spiritual learning and growth when He taught and proclaimed His message of love, grace, and forgiveness in the synagogues, in homes, on the hillsides, on the plains, and along the lakeshore. Jesus sent disciples out in mission and service to make known the good news. In one of Jesus' final acts, He gathered His community of faith together for one last supper at which He gave thanks and blessed those who would continue to serve in His name. In this act of love and worship Jesus made clear again His expectations of those who would choose to follow Him. At the same time and place Jesus boldly acknowledged the conflict among them stating, "Very truly I tell you, one of you will betray me" (John 13:21).

Jesus modeled what this research has determined are the six core concepts necessary for deeper engagement and more faithful discipleship practices. At the conclusion of this research it seems fitting to return to the beginning – to the basics – and hear again the foundational scriptural calls to action, to embrace them, accept

them, and live according to them. The Lord's mission, and what all disciples are still called to, remains the same:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Luke 4:18-19).

The urgent call to action remains the same: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2); and Jesus' Great Commission continues to provide the foundation for discipleship:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matt. 28:18-20).

At the conclusion of this project, it is necessary to note that nowhere in the project has the portion of the subtitle of the project been addressed that refers to "faithful, yet changing congregations." That portion was included from the very beginning stages of this project because the researcher understood that, though apathy exists among individual believers and within congregations, it not necessarily representative of their faithfulness. This research affirmed that congregations and individuals who may be apathetic in spiritual and discipleship practices are still very faithful people who are mostly trying to navigate the change they and the Church at large is experiencing. As a researcher and pastor, it will be all the more important moving forward to acknowledge the faithfulness of believers in the midst of improving discipleship practices.

Above all, this researcher prays that all believers and communities of believers might strive to be the “good soil” Jesus challenges all to be: “But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty” (Matt. 13:23).

APPENDIX A – LETTER OF INQUIRY



Our Savior's Lutheran Church | 1616 W. Olive Street, Stillwater, MN 55082 | (651)439-5704

Monday, May 2, 2016

Dear Pastor (President/Board Member/Staff Person),

A word of introduction ... I am the Lead Pastor at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Stillwater, MN. I have been ordained as a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America for 20 years. This is my third call as pastor to a congregation in those years. I served seven years as Associate Pastor of Children, Youth & Family at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Circle Pines, MN, eleven years as a solo pastor at Fish Lake Lutheran Church of Stark, MN and now am nearing two years as Lead Pastor in my current call. I am pleased to have served in the St. Paul Area Synod throughout my ministry. I am also in the fourth and final year of my Doctor of Ministry studies at Bethel Seminary in St. Paul. This brings me to the purpose of this letter of inquiry which should only require a small amount of your time.

Throughout my ministry experience in the different contexts I described above, I, like many ministry professionals and dedicated lay people, have noticed an alarmingly apathetic commitment towards Christ's call to discipleship that is communicated clearly throughout Scripture and the New Testament, specifically. My concern, in this area of my own personal experience, and in the personal experiences of other professional and lay ministry leaders, that I have learned from, has led me to the title and theme of my doctoral thesis. That being, *"From Apathy to Mission: A Critical Transition for Pastors and Leaders of Faithful, Yet Changing Congregations"*. Churches are at a crossroad in their overall lives, effectiveness and vitality. Of course, the importance of effective discipleship in our churches and world is as critical as ever. Churches continue to play a critical role in reaching, equipping, and sending disciples out into what seems like a more religiously diverse world than ever. It is my hope to better understand why some congregations are apathetic in their ministry and mission while others are actively engaged and purpose-full in theirs.

Please complete the enclosed open-ended questionnaire. You are invited to allow whatever amount of time it takes to complete. Upon completion I ask you to insert it into the enclosed, self-addressed and stamped envelope and return it to me via the postal mail service no later than August 1. If you would like to continue the conversation in person, please indicate that on the questionnaire and I will be happy to arrange a time and place to meet. It's evident to many that congregations within the St. Paul Area Synod, and throughout the ELCA, have much to learn from your congregation and it's leaders. I personally, look forward to learning more.

Grace and peace,
Pastor Dale Stiles

APPENDIX B – PRINTED OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE

Open-Ended Questionnaire

From Apathy to Mission: A Critical Transition for Pastors and Leaders of Faithful, Yet Changing Congregations.

Name: _____ Congregation:

Role/Position in congregation: _____

Answer the following questions as quickly as you can, not giving them the careful, lengthy, or analytical thought and time you might desire to or think they require. Think “Word Association” and answer from the heart only using the limited space provided.

1. When I first joined my church, one thing that impressed me the most about it was ...
 I remember thinking that it was ...
 One thing that impresses me most now, about my church is ...
2. If a friend asked me, “What are the best things about your church?” I would list these strengths:
3. The ways my congregation has changed in the last ten years include ...
4. One of my most enjoyable times I remember having at my church was ...
5. I remember feeling especially close to God at my church when ...
6. One of the best periods of our life together as a congregation was ...
7. I’m thankful that in our church we have been able to ...
8. My pastor’s role in the congregation is ...
9. When our congregation says that “All are welcome!”, we mean ...

10. Loving and welcoming others has taught us, in our congregation, that there are times when we need to ...
11. Some of the ways our congregation has shown God's love for others include ...
12. Experiences that have helped our love towards others grow include ...
13. I find fulfillment and joy in my congregation whenever ...
14. My congregation has helped to encourage me in my life/vocation by ...
15. Name an event or activity that your congregation provides that renews your ...
 - a. body ...
 - b. mind ...
 - c. spiritual life ...
 - d. self-image ...
 - e. love for others ...
16. As a member of my congregation, I am expected to ...
17. One of the most satisfying things about being a member of my congregation is ...

It is satisfying because ...
18. In my congregation, God is ...
19. In my congregation, prayer is ...
20. In my congregation, unconditional love means ...

21. In my congregation, worship is ...

22. In my congregation, discipleship is ...

23. I'm thankful that in the past year our congregation was able to ...

24. When conflicting concerns or issues arise in our congregation we are good at ...

You're finished! Thank you! If you would like to continue the conversation in person please provide me with your contact information and I'll be in touch.

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Pastor Dale Stiles
Our Savior's Lutheran Church
1616 W. Olive Street
Stillwater, MN 55082
763-245-4006

APPENDIX C – ONLINE OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE

Online Open-Ended Questionnaire

This anonymous congregational assessment questionnaire will help me in my Doctor of Ministry research, as I continue to determine how spiritual apathy, both within individual believers and entire communities of faith, affect discipleship practices. Please answer the following questions as quickly as you can, not giving them the careful, lengthy, or analytical thought and time you might desire to or think they require. Think “word association” and answer from your heart. Thank you!

1. When I first joined my church, one thing that impressed me the most about it was ... and what impresses me the most now is ...
2. If a friend asked me, “What are the best things about your church?” I would list these strengths ...
3. The ways my church has changed in the last five to ten years include ...
4. I remember feeling especially close to God at my church when ...
5. My role in my congregation is to ... and my pastor’s role is to ...
6. My congregation has helped to encourage me in my life and vocation by ...
7. As a member of my congregation, I am expected to ...
8. In my congregation, discipleship (or following Jesus) means ...
9. When conflicting concerns or issues arise in our congregation we are good at ...

APPENDIX D – CAT SAMPLE SUMMARY PAGE

Faith Lutheran Church CAT Survey - A Summary of Results

During the months of January and February of 2015, the people of Faith Lutheran Church responded to questions in the Church Assessment Tool (CAT). This survey was done to prepare for the capital campaign as well as to get a fuller understanding of the state of Faith's ministries. Since the time the survey was completed, a lot has changed and the congregation is now in a time of transition. I provide here a summary of the results of the CAT survey, with the support and guidance of the church council.

I'll break my summary into three parts. First, I'll summarize the strengths that the survey highlights. Second, I'll summarize areas named in the survey that need attention. Third, I will summarize ministry priorities as expressed in survey results.

STRENGTHS

There is a lot to celebrate at Faith. In my short time here, I have experienced dynamic worship, effective education programs, a deeply caring community, and lively and faithful passion for the mission of Jesus Christ. CAT survey results confirm these observations.

Worship and Music is a “stand out” ministry at Faith Lutheran Church. There is a large number of musical groups who apply their talents with dedication and energy. High quality and diverse styles are hallmarks of the music ministry of Faith. People come to worship expecting to be inspired and they are seldom disappointed. This strength is essential to the vitality of any church and the central Christian mission to change lives through music and the sharing of God's Word.

The CAT survey also named **Education Ministry** as a strength. Faith Lutheran Church offers diverse learning experiences and the church's constituents stay informed about them and engage in them at a higher rate than the average church that has completed the survey. In addition, those who completed the survey report that the education offerings of the church are high quality and meet the needs of people at a variety of life stages. This strength reflects well the church's Lutheran heritage as well as the need to help people grow in faith in a variety of ways.

The CAT survey also identifies Faith Lutheran Church as an **Adaptable Congregation**. This strength is not about a specific ministry but rather a general quality of the congregation. Being adaptable means that the congregation has considerable resilience. The people who make up the congregation deal with change more effectively than people in the average church that has completed the survey. While tradition is important, the church is also open to innovation and new ideas that can improve its mission. This strength is essential to any church in the 21st century when all churches must strike a balance between the way things have been and the development of ministries that renew the church.

NEEDS FOR ATTENTION

Every congregation has aspects of its mission that need attention. The survey names three areas that need attention at Faith: **Governance, Congregation Self-**

Understanding, and

Generosity. As I summarize these areas, I'll also offer some comments on what I see happening now for improvement.

Governance

Governance is the development and regular monitoring of the strategy, policies and practices that support the mission of an organization. An organization's governance body is accountable to the whole organization through communication and opportunities for input from members of the organization. The primary duty of governance is to maintain and enhance the stability and prosperity of the organization.

The main governing body of Faith Lutheran Church is the Church Council, but there are many other committees that also provide a governance role on behalf of the Council. This governance structure is outlined in the congregation's constitution. The CAT survey suggests that governance at Faith could be improved in two ways: Through **greater participation** in leadership and through **better communication**.

Greater participation in leadership results in broader sharing of tasks that are important to the development of Faith's ministries. Greater participation also means that issues and ideas are discussed more broadly among constituents of the congregation. As 2015 draws to a close, many opportunities for greater participation have emerged. There are three openings on the Church Council, and both a Strategic Planning Committee and a Transition Team will soon be formed. At the center of these developments is the work of the Nominating Committee, a team which is re-established each year to ensure broad participation in the leadership of the congregation. All-told, there is need for between 20 and 30 people to participate on these teams to help lead the church's ministries and make recommendations to the Church Council. Please read church publications to find out ways you can serve and let your interest be known.

The Church Council is aware of the need for **better communication**. Better communication keeps people informed, creates an environment where new ideas emerge and are shared, and also establishes a wider sense of trust. With these benefits in mind, the Council wants you to be aware of five opportunities to be informed, ask questions and be heard:

- **Council President Updates:** On a regular basis, Faith's Council President will publish a brief update. Naturally, these updates will overlap with my monthly reports, but will also offer insights unique to the leadership of Faith's Council.
- **Interim Pastor Monthly Reports:** Each month I write an interim ministry report to the congregation. These reports include my observations about tasks that need to be completed during the interim period. My reports come from conversations with governance teams, from staff conversations, and from discussions with members of the congregation.

- **Budget Forums:** Prior to the annual meeting on January 31, the Council and Finance Committee will hold budget forums. The Council will conclude its work on the budget in December. The proposed budget will then be published for your review. Once you've had a chance to review the budget, be sure to attend one of the budget forums to hear more and ask questions.
- **The Annual Meeting:** The agenda for the meeting is published in the most recent issue of Focus on Faith magazine. This meeting is your opportunity to hear and ask questions about key efforts of the congregation for the coming year, including discussion of the budget, strategic planning, thoughts about staffing Faith's ministries, and the work of the transition team.
- **Listening Posts:** In the months following the annual meeting, members of the Church Council will be available on Sunday mornings to tell you more about what's happening at council meetings and to hear your concerns and questions. Look for more about the Listening Post schedule in future church publications.

Congregation Self-Understanding

Faith Lutheran Church is a large congregation. Of all the thousands of churches in the ELCA, in size Faith probably ranks as one of the top 100 congregations. However, the results of the CAT survey tell the story of a much smaller congregation. The reason why is that Faith Lutheran Church is very pastor-focused. At small congregations, the one pastor tends to become the focus of the ministry. He or she plans and runs worship, and does all preaching. The success of programs and ministry initiatives can depend almost entirely on the support and capacity of the one pastor. The CAT survey results reveal that Faith, despite its size, remains a congregation overly dependent on pastoral leadership much like a small congregation. By being overly dependent on one or more pastors, whenever a pastoral transition occurs, there is disruption and forward momentum suffers.

The reality is that the ministry of Faith belongs to the people of Faith and through them the Church Council. Pastors of large congregations partner with the Council and the people to lead the congregation in ministry together. I know the Church Council intends to do what it can to lead the congregation thoughtfully and strategically so that ministries will continue with only minimal disruption as changes and transitions come in the future.

Generosity

The CAT survey includes demographic information, including data on household income and giving levels. In 2014, the people of Faith gave on average .84% - less than 1% - of household income on behalf of the ministry of Faith Lutheran Church. Among the 600+ ELCA congregations that have completed the CAT survey, average giving is 1.7% of household income - about double the giving level at Faith Lutheran Church.

If the ministry of Faith belongs to the people of Faith, then the ministry also runs on the talents, energy, and financial resources of the people of Faith. The results of the CAT survey encourage us all to examine the commitment we share in the Gospel. We

are all in our own way partners in ministry and every gift matters. The life-long call of faith is to learn to live a generous life.

MINISTRY PRIORITIES

The CAT survey gathers and analyzes feedback from congregations on seventeen different ministry areas. The people of Faith Lutheran Church named three top areas that should receive energy and resources.

- Reaching New People - Survey results suggest that a top priority for just about everyone at Faith is developing and implementing a comprehensive strategy to reach new people and incorporating them into the life of the church.
- Healing Ministries - The second highest priority, as expressed in the CAT survey, is developing ministries that work toward healing those who are broken by life circumstances.
- Meaningful Relationships - The third priority named in survey results is creating opportunities for people to form meaningful relationships.

A couple of observations: First, these top priorities are expressed at many congregations and show how people are aware of the need we all have for growth, community and healing in an increasingly complex, demanding, and sometimes lonely world. Second, the fact that the strongest ministries at Faith Lutheran Church do not appear as top priorities does not mean that those strengths are not important. It means, as the survey itself notes, that congregational members believe that those areas of strength are already being performed at such a high level that additional energy is not required. Third, the data in Faith's CAT survey about ministry priorities will be very useful as the Council and congregation consider strategic priorities in coming years.

APPENDIX E – OSLC WORSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

Our Savior's Lutheran Congregational Worship and Engagement Survey

Pastor Dale and the Church Board of Administration would like your feedback on your worship preferences and your level of engagement here at Our Savior's Lutheran Church. Please help us by completing this brief survey and giving it to the ushers at the end of the worship service.

1. The service you regularly attend is (please circle one):

Sunday, 8:00 a.m.

Sunday, 10:30 a.m.

Wednesday, 5:30 p.m.

2. The service time you would prefer to attend is (please circle one):

Sunday, 8:00 a.m. Sunday, 9:15 a.m. Sunday, 10:30 a.m. Wednesday, 5:30 p.m.

3. Are you satisfied with the current worship schedule? (please circle one) Yes
No

4. What would be your ideal worship time and why?

5. What motivates you to attend worship services?

6. What things motivate you to participate in other events or activities at Our Savior's?

7. Do you have any suggestions for additions or improvements at Our Savior's?

APPENDIX F – OSLC WORSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT SURVEY ANALYSIS

OSLC Worship & Engagement Survey

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. Thirty percent of the respondents are not satisfied with the current service schedule.
2. The ideal worship time is driven by individual family schedules far more than any other factor.
3. People are most strongly motivated to attend and participate by fellowship. Recommendation: Fellowship be proactively included in all church activities (including worship) to the greatest degree practical.
4. Hearing God's word/Re-centering/Spiritual Growth and Worship are also major motivational factors.
5. There is a strong desire for ±9:15 Sunday service time –but there is no clear rejection of any Sunday morning service time.
6. Recommendation: Consider the following service time options, in addition to Wednesday night services during the program year:
 - a. 8:30 and 10:00
 - b. 8:30 and 10:30
 - c. 9:00 and 10:30
 - d. 8:00 and 10:30
 - e. 8:00, 9:15 and 10:30
 - f. 8: 30, 9: 30 and 10:30
7. If it is desired to meet the needs of the entire congregation, a three service schedule on Sunday mornings, with service times at 8:30, 9:30, and 10:30 would likely be welcomed almost universally. This could easily be tested (by another survey) before implementation.
8. Recommendation: Investigate financial options that would enable the church to have a part time pastor to support the lead pastor's work and have ordained leadership at three Sunday services during the program year.

Process:

1. A total of 169 survey responses are included in the results.
2. Analysis of the response questions:
 - a. The response questions for the ideal service times and were reviewed in an attempt to identify major themes driving people's preferences. These questions were open ended allowing the person surveyed to be open with their responses. The categories used for analysis are listed in the summarized data below.

- b. Some judgement was applied to interpret the responses to the response questions; accordingly, alternative interpretations and analysis are possible.
 - c. The written responses are what they are and range widely, with many ideas being provided. Some emotional responses may also be noted.
3. Validity Evaluation (statistical tests, work in progress):
- a. Were enough people surveyed to make this survey a reliable indicator of the will of the congregation?
 - i. Current membership data:
 - 1. Baptized: 942
 - 2. Confirmed: 738
 - 3. Households: 334
 - ii. Assume that the data collected reflects the thoughts of confirmed members.

Summarized Data:

- 1. Service Currently Regularly Attended:
 - a. Sunday 8:00 – 72
 - b. Sunday 10:30 – 77
 - c. Wednesday 5:30 – 27
- 2. Preferred Service Time:
 - a. Sunday 8:00 – 51
 - b. Sunday 9:15 – 62
 - c. Sunday 10:30 – 50
 - d. Wednesday 5:30 – 25
- 3. Satisfaction with Current Service Schedule
 - a. Yes - 113
 - b. No – 48
- 4. Ideal Worship Time
 - a. Schedule (time of service) - 116
 - b. Service Type - 11
 - c. After Faith Formation - 5
 - d. Music - 6
 - e. No Children in Service - 7
 - f. Personal Tradition (personal or family custom or habit) - 1

5. Preferred Service Format
 - a. Traditional - 9
 - b. Blended – 3
 - c. Contemporary – 2

6. Motivation to Attend and Participate
 - a. Hear God’s Word/Re-centering/Spiritual Growth - 56
 - b. Worshiping - 50
 - c. Preaching/Hear Message - 23
 - d. Music and Singing – 29
 - e. Service to the Church - 22
 - f. Friendship and Fellowship – 90
 - g. Service to the Community – 17
 - h. CYF Program - 21
 - i. Personal Tradition (personal or family custom or habit) - 9

Observations and Remarks:

1. Both anecdotally and by admission, there are people not coming to church services due to the schedule, just dropping off their kids for Sunday school. The main reason identified was that the morning gets too long when attempting to bring the children to church after faith formation.
2. Both positive and negative comments about contemporary service. It seems people either really like or really dislike this format. Proponents of this service format are intense. Only positive or neutral comments were observed for traditional or blended services.
3. Several comments about excessive service length. While sermon length was mentioned, one practical suggestion was to reduce the time spent on announcements.
4. Service time adjustments are a common suggestion. The most surprising suggestion is moving the 8:00 service to 8:30 or even 9:00. This seemed to be coming from 8:00 service regulars.
5. Several comments about singing traditional hymns and making sure that the words to songs are always accessible (either in the bulletin or by using the screens).
6. Many different perspectives on preaching! Too much, not enough, too political, need more discussion of contemporary issues, need for more explanation of theological perspectives.
7. Desire for better communication and volunteer committees can be observed.

APPENDIX G – PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Participant Consent Form for Postgraduate Dissertation Research Study

Confirmation and consent

I confirm that I have freely agreed to participate in the research project of Dale Stiles. I have been briefed on the premise of his research and the role the congregation I serve, and I, will have in it. I give permission for the use of my name and for excerpts of my conversations with Dale to be shared in writing as part of his final thesis. I also give permission for data gathered in our Church Assessment Tool (CAT) to be shared in writing as part of Dale's final thesis.

Participant signature: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

I confirm that I agree to keep the undertakings in this contract.

Researcher signature: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

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