2020

Cultivating Relational, Developmental and Missional Discipleship within a Lutheran Mega-Church

Richard Michael Webb
Bethel University

Recommended Citation

BETHEL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

BETHEL UNIVERSITY

CULTIVATING RELATIONAL, DEVELOPMENTAL AND MISSIONAL

DISCIPLESHIP WITHIN A LUTHERAN MEGA-CHURCH

A THESIS PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY DEGREE

IN ORGANIC LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

BY

RICHARD WEBB

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

MAY, 2020

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful for the many people who helped and encouraged me along this journey of exploration and reflection.

I am grateful for my professor, Terry Walling, who helped me cultivate a developmental mindset in regard to discipleship and the journey of faith.

I'm grateful to my thesis advisor, Donald Reed, for his honest, gentle and constant encouragement throughout this thesis project.

I'm grateful to my editor, Dawn Schneider, for catching my many spelling and grammar errors. I'm also thankful for her thoughtful comments and words of encouragement along the way.

I'm grateful to my friends and mentors, Paul Leavenworth and Bill Withers, for their good questions, insights and support they offered throughout the journey.

I'm especially grateful to Pastor Mike Housholder and Lutheran Church of Hope, for their extraordinary generosity, prayers and constant encouragement.

Finally, I'm grateful for all God has taught me along this journey, about ministry, life and unending grace.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

Over the last two decades, many Lutheran mega-churches have become stagnant or have begun to decline in worship attendance. Some have even closed their doors, not surviving past their founding leadership. Furthermore, few of these mega-churches offer any kind of intentional growth pathway for their members. What is called discipleship often appears instead to be a classroom-driven assimilation process.

This project addressed the problem Lutheran mega-churches have in making disciples by exploring the relational, developmental and missional aspects of discipleship and how they might be integrated into an effective discipleship strategy for use in these mega-churches.

This project began with an exploration of Jesus and his followers' approach to discipleship, as found in the books of Matthew, Luke and Acts. This project also included a review of literature focusing on the relational, missional and developmental aspects of discipleship, as well as Lutheran theological reflection on the overall nature of discipleship. Using a case study format, this researcher then investigated and analyzed the discipleship practices of three Lutheran mega-churches through the use of interviews, documentation, and field observations.

Synthesizing the findings resulting from the exploration of Scripture, the review of relevant literature and the field study of three Lutheran mega-churches, the researcher developed an integrated relational, developmental and missional mega-church strategy and pathway for Lutheran mega-churches, particularly for Lutheran Church of Hope,

West Des Moines, Iowa. This strategy and pathway include program alignment and mentoring strategies, a revised visual developmental pathway for use by church members, and a discipleship assessment and resource navigation tool, designed to equip members with the resources they need along their unique discipleship journey.

INTRODUCTION

Disciple-making has never been easy. Throughout the history of Christianity, God's people have struggled to respond faithfully to Christ's Great Commission to "go and make disciples" (Matt. 28:11)[1] within their own cultural context. Often that struggle has borne tremendous fruit. The Wesleyan movement in Great Britain, for example, initiated wide-spread cultural transformation throughout an entire country. At other times, as Dallas Willard notes, "in place of Christ's plan, historical drift has substituted 'Make converts (to a particular 'faith and practice') and baptize them into church membership.'"[2] For many churches the discipleship process has become an assimilation process into a religious institution and its beliefs.

Lutheran mega-churches have not been immune to the challenges of disciple-making. A review of the websites of North American Lutheran mega-churches reveals that many offer no obvious discipleship pathway. If attendance at weekend worship is any measure, most Lutheran congregations, including mega-churches, are in trouble. In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the largest Lutheran denomination in the United States, only three Lutheran mega-churches are growing in their weekend worship

---

[1] Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations are from *The Holy Bible, Today's New International Version,* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005).

[2] Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 5.

attendance.[3] The rest are either stagnant or declining. Even more alarming is the number of Lutheran mega-churches that are not surviving past their founding generations. In 2016 alone one former Lutheran mega-church closed its doors, and another was absorbed into a mega-church of another denomination. These recent trends indicate a pressing need to address the issue of discipleship within Lutheran mega-churches.

This project addressed this need by exploring the relational, developmental and missional aspects of discipleship through biblical reflection, a review of relevant literature and field research at three Lutheran mega-churches. From this exploration, the researcher developed a discipleship model for use within his own congregation as well as other Lutheran mega-churches.

---

[3] "Demographic Reports," Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, accessed March 23, 2016, http://www.elca.org/en/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Research-and-Evaluation/Demographic-Reports.

CHAPTER ONE: DISCIPLESHIP AND THE LUTHERAN MEGA-CHURCH

Statement of the Problem

As a response to the difficulty many Lutheran mega-churches experience with disciple-making, this project addressed the problem of cultivating a relationally, developmentally and missionally oriented adult discipleship environment within a Lutheran mega-church. In this project, three distinct aspects of discipleship are examined. The first aspect of discipleship is its relational nature. Discipleship is relational in that it functions best within the context of an apprenticeship. This was Jesus' primary strategy for forming his disciples. As Jesus apprenticed his disciples, they observed and ultimately imitated his life, ministry and message. The second aspect of discipleship is its developmental nature. Discipleship is developmental because it involves a lifelong journey of transformation. Peter and Paul provide examples of disciples whose lives were transformed over time as they continued to follow Jesus, even after his ascension. The third aspect of discipleship is its missional nature. Discipleship is missional because it has as its goal disciples who adopt the character of Christ and proclaim the Good News of Christ to others through both words and actions. The gospels provide many illustrations of the missional nature of discipleship.

Addressing this problem, the researcher first explored Jesus' and his followers' approach to discipleship as exemplified in Matthew, Luke and Acts. Next, the researcher reviewed relevant literature concerning relational, developmental and missional

discipleship strategies within the local church, as well as Lutheran theological reflection related to discipleship.

Finally, the researcher investigated three Lutheran mega-churches' response to the challenge of disciple-making, paying attention to how these responses were or were not facilitating transformation in the lives of their members. This research included on site observations, semi-structured interviews with staff and congregational members, as well as hardcopy and online documents from all three congregations under study.

Based on these data, the researcher developed an intentionally Lutheran model of a relational, developmental and missional adult discipleship ministry for use at Lutheran Church of Hope in West Des Moines, Iowa (Hope WDM).

Delimitations of the Problem

In order to keep this project manageable, several delimitations proved to be necessary. First, the scope of this project was limited to exploring the adult discipleship strategies, practices and outcomes of three of the largest Lutheran mega-churches (congregations with a weekly worship attendance of 2,000 or more)[4] in North America, with a focus on Hope WDM. Second, this project was limited to the review of literature related to general adult discipleship strategies, as well as adult discipleship strategies within mega-churches, paying particular attention to relevant Lutheran theological reflection on the same topics. Third, this project was limited to the study of the relational, developmental and missional discipleship processes in the New Testament, with primary

---

[4] "Mega Church Definition," Hartford Institute for Religion Research, accessed September 30, 2019, http://hirr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/definition.html.

attention given to the books of Matthew, Luke and Acts. This project was also limited to the review of relevant exegetical studies of the books of Matthew, Luke and Acts.

Assumptions

This project assumed that discipleship is a holistic process involving the ongoing transformation of the life perspective, character and behavior of a disciple to the end that the disciple reflects the perspective, character and behavior of Christ.

This project also assumed that while the discipleship process can and should be nurtured by the local church and its various ministries (worship services, classes, seminars, small groups, etc.), the discipleship process is also nurtured by events, circumstances and relationships, which naturally occur in everyday life.

This project also assumed biblical and theological reflection, particularly Lutheran theological reflection to be foundational to this project.

Finally, this researcher understood the Bible to be an entirely relevant and trustworthy literature resource on which to base adult discipleship strategies and processes.

Sub-problems

This project had five sub-problems. The first sub-problem was the discovery of what the New Testament, particularly the books of Matthew, Luke and Acts, revealed about Jesus' and his followers' approach to discipleship with regard to its relational, developmental and missional aspects.

The second sub-problem explored what the relevant literature revealed in regard to relational, developmental and missional discipleship strategies and practices within the context of mega-church congregations.

The third sub-problem sought to determine what the relevant literature revealed about Lutheran theological reflection in regard to relational, developmental and missional discipleship strategies and practices within the Lutheran tradition.

The fourth sub-problem explored the adult discipleship strategies, practices and outcomes of the three largest Lutheran mega-churches in North America, with a focus on Hope WDM.

The fifth sub-problem, based upon analysis of the above data, suggested a plan of action for implementing an intentionally Lutheran as well as relationally, developmentally and missionally oriented discipleship environment within the context of Hope WDM.

Setting of the Project

Lutheran Church of Hope in West Des Moines, Iowa is a fast-growing mega-church with six campuses located throughout the Des Moines, Iowa metropolitan area. Supported by its main campus in West Des Moines, all six campuses enjoy a combined average weekly attendance of over 13,000 adult worshippers. The main focus of all campuses is a seeker-friendly weekend worship experience involving parking lot to worship center hospitality, energetic band-driven worship and a robust children's ministry, complete with its own worship and drama teams. The weekend preaching style resembles a dynamic business seminar presentation, complete with PowerPoint slides and movie clips. The sermons themselves focus on topics relevant to worshippers' everyday experiences.

In addition to weekend worship, all campuses place a strong emphasis on hands-on compassion ministry, including an effective ministry to the homeless who live near the downtown Des Moines campus and a large recovery ministry at Hope's main campus in

West Des Moines. All campuses also have extensive pastoral care and prayer ministries for their members. While all campuses share the same mission, vision and values, each has been free to develop its own strategy that best serves the people in their area. The downtown campus, for example, focuses on serving the Des Moines area homeless community. As a result, roughly a quarter of its weekend worshippers come from that community.

When guests first arrive at the main campus in West Des Moines, they are greeted by a modern facility that has more in common architecturally with a downtown fine arts center than a traditional church building. Upon entering the facility, guests are welcomed into an airy atrium space where Hope WDM's mission statement is prominently displayed: "Reach out into the world and share the everlasting love of Jesus Christ." In keeping with the mission statement, this modern facility has been designed to help guests feel welcome, comfortable and safe. In this way, both the facility and the congregation extend a clear welcome to the surrounding communities that make up the Des Moines metropolitan area.

Upon entering the worship center, guests experience a worship space that blends the ethos of a traditional Lutheran sanctuary with a modern mega-church auditorium. A large, contemporary, free-standing altar occupies the center of the stage, with a lectern immediately to its left. To the right of the stage hangs a forty-foot high, rough-hewn wooden cross, while to the left is a forty-foot high waterfall that plunges into a large immersion baptismal font. This font is used about six times a year for mass adult baptisms, a practice in keeping with the high value Hope WDM places on

evangelism. Hope WDM's founding and senior pastor, Michael Housholder, often reminds the congregation that its job is to "make heaven crowded."

Hope WDM was founded in 1991 as a traditional Lutheran church plant. It was restarted by Pastor Housholder in 1993 with just twenty weekly worshippers. In 1994 with two hundred worshippers, Hope WDM was organized as a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. That same year Hope WDM moved into its first permanent worship space. Rapid growth meant that this space would be expanded twice to accommodate what in 1999 would be 1,500 weekly worshippers. In 2000, Hope WDM moved a quarter mile west into its second facility. Within a month, worship attendance increased to over 1,900 weekly worshippers. In 2008, following another expansion, Hope WDM built its present worship space, which seats 2,600 worshippers. After completing this worship space Hope WDM began to plant campuses across the Des Moines metro area to accommodate steadily increasing weekly attendance.

Worship was not the only place where Hope, WDM experienced rapid growth. Hope WDM's adult discipleship ministry was initially built around the traditional Lutheran adult education model: a Sunday adult forum, one or two Bible classes, a small group ministry, and men's and women's quarterly events. However, in 1996 Hope WDM's associate pastor, John Kline, enlarged Hope WDM's adult discipleship ministry by introducing several new classes, seminars, support and recovery groups, and a local and global missions ministry. Pastor Kline also significantly expanded the existing small group ministry. For over a decade, Hope WDM's adult discipleship ministry continued

this strategy of continually adding courses, seminars and other offerings, so much so that in 2009 its course catalog resembled that of a small university.

In 2014 Hope WDM's adult discipleship staff began to explore ways to organize its many offerings around a discipleship strategy and pathway that was relational, developmental and missional in nature. There was a desire to move away from offering a multitude of loosely coordinated learning experiences toward a more strategic pathway that supported lifelong, fruit-producing discipleship. In 2015 the adult discipleship staff put together the first draft of a discipleship pathway and began to organize some of its offerings around that pathway.

Importance of the Project

Discipleship and the Researcher's Journey of Faith

The impetus for this project stemmed from the researcher's quest for a sustainable and joyful discipleship pathway, both for the researcher personally and for those whom he serves. The Christianity of the researcher's childhood was rooted in the fear-filled legalism of his fundamentalist church. Discipleship in this church was defined as an extensive checklist of things Christians were required to do in order to keep God pleased with them. However, during the researcher's high school and college years, he began to meet Christians who seemed to relate to God in a joyous manner. While attending college, the researcher joined a Lutheran congregation where he learned about the gift of God's free grace. More importantly, the researcher discovered that God's essential posture toward him was not anger but love.

Unfortunately, as he began to serve in the Lutheran church, first as a volunteer and later as a pastor, the researcher began to experience a Christianity as much out of balance as the legalism of his childhood. Many fellow pastors seemed to be wary of any

kind of discipleship that involved intentional commitment or life transformation.

For them, a discipleship that involved human engagement set believers on the slippery

slope toward works righteousness.

 About ten years ago this researcher began reading the works of Dallas Willard. In

The Divine Conspiracy, while analyzing a dispute between John MacArthur and Charles

Ryrie on what is necessary for salvation, Willard makes the following claim:

> Finally, the two sides agree that getting into heaven after death is the sole target of divine and human efforts for salvation. . . . But we get a totally different picture of salvation, faith and forgiveness if we regard having life from the kingdom of the heavens now—the eternal kind of life—as the target. The words and acts of Jesus naturally suggest that this is indeed salvation, with discipleship, forgiveness and heaven to come as natural parts.[5]

For Willard, salvation is not just about the afterlife. Rather, the free gift of salvation

begins now and includes discipleship along with forgiveness and the afterlife as part of

the package. In this way Willard echoes the apostle Paul in defining discipleship as part

of the wonderful gift of salvation, something that is "worked out" in our daily lives,

rather than a checklist to keep God pleased or an optional activity to do if Christians have

extra time on their hands.

 After encountering Willard, this researcher spent considerable time reading,

researching and studying the Scriptures in an attempt to come up with a biblical

and sustainable model of salvation/discipleship that works effectively within the twenty-

first century church. This project represents a step forward in that quest, both for the

---

[5] Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1997), 47.

researcher personally and in his capacity as Teaching Pastor and Director of adult

discipleship at Hope WDM.

Discipleship and Lutheran Church of Hope

This project addressed the challenges the researcher's congregation has

experienced in cultivating a biblical and sustainable discipleship environment within a

Lutheran mega-church. Until recently, his congregation's discipleship strategy consisted

of offering a vast array of classes, seminars, retreats, and service projects without any real

guidance to those wanting to grow as disciples. The only direction his congregation

offered was an encouragement for all newcomers to participate in Alpha,[6] join a small

group and take part in the congregation's many local or global service projects. What was

lacking was a clear pathway that would help members navigate the congregation's

many discipleship offerings.

To that end, the researcher's congregation has taken the first steps toward

developing a discipleship pathway that is relational, developmental and missional. This

project provided his congregation with an overview of current thinking in regard to

effective discipleship strategies, a window into the best practices of congregations whose

context is similar to his congregation's, and the Biblical and theological reflection

necessary to complete his congregation's discipleship strategy.

---

[6] Alpha USA, "What is Alpha," accessed September 30, 2019, https://alphausa.org/about.

Discipleship and the Church at Large

In 2015, the Navigators commissioned the Barna Group to conduct research on the state of discipleship in the United States. The report summarized its findings as follows:

> Churches are in need of new models for discipleship. Current programs capture only a minority of Christians, and most believers do not prioritize an investment in their spiritual growth. At the same time, church leaders desire a clear plan and lack systems to evaluate spiritual health. Millennials, as we will see—though time-starved and distracted—crave relationships, especially one-on-one.[7]

This project addressed The Barna Group's call for new models of discipleship by exploring this challenge within Lutheran mega-churches. Additionally, this project suggested a discipleship strategy for Lutheran mega-churches that both motivates Christians to invest in their spiritual growth and address Millennials' and others' needs for a relationally based discipleship environment.

Nature of the Research

Project Data

This project was qualitative in nature with Case Study being the model employed. Because this project was also a collective case study involving three Lutheran mega-churches, within-case and cross-case analysis were employed. Primary data included face-to-face and phone interviews with pastors, staff members overseeing adult discipleship ministries and key congregational members, personal observations recorded in field notes, and relevant congregational documents from websites, on-site visits and denominational statistics departments. Secondary data included relevant biblical,

---

[7] Barna Group, *The State of Discipleship: A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with the Navigators* (Ventura, CA: The Barna Group. 2015), 12.

theological and mainstream literature dealing with the challenge of cultivating a

relationally, developmentally and missionally oriented adult discipleship environment

within a Lutheran mega-church.

Project Overview

First, the researcher explored Jesus' and his followers' approach to discipleship

as exemplified in the New Testament, particularly in the books of Matthew, Luke, and

Acts. This step included a review of relevant exegetical literature.

Second, the researcher reviewed other relevant literature related to this study.

This review focused on Lutheran theological reflection on adult discipleship as well as

relevant literature dealing with the relational, developmental and missional

discipleship strategies within mega-churches.

Third, the researcher investigated how the three largest Lutheran mega-churches

in North America responded to this challenge by setting up interviews with senior

pastors, staff members overseeing adult discipleship ministries and congregational

members known for their spiritual maturity. The researcher also obtained

relevant congregational and denominational documents, both hardcopy and online.

Fourth, the researcher collected, analyzed and synthesized the field data in order

to make initial observations regarding discipleship processes within a Lutheran mega-

church.

Finally, the researcher brought together the initial field observations with the

observations and insights emerging from the Scripture study and literature review in

order to refine and further develop a Lutheran model of a relational, developmental and

missional adult discipleship ministry within Hope WDM.

CHAPTER TWO: JESUS AND DISCIPLESHIP

Defining "Disciple" and "Discipleship"

The starting place for this exegetical exploration begins with an investigation into the word "disciple" (and its related term "discipleship"), as well as its use over time. Some of the questions this exploration addresses are how the word "disciple" is used in classical Greek literature, how it is used in Old Testament and intertestamental literature and how the word "disciple" and its associated concepts are employed by the writers of Matthew, Luke and Acts.

Classical Greek Usage

According to *Kittel,* μαθητής in classical Greek usage simply means someone "who directs his mind to something,"[8] that is, someone focusing on a body of information with intent to learn. Michael Wilkins shows that over time μαθητής acquired multiple meanings. In the early classical period μαθητής referred to a "learner," an "adherent" of a teacher, or an "institutional pupil" of the Sophists.[9] In the late Hellenistic period (31 B.C. to 313 A.D.), the word μαθητής still meant "learner" but began to denote more someone who adhered to a teaching or teacher.[10]

---

[8] Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 475.

[9] Michael J. Wilkins, *Discipleship in the Ancient World and Matthew's Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 41.

[10] Wilkins, 42.

Old Testament and Intertestamental Usage

While the word μαθητής is rarely used in the LXX, master-disciple relationships existed throughout Old Testament and intertestamental literature. Wilkins, referring to Old Testament Israel, writes that "in spite of the relative absence of disciple terminology and explicit teaching on discipleship, the nature of the prophetic ministry, the writing prophets, the scribes, and the wisdom tradition speak strongly of the existence of master-disciple relationships in Israel."[11] Prominent examples of Old Testament master-disciple relationships include those of Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, and quite possibly Elisha and Gehazi. In Isaiah 8:16, the prophet briefly mentions a group of people he refers to as "my disciples."

Referring to master-disciple relationships of the Maccabean period, David Csinos notes the high level of intimacy and commitment on the part of the disciple to the master-teacher.

> The ancient Jewish text *Pirkei Avot* records the words of Yossei, the son of Yoezer of Tzreidah, to his disciples: "Dust yourself in the soil of [your rabbis'] feet, and drink thirstily of their words" (i:4) This rabbi, who lived during the early Maccabean period, was telling disciples to follow their rabbis so intently, listen so closely to their words, and walk so closely behind them that they would become covered in the dust that their rabbis kicked up as they walked along the sandy roads.[12]

Wilkins comments that, in first century culture, μαθητής (as well its Hebrew equivalent, *limmûdh*) "were popular terms at the time of Jesus to designate a follower

---

[11] Wilkins, 91.

[12] David M. Csinos, ""Come, Follow Me": Apprenticeship in Jesus' Approach to Education," *Religious Education* 105, no. 1 (2010): 56.

who was vitally committed to a teacher/leader and/or movement."[13] Wilkins observes that

"the terms themselves did not determine the type of discipleship; the type of discipleship

was determined by the leader or movement or teaching to which the disciple was

committed."[14] This meant that the meaning of μαθητής varied significantly between

teachers and movements depending upon how a given teacher or leader chose to define it.

<div align="center">Μαθητής in Matthew and Luke</div>

The flexibility of the first century terms μαθητής is reflected in the way New

Testament authors, particularly Matthew and Luke, make use of the term in their

writings. James Samra comments that μαθητής and its related verb form μαθητεύω seem

to carry multiple meanings when used by the gospel writers:

> . . . [T]he word "disciple" *(μαθητής)* and its related verbal form *(μαθητεύω)* sometimes have an educational, intellectual sense (Matt. 10:24; 13:52), in which case "discipleship" is simply the process of being educated by a teacher. At other times (and more frequently) discipleship seems to involve life transformation (16:24; Mark 8:34; cf. 1:17-18), in which case discipleship is seen as the process of becoming like one's master. . . . there are different referents for the word "disciple." Sometimes the word speaks of those who occasionally followed Christ (Matt. 8:21). . . . Sometimes the word "disciple" is used of those select few who were being trained to be leaders of the church (17:1).[15]

The definition of "disciple" also varies between the gospel writers. Longenecker shows

that unlike Mark, Luke and Matthew do not reserve the description "disciple" only for the

Twelve. He cites Luke 6:17 where Jesus teaches "a large crowd of his disciples" and

Luke 19:37 where "the whole crowd of disciples" began to praise God as Jesus entered

---

[13] Wilkins, 125.

[14] Wilkins, 125.

[15] James G. Samra, "A Biblical View of Discipleship," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160, no. 638 (April 2003): 219-20.

Jerusalem.[16] Matthew, in his gospel, refers to Jesus' "twelve disciples" in 10:1 and other passages, but also mentions "another of his disciples" who requests to bury his father in 8:21. Samra states that in Acts Luke uses "disciple" as a technical term referring to all believers.[17]

In sum, the multivalent meanings of μαθητής make it difficult to pin down a single definition for the words "disciple" and "discipleship." Nonetheless, following Wilkin's observation (that the teacher determined what kind of discipleship the disciple experienced),[18] it should be possible to construct a stable set of meanings for both "disciple" and "discipleship" by examining Jesus' words and actions toward his disciples.

<div align="center">

Jesus' Invitation to Discipleship

</div>

Both Matthew and Luke contain accounts of Jesus inviting people to become his disciples. Luke records Jesus inviting his first disciples, Peter, James and John, after performing many miracles in the region of Capernaum and also after being aggressively rejected by the people of his hometown, Nazareth (indeed, they tried to throw him off a cliff). Becoming a disciple of Jesus, then, has both its positive and negative aspects. On the one hand, it seems reasonable for Jesus' first disciples to drop their nets and follow him. He is, after all, a wonder-working prophet, proclaiming the kingdom of God. Given the large catch of fish they take in, Peter, James and John also have hard evidence in front

---

[16] Richard N. Longenecker, "Taking Up the Cross Daily: Discipleship in Luke-Acts," in *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament,* ed. Richard Longenecker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 56.

[17] Samra, 223.

[18] Wilkins, 125.

of them that Jesus can deliver what he promises. Following Jesus appears to be a path to obvious glory.

On the other hand, Jesus' visit to Nazareth reveals that he is also one who has been rejected by those who seem to know him best. The prologue to the Gospel of John sums up the Nazareth episode well: "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him" (John 1:11). By placing three miraculous healing accounts (Jesus driving out an evil spirit, healing Peter's mother-in-law and healing various kinds of people at sunset) in proximity to the Nazareth episode, Luke seems to be suggesting, "as it will be with Jesus, so it will be with his disciples." While they may experience mighty deeds of power, they will also experience moments of profound rejection. And that is, indeed, how things unfold for the disciples in the Book of Acts.

Matthew's account of Jesus' invitation to the first disciples occurs at a different point than in Luke's narrative. Following Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, Matthew quickly mentions Jesus' move to Capernaum and his preaching in that same region, before giving a brief account of Jesus calling his first disciples. While both Matthew and Luke record Jesus telling his disciples that they will fish for people, only Matthew includes the phrase, "follow me."

It seems somewhat understandable that in Luke's narrative Peter, James and John would drop their nets at once to follow Jesus. Matthew, on the other hand, leaves the reader wondering about the disciples' motivations. Only after Peter and Andrew and later James and John follow Jesus does Matthew mention Jesus' miraculous healings. Warren Carter suggests that Matthew's reader is already aware of Jesus' ability to make such an authoritative and irresistible invitation because Matthew in his opening chapter "has

established Jesus as the one who originates from God and is commissioned by God to save from sins (1:21) and to manifest God's presence (1:23)."[19] In other words, as the divine Immanuel, Jesus' call to his disciples turns out to be God's call. In the end, those following Jesus are actually following God himself.

A second and equally interesting call account occurs when Jesus invites Matthew (Levi in Luke) the tax collector to follow him. As with the first disciples, Matthew (Levi) gets up immediately at Jesus' invitation and follows him. Both Matthew and Luke place their account after Jesus forgives and heals a paralyzed man. Although there are variations between Matthew's and Luke's story lines, they are similar enough that it is possible to notice some parallels between the call of Matthew (Levi) and the story occurring immediately prior.

In both accounts the paralytic and the tax collector are outsiders, one because of his chronic illness, the other because of his choice of career. In both accounts, after Jesus' first response, the religious leaders who are present lodge serious complaints against Jesus. Because Jesus forgives the paralytic's sins, they complain that he has committed blasphemy. Because Jesus eats with Matthew and his friends, they complain that Jesus eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners, thereby making himself unclean. In both accounts there is a "double move." With the paralytic, Jesus first forgives his sins, then gives him the ability to walk. With Matthew, the tax collector, Jesus first invites him to follow him, then joins him in a banquet with other tax collectors and sinners.

---

[19] Warren Carter, "Matthew 4:18-22 and Matthean Discipleship: An Audience-Oriented Perspective," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (January 1997): 63.

The point of the parallels between these two episodes may best be summed up by Jesus' response to the Pharisees: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:31-32). Ralph Martin observes that through his actions,

> Jesus is announcing that his meals with sinners are an anticipatory token of what God intends to do, that is, to receive sinners at his heavenly table. This dimension to his action in eating with sinners seems clearly to explain the innuendo leveled at him, as "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (7:33-35).[20]

Jesus, then, as "a friend of tax collectors and sinners," and as Immanuel not only heals broken people, he also associates with them and ultimately does what only God can do, he forgives them.

Following Jesus

Jesus invites Peter, Andrew, James, and John to become his disciples by using the phrase "follow me" (Matt. 4:18-22). While it appears that Jesus is indeed asking these fishermen to become his disciples, he is also asking them literally to follow him, as evidenced by their response. The notion of disciples physically going wherever their master goes would not be unusual in first-century Judea. Commenting on Jesus and the first-century rabbinic tradition, Csinos writes,

> After their rabbi called them to be disciples, they were to observe his every deed and word, following him so closely that they would become dusted in the soil of his feet as he guided them. Throughout the synoptic Gospels, there is recurring evidence that this is just what Jesus' disciples did. They accompanied him on his journeys, learning from what he said and did, gradually moving towards full participation in his community of practice.[21]

---

[20] Ralph P. Martin, "Salvation and Discipleship in Luke's Gospel," *Interpretation* 30, no. 4 (October 1976): 374.

[21] Csinos, 56.

In other words, Jesus' first disciples behaved much the same as other disciples did: they followed their rabbi, observed his words and actions and imitated his way of life.

While these first disciples literally left their family and livelihood to follow Jesus, in both Matthew and Luke, Jesus calls other disciples to follow him in different ways. When Jesus calls the centurion, he could reasonably be called Jesus' follower even though he does not join Jesus in his journeys (Luke 7:1-10, Matt. 8:5-13). In fact, Jesus tells the crowd surrounding him that he has never found such great faith in Israel as he has found in this centurion (Luke 7:9). Mary and Martha are introduced to the reader as people entertaining Jesus in their home (Luke 10:38-52). Mary is described as "sitting at Jesus' feet," a phrase Luke uses, according to Christopher Hutson, to designate a disciple/teacher relationship.[22] Commenting on the practices of many of Jesus' followers, N. T. Wright remarks,

> The evidence points, I suggest, towards Jesus intending to establish, and indeed succeeding in establishing, what we might call cells of followers, mostly continuing to live in their towns and villages, who by their adoption of his praxis, his way of being Israel, would be distinctive within their local communities.[23]

It appears that in the gospels of Mark and Luke there are at least two ways to "follow" Jesus: (1) as his apprentices, physically present with him, observing his lifestyle and ministry, learning from his teaching and ultimately imitating Jesus' lifestyle, ministry and teaching, and (2) as active adherents to his teaching, also observing (albeit from a distance) and learning, but still remaining in their original communities.

---

[22] Christopher Roy Hutson, "Martha's choice: A Pastorally Sensitive Reading of Luke 10:38-42," *Restoration Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (2003): 140.

[23] N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God,* vol. 2, *Christian Origins and the Question of God,* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 276.

Imitating Jesus

In both Matthew and Luke Jesus tells his first disciples that they will "fish for people." In a sense, Jesus is revealing his own mission, which the disciples will soon imitate. Jesus is also anticipating his final command to "go and make disciples," as Matthew records it. Luke records Jesus using the language of "witnesses." Nonetheless the results are similar; Jesus' disciples/witnesses proclaim—and enact—what they have seen and heard, with the result being that others become disciples as well.

While there seem to be two ways of "following" Jesus, at least some of his followers engage in what appears to be a practice of observation and imitation. Dean Wenthe remarks, "the view that the Rabbi or teacher was to embody his teaching, and then be imitated by his disciples, also informs our understanding of Jesus and the disciples in their social milieu and setting."[24] If Wenthe is correct, Jesus and his disciples appear to be following the rabbinic tradition of apprenticeship learning.

Both Matthew's and Luke's accounts of Jesus calling his first disciples conclude with them walking away from their old way of life and physically following Jesus. The disciples' response conditions the story line of both gospels: what happens narratively up to Jesus' betrayal and arrest, for the most part, happens to Jesus' disciples as well. Whatever miracles Jesus does, they experience. Whatever Jesus teaches to the crowds they also learn.

---

[24] Dean O. Wenthe, "Prophet, Priest, King, and Teacher: The Old Testament, Intertestamental, and Hellenistic Antecedents for Jesus' Role as Rabbi and Teacher," in *Lively Legacy: Essays in Honor of Robert Preus,* eds. Kurt E. Marquart, John R. Stephenson, and Bjarne W. Teigen (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary, 1985), 204.

Samra indicates that Jesus engaged in several teaching and training strategies.[25] Initially Jesus' disciples were to observe his life and ministry and learn from his teaching. Matthew records that almost immediately after Jesus calls his first followers, he instructs them with the extended teaching of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7). Another way Jesus taught his disciples was through private explanations of his teaching and parables, such as after the parable of the sower (Luke 8:1-15, Matt. 13:1-23). Jesus also taught his disciples by giving them challenging assignments, as was the case with the feeding of the five thousand (Luke 9:10-17).

Ultimately Jesus sends both the Twelve and seventy-two other disciples out to imitate the ministry he has been doing: proclaiming the kingdom of God, healing the sick, and driving out demons (Luke 9:1-2). This process of observation and imitation is also carried into the post-resurrection period of the Church. The writer of Hebrews urges readers to "Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith" (Heb. 13:7). To the Corinthians, Paul writes, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1 NRSV). These and other passages suggest that the primary learning strategy for the early church was the same for Jesus' initial followers: observation and imitation.

Jesus' actions are not the only points of imitation for his disciples; Jesus also teaches his followers to imitate his character. During the final supper Jesus shared with his disciples, an argument arose among them over who was the greatest. Jesus responds by calling on his disciples to imitate his humility and servant posture.

---

[25] Samra, 233-34.

> The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves (Luke 22:25–27).

This passage is not the only place Jesus calls his disciples to imitate his character. Earlier in Luke's gospel Jesus tells his disciples, "the one who is least among you all is the greatest" (Luke 9:48). Indeed, the idea that the least are the greatest in the kingdom of God is a concept that runs throughout Luke's gospel.

The Relational Nature of Discipleship

One of the more remarkable aspects of Jesus' discipleship strategy was his use of relationships to teach his followers. When Jesus called his first disciples to follow him, they literally stopped what they were doing and began to follow him wherever he went (Matt. 4:18-22, Luke 5:1-11). This simple act of following created relationships that gave the disciples an extraordinary window into Jesus' life and ministry. It also gave Jesus an opportunity to teach his disciples about the kingdom of God in an extremely focused manner. As a result, Jesus was able to leverage this close relational environment to equip them to do the very ministry he was doing.

Jesus' Disciples as Servant Family

One major component of Jesus' relationally driven discipleship strategy involved redefining the traditional Jewish notion of family. In one extraordinary account, when Jesus' mother and brothers come to see him, Jesus declares, "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice" (Luke 8:19-21), a clear challenge to the centrality of the first-century Jewish family. Commenting on the radical nature of Jesus' statement Wright observes:

> [Jesus' statement] would be remarkable enough in almost any culture. In a peasant society, where familial relations provided one's basic identity, it was shocking in the extreme. In the first-century Jewish prevailing worldview, it cannot but have been devastating. Jesus was proposing to treat his followers as a surrogate family. This has a substantial positive result: Jesus intended his followers to inherit all the closeness and mutual obligations that belonged with family membership in that close-knit, family-based society.[27]

Wright's observation plays out in several ways throughout Matthew's and Luke's gospels. One of the most basic ways is Jesus' constant reference to his followers as "brothers and sisters."

Jesus warns his followers against the hypocrisy of the teachers of the law and the Pharisees (Matt. 23). He notes that they look for honor and respect and desire for people to call them "Rabbi" (Matt. 23:6-7). By contrast Jesus declares that his followers live in a family where God is their Father and they are all brothers, sisters and servants to each other.

> But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Messiah. The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. (Matt. 23:8-12).

During Jesus' last supper with his disciples, Jesus reinforces this notion of his disciples as a servant-family by declaring that "the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves" (Luke 22:26). Referring to Matthew's gospel, Terence Donaldson writes,

> To be part of Jesus' community, it is necessary to become like children (18:1-5). Hierarchical (23:8-10) and tyrannical (20:25) patterns of leadership are to be

---

[27] Wright, 278.

guarded against. Rather, greatness in the community of Jesus' disciples is to be measured in terms of humble service to all (20:26-28; 23:11-12).[28]

As with Luke's gospel, the idea that Jesus' followers are to be a family of brothers and sisters who mutually serve each other resonates throughout Matthew's gospel.

In the post-Pentecost community of Acts 2:42-47, Luke describes the community of disciples, acting more or less like the servant-family Jesus envisioned in the gospels: (1) they have everything in common, (2) they sell their property and possessions to support those who have need, and (3) they regularly break bread together and eat meals together. The result, writes Luke, is that "the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Luke 2:47). Throughout Acts, the disciples continue to refer to each other as "brother" and "sister," a symbol of the reality in which they strive to live.

The Servant Family and the Kingdom of God

In both Matthew and Luke, Jesus makes several connections between the kingdom of God and Jesus' understanding of his disciples as the family of God. One such connection occurs in the prayer Jesus taught his disciples (Matt. 6:9-13, Luke 11:1-4). This prayer begins by addressing God as "Father," with the first petition requesting that the Father's kingdom would come on earth as in heaven. The implications are clear: those who pray to God as Father, and for his kingdom to come, are members of both God's family and his kingdom. In this prayer, the language of family and kingdom come together to speak of the same reality: the family of God, if not identical with, is at the very least an essential part of the kingdom of God.

---

[28] Terence L. Donaldson, "Guiding Readers – Making Disciples: Discipleship in Matthew's Narrative Strategy," in *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament,* ed. Richard Longenecker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 46.

In other places within Matthew's and Luke's gospels, Jesus employs a set of symbols when he speaks about the realm of God: kingdom, Father and children. In Luke 23:32, two of these symbols come together with the symbol of shepherding to describe God's posture toward his people: "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom." In other words, Jesus' little flock turns out to be children of a Father who delights in transforming his family into a kingdom of priests.

In Matthew 25:40, the king in Jesus' story of the sheep and the goats declares, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." Here the symbols of royalty and family come together in the account of the King judging the inhabitants of the earth. In this parable, the sheep and the goats are separated depending on how they have treated the king's subjects, who are also his brothers and sisters. The kingdom of God is revealed to be the family of God.

Not only does Jesus speak of his followers as family and by implication children of God, he also uses a child as an example of the posture one takes in order to enter the kingdom of God. In Matthew 18:1 Jesus' disciples ask him, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Jesus' responds,

> Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes a humble place—becoming like this child—is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me (Matt. 18:3-5).

Frederick Dale Bruner comments, "In Jesus' opinion a little child is the best definition of a great person. It is not the child's subjective innocence or purity that is so much in view

as it is the objective smallness or weakness of the child."[29] Quite unlike the hierarchical tendencies of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, greatness in God's kingdom is defined by adopting the humble attitude of children, little ones who are completely dependent on their heavenly Father for their welfare.

<div align="center">Meals as Teaching Moments</div>

In his article on Jesus as rabbi and teacher, Wenthe comments on the places first-century rabbis would use for teaching their students: "The settings in which the Rabbi and his disciples considered the Torah were widely varied, though often the synagogue gatherings and meal assemblies served to focus the study in a more formal manner."[30] A quick reading of Matthew and Luke indicates that Jesus also followed the rabbinical practice of using meals as opportunities for teaching both his disciples and his opponents.

In Luke's and Matthew's gospels, the first meal mentioned is Jesus' meal with Matthew (Levi) and his fellow tax collectors and sinners. When questioned about his actions, Jesus uses this meal as an opportunity to announce his mission: "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32). Luke records that immediately following this meal, Jesus is asked why his disciples continue to eat and drink, even while John's and the Pharisee's disciples pray and fast. Again, Jesus turns the disciples' eating and drinking into a sign both of his own identity—the bridegroom—and of the kingdom of God—new wineskins (Luke 5:33-39).

---

[29] Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary,* vol. 2, *The Churchbook: Matthew 13-28* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 634.

[30] Wenthe, 195.

Not only does Jesus use meals as occasions for teaching his disciples, he also tells stories involving meals. Often these stories teach his followers about the kingdom of God. One of Jesus' best-known meal stories—the parable of the lost son—is the last in a series of three "lost and found" parables. These parables are Jesus' response to the complaints of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law that "this man welcomes sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:2). In this third parable, these "righteous complainers" find themselves aligned with the older brother on the outside of a great banquet while the host/father pleads with him to come in and join in the celebration. Martin notes, "The actions and parables of Jesus in Luke are consonant with a concern for the social and religious outcasts of his day, particularly in his offer of table-fellowship to "publicans and prostitutes" (5:29-32; 15:1,2; 19:5-7) that has to be viewed in the light of the expected "banquet of the blessed" in God's kingdom (14:15)."[31] Through the parable of the lost son, Jesus challenges both his disciples and his detractors with the radically inclusive nature of the kingdom of God.

Most likely the most profound meal in all the gospels is the Lord's Supper. In this meal, Jesus reveals his ultimate mission, teaches his disciples about true greatness and gives them a striking example of what it means for his disciples to serve each other. Jesus' words over the bread, "This is my body, given for you" (Luke 22:19), reveal his radical commitment to his disciples (indeed to the whole world) even to the point of his own death. Jesus' words over the wine, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. . ."

---

[31] Martin, 374.

(Luke 22:20), tie him to the covenant that Israel's God made with his people, thereby placing Jesus at the climax of God's redemptive story with Israel.

Luke recounts the tragic irony of the disciples arguing over who is the greatest, immediately after hearing Jesus' words over the bread and wine. In response, Jesus contrasts himself and the community of his disciples with "the kings of the Gentiles," who "lord it over them" and "call themselves Benefactors" (Luke 22:25). Instead they are to imitate Jesus as "one who serves" (Luke 22:27). In John's account of Jesus' final Passover, he takes off his outer clothing, wraps a towel around his waist and washes his disciples' feet (John 13:1-16). Taken together with Jesus' comment in Luke's account on true greatness, Jesus' last supper serves not only to reveal his commitment to his disciples, but also his disciples' call to imitate Jesus as chief servant of all.

The Developmental Nature of Discipleship

Beginning with the gospels and continuing through the Book of Acts, Jesus' disciples embark on a remarkable journey of transformation from unlikely fishermen, tax collectors and religious zealots to the courageous leaders of the post-resurrection Jesus movement. In order to make sense of this transformation, it is important to understand Jesus' strategy for developing his disciples into the faithful leaders they become.

According to Csinos, Jesus employed many methods of teaching as he spoke to various groups of people. "He fulfilled scriptural prophecies (Matt. 12:15-17), preached (Luke 6:17- 49), taught by example (Matt. 14:22-36), prophesied (Matt. 24:1-51), asked questions (Matt. 16:13-20), gave analogies (Matt. 12:38-42), and presented parables

(Matt. 13:1-34). In no way was Jesus a one-method or single-style teacher."[32] Samra

groups these diverse methods into two modes of teaching.

> "First, He taught systematically. That is, He taught large amounts of material in single settings with unified themes. . . . Second, Jesus also taught occasionally, that is, He often taught truths when an occasion arose. This type of teaching was possible as the disciples spent extended time with Him."[33]

If anything, Jesus was an extremely flexible teacher, adapting his methods to demands of

the situation.

<div align="center">Jesus' Systematic Teaching</div>

One of the most obvious examples in the gospels of Jesus' systematic teaching is

the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7). In this teaching, Jesus instructs his disciples on

what they are to believe, how they are to pray and how they are to live. Jesus begins his

sermon with the word, "blessed." Some who are blessed are so because of certain

behaviors and attitudes they possess (the merciful, the pure in heart). Others have had

their blessedness thrust upon them by life's circumstances (those who mourn).

Jesus continues this teaching by describing the essential character of his

followers: salt and light. While salt is only used as a positive symbol in the Old

Testament when connected to temple offerings, light is a common positive symbol,

referring to God's light (Ps. 27:1), to the light of God's Word (Ps. 119:105) and to the

light of the righteous (Prov. 13:9).

In addition to teaching his disciples what they are to believe, Jesus also teaches

them how they are to pray. In particular, Jesus gives them what is now called "the Lord's

---

[32] Csinos, 54.

[33] Samra, 233.

Prayer," a wide-ranging prayer that covers such topics as the name, kingdom and will of God, daily needs, forgiveness, and temptation. Along with this prayer, Jesus tells his disciples not to worry but rather to ask, seek and knock, relying on the generosity of their Father in heaven (Matt. 7:7-11).

Finally, Jesus teaches his disciples how they are to live. While the sermon on the mount covers a wide range of topics relating to behavior, one stands out in particular: reconciliation. Jesus commends those who are merciful (Matt. 5:7) and who are peacemakers (Matt. 5:9). He also tells his disciples to be reconciled before making sacrifices (Matt. 5:23-24), to settle civil conflicts out of court (Matt. 5:25-26), to turn the other cheek (Matt. 5:39), and to love their enemies (Matt. 5:44). In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus instructs his disciples to ask for forgiveness for their debts "as we also forgive our debtors" (Matt. 6:12). Jesus' consistent teaching on reconciliation points not only to God's posture toward his people but also to the instrument of God's central act of forgiveness: Jesus' own crucifixion.

Jesus' Occasional Teaching

While most of Jesus' teaching in Matthew is systematic, Jesus' teaching in Luke is more occasional. One prominent example of occasional teaching in Luke is Jesus' teaching on the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. This teaching is in response to the mutterings of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law: "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:2).

Both Luke and Matthew include accounts of Jesus taking his disciples aside and explaining certain parables. Matthew clusters together the parable of the sower and the parable of the weeds, along with the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast (Matt. 13:1-35). At the conclusion of the parable of the sower, Jesus' disciples approach him

and ask why he speaks in parables. Jesus responds by explaining the purposes of parables: to obscure their meaning from those whose hearts are calloused (Matt. 13:15). He then tells his disciples, "blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear" (Matt. 13:16). Finally, he explains to them the meaning of the parable.

After Jesus tells the crowd three more parables, Jesus' disciples approach him again, asking him to explain the parable of the weeds. This time he responds straightforwardly with an explanation. After Jesus concludes his teaching with two more parables, he asks his disciples, "Have you understood all these things?" (Matt. 13:51), to which they respond, "yes." From the way Matthew arranges this discourse, it seems that Jesus not only teaches his disciples the meaning of certain parables, he also gradually equips them to discern the meaning of parables without needing to ask him.

Occasional Teaching through Life Situations

The Feeding of the Five Thousand

Both Luke and Matthew include accounts in which Jesus places his disciples in situations where they are forced to apply what he has taught them. Luke links together two such accounts: Jesus sending out the Twelve (Luke 9:1-9) and the feeding of the five thousand (Luke 9:10-17). Luke's version of the sending out of the Twelve occurs after a series of several healings, a short teaching including Luke's version of the Beatitudes (Luke 6:17-49), the parable of the sower (Luke 8:1-15), Jesus calming a storm (Luke 8:22-25), restoring a demon possessed man (Luke 8:26-39), and raising a dead girl back to life (Luke 8:40-56). When he sends out the Twelve, Jesus gives them authority to do the very things he has been doing: "he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick" (Luke 9:1–2). Jesus equips them for this ministry not only by teaching

them in a conventional manner but also by demonstrating to them what proclamation, healing and teaching look like, particularly when Jesus is the one doing them.

Luke records that when the Twelve return from their mission they report to Jesus everything they have done. Usually this would have taken the form of a debriefing session where Jesus would have engaged in both affirmation and correction.[34] Unfortunately, this debriefing never occurs. Instead the crowds learn where Jesus and his disciples are (Bethsaida) and follow them there. After teaching and healing the crowds, the Twelve suggest Jesus should send them away to get some food and lodging. Jesus' response is to leverage the situation pedagogically for the benefit of his disciples: "You give them something to eat" (Luke 9:13). In light of all Jesus' disciples have learned and accomplished—proclaiming the kingdom and healing the sick—it should not be outside their imagination to conceive of Jesus, or themselves for that matter, as having the power and authority to feed the crowds in some miraculous way.

Unfortunately, the disciples' response indicates a distinct lack of imagination and faith and so Jesus must step in to feed the crowd. Even so, after Jesus gives thanks and breaks the loaves and fish, he still involves the disciples in the miracle by having them distribute the loaves and fish to the crowds. When the crowd has finished eating, "the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over" (Luke 9:17). Even at the conclusion of the meal Jesus is not finished teaching his disciples. The disciples collect exactly twelve baskets of leftovers. The unlikely coincidence of this

---

[34] Samra, 234

number of baskets most likely alerted Jesus' disciples both to his sovereignty over the situation and to their role as participants in Jesus' miraculous feeding.

The Stilling of the Storm

Another situation which Jesus uses to teach his disciples is recorded in Matthew 8:23-27 where Jesus calms a storm. In Luke, this account does not appear to be connected very tightly to the gospel's overall timeline. His account begins with "One day" (Luke 8:22). Matthew, on the other hand, places this account after two would-be disciples are challenged as to their commitment to following Jesus. Perhaps Matthew is using the placement of this story to indicate why total commitment is necessary if one wishes to be Jesus' disciple. Sometimes disciples encounter severe storms as a result of following Jesus.

Matthew's account is sparse. Jesus get into a boat, his disciples follow him and suddenly a furious storm comes up with waves so intense that they sweep over the boat (Matt. 8:23-24). Luke and Mark provide more detail. Both Luke and Mark indicate that Jesus intends to go to the other side of the lake (Luke 8:22, Mark 4:35). Mark also notes that it is evening. All three gospel accounts record that during the storm Jesus is asleep, a detail almost as astounding as the storm. The disciples wake Jesus, pleading with him, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" (Matt. 8:25). At this Jesus gets up and rebukes the wind and waves. The result of Jesus' rebuke is, as Matthew reports it, the lake is "completely calm" (Matt. 8:26).

What are the disciples to learn from this situation? One way to understand this story is to view it as an "enacted parable," drawing from creation motifs found in Genesis 1. If Mark's observation that this event occurs in the evening is included, there are three

elements that would have been strongly evocative to Jesus' first-century Jewish disciples. (1) Jesus and his disciples are in a boat on the water. While water can be a symbol of life for the Jewish mind, it can also be a symbol of chaos and disorder. Genesis 1:2 depicts water as being part of a "formless and empty" earth. Later, in Genesis chs. 7-9, water plays a catastrophically destructive role in the story of the flood. (2) Mark comments that this event occurs in the evening, possibly when it is dark. Again, there are resonances with the creation story where "darkness was over the surface of the deep" (Gen. 1:2). (3) After Jesus is awakened, he speaks to the wind and the waves and everything becomes calm. As with the two preceding elements, Jesus speaking to chaotic water in the dark (according to Mark) has all the overtones of Israel's God speaking ("let there be") an orderly creation out of random chaos.

The disciples ask themselves, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!" (Matt. 8:27). Whether or not they fully understand what they have experienced, all the symbolic elements are in place: through the stilling of the storm, Jesus reveals himself as Israel's Creator God, capable of speaking order into chaos, just as he did at creation.

Jesus' Apprenticeship Strategy

While Jesus engages in both systematic and occasional modes of teaching, his overall development method appears to be one of apprenticeship. Quite apart from ways of teaching that prioritize information, the first-century apprenticeship method of discipleship involves the whole life of both the teacher and the one taught. Reflecting on first-century discipleship strategies, Csinos remarks,

> Formal educational systems that were made up of apprenticeship and situated learning were relatively common in first century Palestine. . . . In this ancient model of instruction, the disciple would learn a new way of life—his rabbi's way

of life—by accompanying his rabbi on his journeys and learning through observation and participation in the life of his rabbi.[35]

This process of apprenticeship is evident throughout the gospels. Jesus' apprenticeship strategy involves several steps. Some of these steps are: inviting, connecting, modeling, teaching, imitating, affirming and correcting, and commissioning.

Inviting

Jesus invites his first disciples to "follow him," thereby indicating that they will become his apprentices. When Jesus tells his first disciples that they will be "fishing for people" he reveals a major aspect of their mission. The details of their mission are further revealed when Jesus calls Matthew. The banquet Jesus attends signals the kind of people he will call to be a part of his disciple community: outsiders such as "tax collectors and sinners."

Connecting

Jesus connects relationally with his disciples in two ways. The first is when his disciples literally leave everything behind and follow him. The second way Jesus connects relationally is through the many meals Jesus has with his disciples. Jesus even uses meals with new converts such as Zacchaeus and also with his opponents, the Pharisees, to teach his disciples the nature of the kingdom of God.

Modeling

Through his preaching, healings and even his interactions with his opponents, Jesus models for his disciples how to proclaim the kingdom of God and be its servants. In short, Jesus is modeling what he one day expects his disciples to do.

---

[35] Csinos, 51.

Teaching

As mentioned above, Jesus uses many diverse methods of teaching, both in his more formal times of systematic teaching and in his informal times of occasional teaching.

Imitating

After a period of modeling and teaching, Jesus sends out first the Twelve (Luke 9:1-9) and later the Seventy-Two (Luke 10:1-24) to prepare the way for him by imitating his ministry of proclamation, healing and deliverance.

Affirming and Correcting

At various times Jesus either affirms what the disciples have learned or corrects them where they have wandered into error. An example of where affirmation and correction occur in close proximity can be found in Matthew 16:13-20 where Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" After the disciples give their various responses Peter answers, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus affirms Peter by responding, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven." Unfortunately, as Jesus spells out what it actually means to be the Messiah, Peter confronts Jesus by telling him, "This shall never happen to you!" At this point Jesus corrects Peter with the rather blunt response, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns." After rebuking Peter Jesus takes the occasion to speak to all of his disciples about what it means to take up their crosses daily as his disciples, thereby gaining their lives by losing them.

Commissioning

In Matthew, after Jesus' resurrection, Jesus commissions his disciples to do what he has been doing: making disciples. In Luke and Acts, Jesus calls his disciples Spirit-empowered "witnesses." Taken together, Jesus sends his disciples out, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to proclaim what they have seen and heard and to make more of what Jesus has shaped them to be: disciple-making disciples.

This process of disciple development continues beyond the first generation of Jesus' followers. After Jesus' ascension, Samra notes, "instead of the word "disciple," a new but related concept was brought to the forefront, namely, the concept of imitation."[36] He goes on to observe that "imitation then is similar to discipleship in the sense that it is the process of transferring one's lifestyle to the next generation. Having progressed in the process of imitating Christ, Paul encouraged his converts to imitate *him* [italics in original]."[37] An example of just such an encouragement is found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1, NRSV). While the vocabulary has changed from the gospels and Acts and Paul's epistles, the mode of learning has remained the same. Like Jesus' disciples, Paul's students engage in the apprenticeship process of observation and imitation.

The Missional Nature of Discipleship

Discipleship and Mission in Matthew

Matthew's gospel ends with Jesus and eleven of his disciples on a mountain. Jesus speaks to them these final words:

---

[36] Samra, 223.

[37] Samra, 224.

> All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go 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 I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Matt. 28:18-20).

This passage reveals that, among other things, Jesus is commissioning his followers to make out of all the nations the same kind of disciples that he has made out of them. Here again, in Jesus' mission for his disciples, the theme of imitation emerges. Jesus is calling on his disciples to imitate his disciple-making process by doing what he has done throughout his ministry: make disciples.

Another passage which refers to the disciples' own process of imitating Jesus occurs within Jesus' first commissioning speech in Matthew10. Preparing his disciples for the insults and persecutions they will receive, Jesus tells them, "The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for students to be like their teachers, and servants like their masters. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household!" (Matt. 10:24–25). As Jesus implies, the way students become like their teachers is by acting like them.

Proclaiming God's Word in a Mixed Community

Two parables in Matthew illustrate the way Jesus' followers are to go and make disciples. The first is the parable of the sower, where the farmer sows his seeds indiscriminately: on a path, in the rocky places, amidst the thorns, and in good soil (Matt. 13:1-23). While the focus of the parable is on four types of people who hear God's Word, the fact that the seed has been sown in all kinds of soil cannot be ignored. Jesus' disciples are not to be discriminating in regard to whom they proclaim God's Word.

Immediately after the parable of the sower Matthew records Jesus telling his disciples the parable of the weeds (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43). In this parable, a landowner discovers that his enemy has sown weeds among the wheat in his field. The landowner's servants ask if they can pull up the weeds. He tells them to wait until harvest time so as not to damage the wheat. This parable reveals to the disciples the kinds of people they can expect to be part of their communities. While the mixture of plants in this parable is not the result of indiscriminate planting, it is still to remain undisturbed until harvest.

In both parables, there is a sense that God's Word should be proclaimed to all kinds of people, regardless of their potential to receive it and keep it. Additionally, there is a sense that the community of disciples will be a *corpus mixtum* that should be left to a God to sort out in his patient and gracious time. That the disciple community will contain weeds as well as wheat means that there will be resistance to the gospel not only outside the community, but inside as well. Furthermore, Christian communities are also to be communities of grace as they follow the command to leave the weeds alone until harvest time.

Fishing, Salt and Light

When Jesus calls his first disciples he says, "Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people" (Matt. 4:19). Here is where Matthew's readers receive the first glimpse of what it means to be a disciple on mission. To be a disciple of Jesus is, at the very least, a disciple who fishes for people on Jesus' behalf.

This basic definition of discipleship is filled out by Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.
David Garland refers to this first speech in Matthew as a "charter for discipleship."[38]
While this wide-ranging sermon covers a variety of topics relating to discipleship, one
particular passage within this sermon points to the missional aspects of discipleship. Here
Jesus compares his disciples to salt and light (Matt. 5:13-16). Aside from its obvious
properties as a preservative and a flavoring agent, when Jesus refers to his disciples as
salt, he may also have in mind several Old Testament passages where salt is an integral
part of the offerings Israel makes to God (Exod. 30:35, Lev. 2:13, Num. 18:19).

When Jesus refers to his disciples as "the light of the world," in the same breath
he refers to them as "a town built on a hill" (Matt. 5:14). Here Jesus appears to be linking
his disciples' mission to two well-known Old Testament descriptions of Israel's mission.
According to Garland, when Jesus speaks of light, he is likely referring to one of Isaiah's
servant songs, where the servant is called to be an instrument of both restoration and
salvation: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob
and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles,
that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth" (Isa. 49:6).[39] Garland also believes
that when Jesus refers to "a town built on a hill" he has in mind Isaiah's prophecy where
the nations stream to the Lord's temple to learn God's ways.[40]

> In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as the
> highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will
> stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the

---

[38] David E. Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys Publishing, 2001), 51.

[39] Garland, 60.

[40] Garland, 60.

mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3).

If Garland is correct, Jesus is assigning his disciples the mission originally belonging to Israel, a provocative move that must have been startling to everyone who witnessed it.

If the disciples are salt and light, they are also harvesters, sent with Jesus' authority to do what Jesus did: proclaim the good news of the kingdom of heaven, heal the sick and drive out demons. Matthew records that, after one particular encounter with the crowds, Jesus turns to his disciples and says, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Matt. 9:37-8). But before they can even pray for more workers, Jesus calls the Twelve together, gives them authority to heal diseases and drive out demons, and commissions them to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 12:1-4). Donaldson points out that in this way Jesus makes the disciples "the answer to their own prayers even before they had time to pray!"[41]

Another situation which illuminates the way Jesus' disciples are to be salt and light occurs after Jesus calls Matthew to follow him. While Jesus and his disciples eat dinner at Matthew's house, Jesus is accused of eating with tax collectors and sinners, those regarded by the Pharisees as outsiders to Jewish society. Jesus' ironic response is that he has come not to call the righteous, but sinners (Matt. 9:9-13). As Matthew's gospel unfolds, Jesus and his disciples continue to associate with various kinds of outsiders.

---

[41] Donaldson, 36.

This theme of Jesus' orientation toward outsiders begins with Matthew's genealogy, where he includes four women, each an outsider in her own way. Furthermore, the first people to worship the baby Jesus are foreign astrologers, again outsiders. Later, when encountering a leper (another outsider) asking to be healed, Jesus first touches him—thereby making himself unclean—before he heals him (Matt. 8:14). Soon afterward, when Jesus encounters a Roman centurion seeking healing for his servant, Jesus exclaims, "Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith" (Matt. 8:10).

Initially this orientation toward outsiders is limited by Jesus' instructions to his disciples, "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel" (Matt. 10:5-6). Garland believes that Jesus' limitation on his disciples' mission was strategic and ultimately for the benefit of Jew and Gentile alike. "The priority of the mission to Israel makes sense if Israel is to fulfill its vocation as the light to the nations (Isa. 42:6, 49:6). Israel must be renewed and gathered before it can carry out its task for the nations."[42] Even still, Jesus cannot resist the pleas of the Canaanite woman for her demon-possessed daughter. While he initially tells her "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24), on the basis of the woman's faith, Jesus ultimately heals her daughter. Finally, Jesus commissions his disciples to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19). As renewed Israel, Jesus' disciples expand their mission to include the Gentiles as much as Israel.

---

[42] Garland, 112.

For Matthew, the disciples' mission is multi-faceted. It involves imitating Jesus, both in becoming a disciple and in making more disciples. It involves being "salt and light," modeling to all those around what the kingdom of God looks like. It involves being an instrument of healing, freedom and restoration. Finally, it involves proclaiming the good news of Jesus to all people, particularly to outsiders. For Matthew discipleship involves all these activities, all focused toward one goal: to make more disciples.

Discipleship and Mission in Luke and Acts

Witnessing and Testifying in Luke's Gospel

In both of Luke's commissioning accounts (Luke 24:48-9, Acts 1:8) Jesus calls his disciples "witnesses." These, however, are no isolated incidents. The concept of being a witness (μάρτυς) or giving witness (μαρτυρέω), human and angelic, is woven throughout the narratives of both Luke and Acts. In the beginning of Luke's gospel, Luke writes that he has "decided to write an orderly account" (Luke 1:3), that is, give witness of the things that have taken place. Just a few verses later Zechariah, while struck speechless by the angel Gabriel, nonetheless testifies loudly through his silence that something extraordinary has taken place.

When Mary visits Elizabeth after witnessing the angel's announcement concerning her pregnancy, both women testify to the child Mary is to bear. Mary in particular sings a paraphrase of Hannah's triumphant song (1 Sam. 2:1-10) as she testifies to the coming mighty acts of God (Luke 1:46-55). When Mary gives birth, angels from heaven testify to an unlikely group—shepherds—who themselves both witness and testify to the strange birth of Jesus. Luke records, "When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them" (Luke 2:17-18). Sometime later Zechariah

and Elizabeth's son John appears in the wilderness testifying, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Luke 3:16). It seems that in the first three chapters of Luke's gospel, someone is either witnessing or giving witness to the coming Messiah.

Before Jesus calls his first disciples, he gives them something to see: a completely unexpected and exorbitant catch of fish (Luke 5:1-11). This experience has the desired effect. Based on what these fishermen have witnessed, they leave everything behind and follow Jesus. Later, when the imprisoned John sends his messengers to Jesus asking, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" (Luke 7:20), Jesus responds with "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard" (Luke 7:22). In both incidences what Jesus' followers see and hear changes their lives and points to his identity as Messiah.

Beginning with Luke's opening chapters, the "witness" motif continues to weave its way throughout the entire gospel. Following Jesus' response to John's messengers, the disciples then witness Jesus calming a storm, setting free a demon-possessed man and even raising a dead girl back to life. When Jesus sends out first the Twelve and later seventy-two others, both groups witness first-hand the power of God flowing through their ministry. Luke records that when the seventy-two return they exclaim, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name" (Luke 10:17). For these followers of Jesus, there continues to be much to see and hear.

After Jesus is risen, several women disciples give witness to the empty tomb and the resurrection message of the two men standing beside the tomb (Luke 24:1-11). Two

disciples, on the road to Emmaus, return to Jerusalem to testify to the Eleven, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon," and continue to explain how they recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread (Luke 24:34-35). With all that Jesus' disciples in Luke's gospel have seen and heard, it comes as no surprise that Jesus' commissioning accounts at the conclusion of Luke and the beginning of Acts are framed in terms of witnessing and testifying.

Witnessing and Testifying in Acts

The motif of witnessing and testifying continues into the book of Acts. When the eleven apostles look for a person to replace Judas, one of their requirements is, "one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection" (Acts 1:22). On the day of Pentecost, the crowds hear the disciples "declaring the wonders of God" (Acts 2:11), each in their own language. When Peter preaches to the crowd he proclaims, "God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it" (Acts 2:32). After Peter heals a man lame from birth, he once again testifies concerning Jesus' death and resurrection: "You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this" (Acts 3:15-16). Preaching to Cornelius and his household, Peter proclaims concerning Jesus, "We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem" (Acts 10:39). In all four instances, just like John's disciples, Jesus' disciples give witness to what they have seen and heard: the good news about Jesus.

Luke first introduces Paul, with some irony, as the young man at whose feet the "witnesses" laid their coats during the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58). Later, a very different Paul, referring to Jesus and the other apostles, states, "But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from

Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people" (Acts 13:30-31). After his arrest in the Jerusalem temple, and subsequently leaving the Sanhedrin in disarray, Paul receives a vision of the Lord standing near him and saying, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome" (Acts 23:11). In the final chapter of Acts, Paul preaches to the local Jewish leaders in Rome. Luke tells his readers that Paul "witnessed to them from morning till evening, explaining about the kingdom of God, and from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets he tried to persuade them about Jesus" (Acts 28:23). Like many other characters in Luke's writings, Paul becomes a witness to the good news of Jesus, testifying to what he and others have seen and heard.

As with Luke's gospel, the language of "witnessing" and testifying" permeates the Book of Acts. In fact, forms of μάρτυς (witness) and μαρτυρύμαι (testify) occur twenty-six times in the book of Acts. Together with Garland,[43] Moore notes that Luke's use of "witnessing" language, particularly in his commissioning accounts, finds its roots in Isaiah's prophecy concerning God's servant, Israel, who is called to give witness that Yahweh alone is God and savior.[44]

> "You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior. I have revealed and saved and proclaimed— I, and not some foreign god among you. You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "that I am God" (Isa. 43:10-12).

Moore further observes that "just as Israel was to testify of God's saving acts on behalf of

---

[43] Garland, 60.

[44] Thomas S. Moore, "The Lucan Great Commission and the Isaianic Servant," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154, no. 613 (January-March 1997): 53-56.

His people (Isa. 43:8-13; 44:6-8), so too the disciples were to testify of God's saving action in Jesus' death and resurrection."[45] In this way Luke uses the language of witness and testimony to point symbolically to the mission originally assigned to Israel as God's witnessing people, but now given to Jesus' disciples.

For Luke, to be a disciple means to give witness to the good news about Jesus, the crucified and risen Messiah, both with words and actions. For Luke, those actions also include Spirit-driven deeds of power such as driving out demons, healing the sick and even raising the dead. Ultimately for Luke all discipleship activity has one goal: the expansion of the kingdom of God, one new disciple at a time.

Discipleship and Mission in all Four Gospels

All four gospels make clear that discipleship in the New Testament ultimately expresses itself in some kind of missional activity. Each gospel ends with some type of commissioning, reinforcing the outward-bound nature of discipleship. Matthew's gospel concludes with Jesus on a mountain commissioning his disciples to "go and make disciples of all nations," baptizing and teaching "the nations" to obey everything Jesus has commanded them (Matt. 28:16-20). Mark's gospel concludes with the angel telling the women, "go, tell his disciples" about Jesus' resurrection (Mark 16:7).

Luke contains two commissioning scenes. At the end of Luke, Jesus tells his disciples that they are "witnesses" of all that has happened to Jesus, and to wait until they are clothed with "power from on high" (Luke 24:48-49). The commissioning scene in Acts is similar. Jesus promises that his disciples will receive power when the Holy Spirit

---

[45] Moore, 55.

comes upon them. When that occurs, they will be his "witnesses, in Jerusalem, and in all

Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:6-8). For Luke, to be a disciple

is to give witness by the power of the Spirit to what they have seen and heard concerning

Jesus, his teaching, his suffering, death, and resurrection.

In John's gospel Jesus declares to his disciples, "As the Father has sent me, I am

sending you" (John 20:21). This statement has parallels with Jesus' statement to his

disciples after he washed their feet: "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed

your feet, you also should wash one another's feet" (John 13:14). For John, to be a

disciple is to be one who imitates the master—to do what Jesus did—whether in mutual

service (as symbolized by foot washing) or in the larger mission of proclamation, healing

and forgiveness that Jesus received from his heavenly Father.

Through their respective commissioning episodes, each gospel writer expresses

his understanding of discipleship in slightly different terms; yet every gospel writer

understands that to be a disciple of Jesus is ultimately to be sent out on a mission, be it

witnessing, serving, healing, restoring, or disciple making as Jesus did. Discipleship

certainly involves learning and believing certain things about Jesus. Discipleship also

involves the restructuring of values and the reformation of character. But without the

missional orientation of telling, teaching, witnessing, serving and the making of more

disciples, discipleship is incomplete and, at best, no more than the cultivation of Christian

piety. Addressing the wide-spread tendency in the contemporary church to confuse

discipleship with piety formation, Christopher Beard observes,

> In the midst of [the church's] identity crisis, the focus of spiritual formation has
> become information and behavior; expectations have often been reduced to
> attending church-produced Bible classes and behaving in a moral fashion by
> community standards. While information and behavior are certainly important

aspects of spiritual formation, the concept of missional discipleship is built on the presumption that they were never meant to be the end, but rather the means by which transformation takes place.[46]

The challenge, then, for the contemporary North American church is to move beyond one-dimensional, program-driven versions of discipleship and to recapture all aspects of biblical discipleship, as reflected in the New Testament. Perhaps in doing so, the church will find its way out of its present decline and crisis of identity.

Conclusion: Jesus and Discipleship

Discipleship in the first century rabbinic tradition was more than simply absorbing knowledge. It involved a whole-life transformation that was relational, developmental and missional in nature. Discipleship was about becoming over time like the master, both in terms of teaching and way of life. Similar to other rabbis, Jesus' strategy for discipleship involved a relationally driven apprenticeship process where the disciple closely followed, observed and imitated the teacher.[47] As part of that process Jesus engaged in systematic and occasional teaching.[48] In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), an example of his systematic teaching, Jesus addressed topics such as the disciples' identity and mission, their life together in community and how they should pray. Much of Jesus' occasional teaching emerged from the ministry challenges his disciples faced as well as the conflicts that arose between the disciples. The feeding of the

---

[46] Christopher Beard, "Missional Discipleship: Discerning Spiritual-Formation Practices and Goals within the Missional Movement," *Missiology (Online)* 43, no. 2 (April 2015): 179.

[47] Wenthe, 204.

[48] Samra, 233.

five thousand provides an example of Jesus using a challenging situation to teach about the kingdom of God and the nature of his own identity and mission.

Jesus' apprenticeship process also involved sending his disciples beyond their familiar environment to engage the world with witness, proclamation and acts of service, healing and restoration. In Matthew, Jesus commissioned his disciples to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19). Luke and Acts offer two accounts of what is most likely the same situation, where Jesus declares them to be Spirit-empowered witnesses, "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Earlier on, Jesus sends out his disciples to do the very ministry he has been doing: proclaim the good news of the kingdom, heal the sick and drive away demons (Luke 9:1-9, 10:1-24). In the book of Acts, the disciples make more disciples by giving witness to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, both through proclamation and deeds of power.

The way Jesus made disciples was an ongoing, relationally driven, transformative, and outward-bound process that involved the whole person. Jesus' discipleship strategy challenges the twenty-first century North American church to move beyond what, for many congregations, is a classroom-based method of discipleship and to think more holistically about what it means to be a disciple and make disciples in North America.

CHAPTER THREE: THE NATURE OF DISCIPLESHIP

The amount of resources relating to the relational, developmental and missional aspects of discipleship is beyond the scope of a single literature review. Nonetheless, a set of representative resources has been selected, which the researcher believes will be helpful in laying the foundation for a Lutheran discipleship model that integrates these three aspects of discipleship. The resources selected include texts exploring (1) the role of community in discipleship together with various models of relational discipleship, (2) the nature of discipleship as a developmental process, models of disciple and leader development and various discipleship practices, and (3) the missional nature of discipleship expressed in acts of witness and service. These resources also include two historically important essays by Martin Luther where he describes how the relational, developmental and missional aspects of discipleship naturally flow out of the life of faith.

The Relational Aspect of Discipleship

All four gospels indicate that Jesus developed his disciples primarily through relationships. The vast majority of letters in the New Testament are written to communities of Christians. In his book, *Life Together,* Dietrich Bonhoeffer regards community as foundational to Christian living and the primary vehicle for making disciples. He argues that the goal of Christian community is for Christians to encounter

one another "as bringers of the message of salvation."[49] Bonhoeffer believes Christians find their identity not in their own justification, but in the external Word of God proclaimed over them by other believers.[50] Thus, Christians need one another to be for each other "bearers and proclaimers of the divine word of salvation."[51]

For Bonhoeffer, this external Word forms the basis of Christian community,[52] which is a divine reality experienced in Christ,[53] not something obtained through human effort. Nonetheless, "serious Christians" often enter into community with their own idealized dream of Christian community and work hard to obtain that dream. It is God's grace if those dreams are quickly shattered. Christians need to be disillusioned not only with other Christians, but also with themselves.[54] It is this disillusionment that makes possible the realization that true Christian community consists of sinners bound together in "that one Word and Deed of Christ," his forgiveness of our sins.[55]

Bonhoeffer believes that many Christians do not experience true fellowship in their life together because they see themselves as devout people and not as the sinners they truly are. In fact, their communities are often designed to exclude the undevout and the sinners. The result is that everyone lives isolated lives, veiled in hypocrisy.[56] The

---

[49] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community,* trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1954), 23.

[50] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together,* 22.

[51] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together,* 23.

[52] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together,* 22.

[53] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together,* 26.

[54] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together,* 26-7.

[55] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together,* 28.

[56] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together,* 110.

truth of the matter is that God loves sinners and has provided a way for Christians to experience authentic fellowship with each other. In the discipline of confession, Christ gives believers the authority to hear one another's confession of sin and in turn forgive their sins in his name.[57] While sin isolates the believer from community, confession restores the believer to community. In confession, the community bears the sin of the believer, thereby binding the believer even more to the community.[58] In this way, the discipline of confession points back to what Bonhoeffer calls the goal of Christian community: that Christians encounter one another "as bringers of the message of salvation."[59]

While Bonhoeffer explores the nature of the disciple community as a divine reality believers experience in Christ, Sylvia Collinson examines how this reality worked itself out in the discipleship practices of Jesus and the early church. From her study of the Greek word "ματθητής" and the practices of Jesus and the early church, Collison concludes that Christian discipleship occurred as "an intentional, largely informal learning activity" within small close-knit groups where mentors worked with one or more people to help them learn "to be an active follower of Jesus and a participant in his mission to the world." [60] In particular, the disciple practices of Jesus and the early church

---

[57] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together,* 111.

[58] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together,* 113.

[59] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together,* 23.

[60] Sylvia Wilkey Collinson, "Making Disciples and the Christian Faith," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 29, no. 3 (July 2005): 242, accessed May 25, 2017, http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/articles/18750450/making-disciples-christian-faith.

appear to consist of six components: relational, intentional, informal, communal, reciprocal, and centrifugal.[61]

Discipleship was relational in that it involved not only an intimate relationship with God as master disciple maker, but also an intimate relationship between a teacher and a learner. This relationship was voluntary and was characterized by teacher and learner engaging in a long term, loving commitment to each other.[62]

Discipleship was intentional in that it was not mere friendship, but rather a friendship whose purpose was for teaching and learning to occur. This necessitated commitment on the part of both teacher and learner.[63]

Discipleship was predominantly informal in that most learning would occur within the circumstances of everyday life. Even so, some formal teaching was still a necessary part of the discipleship process.[64]

Discipleship was communal in that it was important for individuals and small groups to come together regularly into a larger community for learning that could not be provided in smaller groups. For example, larger groups allow for greater diversity in age, gender, ethnicity, and social background that can, in turn, produce a more robust learning environment for the community.[65]

---

[61] Collinson, 241.

[62] Collinson, 241.

[63] Collinson, 241.

[64] Collinson, 241.

[65] Collinson, 241.

Discipleship was reciprocal in that no one would be exclusively the teacher or the learner. While one member might have spiritual gifts that enable effective teaching, all parties would be involved in the pedagogical process in that they would teach each other by example, that is, by modeling their lives after Christ.[66]

Discipleship was centrifugal in that its ultimate goal was partnering with God in his mission to the world. Because disciple learning occurred primarily in everyday life situations, this "going out" movement was a natural and integral part of the learning process. In this way, the focus was not on personal growth but on serving and giving witness to the neighbor. Such a process was energized by action/reflection cycles where the learner, together with the teacher, observed, acted, reflected, refined, acted, reflected, and further refined his or her actions in the world.[67]

By contrast, according to Collinson, the twenty-first century church's primary model of teaching bears little resemblance to the way Jesus and his first followers made disciples. Most churches, particularly Protestant churches, have opted instead for a classroom model of teaching.[68] Unfortunately such formal teaching cannot adequately instill in the learner "the full spectrum of what it means to be a follower of Jesus."[69] While the concept of a personal relationship with God may receive significant emphasis in formal teaching, this relationship is more easily "caught than taught." In other words, people learn what it means to have a relationship with God by seeing and being with

---

[66] Collinson, 241.

[67] Collinson, 241-2.

[68] Collinson, 240.

[69] Collinson, 249.

others who already have this kind of a relationship.[70] Ultimately, discipleship involves more than imparting information. Discipleship is about the inculcation through relational means of attitudes, values, skills and behaviors that belong to those who are follows of God.[71]

Like Collinson, James Wilhoit sees discipleship as more than classroom instruction. Wilhoit understands the spiritual formation process by its very nature to be a discipleship (apprenticeship) process, which occurs in community and shapes the believer toward the outward oriented practices of prayer and love.[72] Indeed, these twin practices are at the heart of Jesus' two great commands (Matt. 22:37-39) to love both God and neighbor.[73] Healthy spiritual formation also maintains a balance between the individual and communal aspects of the life of faith.[74] This is illustrated by Jesus' own devotional practices, which involved private acts, such as solitude and prayer, and communal acts, such as teaching his disciples, and attending synagogue services.[75]

Similar to Bonhoeffer, Wilhoit believes that the local community of faith, by having a sober awareness of its own sin as well as its deep spiritual longing, creates a positive climate for healthy spiritual formation. The community must be aware that it

---

[70] Collinson, 249.

[71] Collinson, 250.

[72] James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 45.

[73] Wilhoit, 45.

[74] Wilhoit, 117.

[75] Wilhoit, 40.

cannot address the problem of sin through its own effort.[76] Addressing the issue of its

own sin requires a posture of humility and receptivity on the part of the community.[77]

This posture of open humility is nourished through corporate worship, particularly the

communal practices of confession, repentance and the sacraments.[78] Another community

practice that engenders healthy spiritual formation is the practice of testimony. "Good

testimonies put God on display."[79] When people tell stories of God active in their lives, it

causes others to reflect on the activity of God in their own lives.[80] This increases love and

trust in God as well as obedience to God.

For Wilhoit, three relationships in particular foster spiritual growth: the small

group, the mentor and the spiritual friend. While small groups are not the solution to all

spiritual formation challenges, they do offer a place for believers to remember who they

are in the middle of the turmoil they encounter in daily life. Small groups are also

communities where members practice what it means to love each other. The mentor

relationship is another place that fosters spiritual growth. In this relationship more

experienced (often older) disciples teach, guide or give advice as needed to less

experienced disciples. Often mentors teach by example, modeling the Christ-like lifestyle

to others.[81] A another type of relationship is that of spiritual friendship. These are

---

[76] Wilhoit, 63.

[77] Wilhoit, 81.

[78] Wilhoit, 86.

[79] Wilhoit, 132.

[80] Wilhoit, 104.

[81] Wilhoit, 186-7.

typically peer relationships where the mentoring usually flows in two directions. These may be lifelong friendships or may only last for a certain period such as one's time at college.[82]

Among the many ways relational discipleship can take place, Randy Reese and Robert Loane focus their attention on how mentors accompany disciples through the various phases of their spiritual journey.[83] While the title of their work, *Deep Mentoring: Guiding Others on Their Leadership Journey,* suggests a work focused on leader development, Reese and Loane view the process of leader formation and disciple formation to be essentially the same thing.[84] Consequently, their model is as useful for mentors engaged in disciple development as it is for mentors engaged in leader development.

Reese and Loane believe that both disciple development and leader development are essentially relational enterprises. They note that Jesus walked closely with his disciples, living in their stories and inviting them to live in his. Out of the many options available to him, Jesus made disciples out of his followers by forming significant relationships with them.[85] Reese and Loane refer to such a comprehensive discipleship strategy as an act of "cultural resistance" against pressures from both in and outside the congregation that can mitigate against such careful and attentive mentoring practices. These pressures manifests themselves in several ways: (1) the temptation to skim the

---

[82] Wilhoit, 187.

[83] Randy D. Reese and Robert Loane, *Deep Mentoring: Guiding Others on Their Leadership Journey* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 18.

[84] Reese and Loane, 21.

[85] Reese and Loane, 50.

surface rather than listen closely to the faith stories of those being mentored, (2) the tendency to adopt a one-size-fits-all discipleship strategy instead of respecting the uniqueness of both the disciple and his or her journey, (3) the inclination to use people as a means toward one's own ends, rather than honoring them by viewing them as an end unto themselves, and finally, (4) the need to speed up the mentoring process rather than adopting a lingering posture where God's work in the disciple may be noticed and attended to.[86]

In response to these cultural pressures, Reese and Loane argue that an important way mentors are effective is by "paying attention with [disciples] to their life stories."[87] When mentors pay attention to the stories of those they serve, they are able to perceive God's sovereign action at work within those stories. They begin to see God redeeming and utilizing all the pieces of a disciple's life journey, both for the disciple's benefit and God's own purposes.[88] This attentiveness allows mentors to see where God is already at work and join him in the disciple's formation.

Reese and Loane believe Jesus' own discipleship strategy is a useful model for mentors seeking to facilitate the disciple formation process in others. They show that Jesus walked with his disciples in a way that could be characterized as deepening, particularizing, hospitable, and patient.[89] Jesus' way with his disciples was a "deepening way" in that he invited others to greater depth in their lives through questions that

---

[86] Reese and Loane, 45.

[87] Reese and Loane, 50.

[88] Reese and Loane, 55.

[89] Reese and Loane, 179

engaged his hearers in more profound modes of discovery.[90] Jesus' way with his disciples was "particularizing" in that he avoided a one-size-fits-all approach and instead engaged them as the unique people God created them to be.[91] Jesus' way with his disciples was "hospitable" in that he constantly crossed cultural and religious boundaries[92] to create a space where his disciples could experience what Adele Ahlberg Calhoun calls "a welcoming spirit of respect, acceptance, and care."[93] Finally, Jesus' way with his disciples was a "patient" way in that Jesus took his time shaping those who might be regarded as belonging to a "fellowship of slow learners."[94]

As God shapes disciples, mentors must pay attention to where God is at work in their lives and partner with God in that shaping process. Crucial to the mentoring process is the recognition that mentoring is always a unique response to a unique person in a unique setting.[95] As disciples begin their spiritual formation, they often need mentors who model for them what mature disciples looks like, both in terms of their relationship with God and the way they influence others for God's kingdom.[96] As disciples continue to develop and grapple with what it means to live and serve out of their identity in Christ, they often experience transitions in their lives marked by periods of disorientation,

---

[90] Reese and Loane, 180-1.

[91] Reese and Loane, 182.

[92] Reese and Loane, 184.

[93] Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 138.

[94] Reese and Loane, 186.

[95] Reese and Loane, 36.

[96] Reese and Loane, 105.

brokenness and refinement.[97] During these periods mentors can offer a sense of

perspective that disciples cannot achieve on their own.[98] Mentors help disciples see that

these turbulent times can be fruitful times of formation and growth and should not be

avoided.[99] As disciples invest more deeply in their own relationship with God and the

development of others for increased kingdom influence,[100] their formation reaches full

circle. Disciples who have been mentored now become mentors themselves. Nonetheless,

disciples at this stage in life still need mentors as they attempt to come to clarity

regarding their values, their priorities and their life purpose.[101]

When mentors follow Jesus' discipleship strategy, Reese and Loane contend that

their mentorship will be characterized by listening carefully to their disciple's stories,

asking discerning questions, and providing hope by calling attention to God's presence

and action within the disciple's unfolding story.[102] In this way they become "ordinary

people who offer a wise presence that shows interest in us by asking questions and

listening, by discerning and praying with us."[103]

The resources thus far reviewed have focused on Christian discipleship practices

as they occurred among Jesus and his followers. Daniel Olson focuses on the impact of

these practices on one particular congregation. In 1987 the United Methodist Church

---

[97] Reese and Loane, 130-1.

[98] Reese and Loane, 138.

[99] Reese and Loane, 126.

[100] Reese and Loane, 146-7.

[101] Reese and Loane, 162.

[102] Reese and Loane, 206.

[103] Reese and Loane, 188.

launched a denomination-wide discipleship initiative aimed at increasing biblical

knowledge and deepening religious commitment among church members through small

groups. It was known as "The Disciple Program" and consisted of small groups no larger

than twelve members and one teacher.[104] In these small groups members would engage in

regular Bible study, prayer and intentional group discussion. It was the hope of the

program's creators that small group members would, in turn, influence other

congregational members by example.[105] The Disciple program was initially designed to

last only one year. However, there were so many requests for more materials that in 1991

the Disciple II program was initiated.[106]

Daniel Olson investigated this discipleship initiative and, as part of that

investigation, observed a small group taking part in the Disciple II program. During his

observation, Olson saw group members beginning to pray and read their Bibles regularly.

Group members' behavior also began to change. They began to overcome personal

obstacles. They became more compassionate and some even began to witness to others

about their faith.[107] As Olson interviewed group members, many reported that they now

had a "closer relationship with God." One group member, Alice, remarked that for her,

God was now a "personal friend." "I talk with him every day," she reported. As a result,

Alice now had an "inner peace" making it easier for her to reach out and be helpful to

---

[104] Daniel V. A. Olson, "Making Disciples in a Liberal Protestant Church," in "*I Come Away Stronger": How Small Groups Are Shaping American Religion,* ed. Robert Wuthnow (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1994), 127.

[105] Olson, 126.

[106] Olson, 127.

[107] Olson, 126.

others.[108] Olson also discovered that almost all group members had become leaders in their congregation. Again, Alice remarked that she had once been "a pew warmer." Now she had become the director of outreach for prospective new members, a part-time job through which, she happily "contributed" up to forty hours per week.[109]

Olson's study provides an important example of a successfully implemented relational discipleship strategy within a major North American denomination that appeared to "increase biblical literacy, encourage spiritual renewal, and increase levels of church leadership and volunteer work."[110]

Taken together, these reviewed resources suggest that Christian discipleship is an expression of the communal nature of Christianity itself, a reality where Christ himself is experienced in the various kinds of relationships believers have with each other. These resources also suggest the discipleship process is effective when disciple makers function as friends, models, teachers and mentors, giving both formal and informal, situational instruction to their disciples. Finally, these resources, particularly Olson's study, indicate that when relational discipleship strategies are implemented in the local congregation, the result can be significant spiritual growth on the part of individuals and benefit to the congregation as a whole.

The Developmental Aspect of Discipleship

Throughout the stories of Scripture, it seems God chooses particular people and over time shapes them for his purposes and their benefit. Over Joseph's lifetime God

---

[108] Olson, 137-8

[109] Olson, 140.

[110] Olson, 145.

transformed him from an arrogant and entitled young man into a wise ruler, capable of forgiving even those who had tried to kill him (Gen. 37-50). Moses, Esther, Peter, and other major figures in Scripture experienced similar transformations. The Apostle Paul sums up this developmental process as he writes:

> And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified (Rom. 8:28-29).

Put another way, God uses "all things" such as events, circumstances, relationships, and time to shape disciples into the image of Christ for his mission and their benefit. Three resources that address the developmental aspect of the discipleship journey are Janet Hagberg and Robert Guelich's *The Critical Journey*,[111] J. Robert Clinton's *The Making of a Leader*,[112] and Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson's, *Move*.[113] All three resources describe the journey of discipleship in terms of various life stages and, in turn, propose developmental models based on those stages.

In *The Critical Journey*, Hagberg and Guelich propose a six stage developmental model. The first three stages are defined by external circumstances such as a church community, a body of doctrine[114] or a leadership role within the church community.[115]

---

[111] Janet Hagberg and Robert A. Guelich, *The Critical Journey: Stages in the Life of Faith*, 2nd ed. (Salem, WI: Sheffield Pub., 2005).

[112] J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development,* 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2012).

[113] Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

[114] Hagberg and Guelich, 11-12.

[115] Hagberg and Guelich, 73.

The last three stages involve inner healing and personal transformation. Hagberg and Guelich note that movement from one stage to another is often initiated by a crisis of some kind or, at the very least, a significant and unexpected external change in disciples' lives, either positive or negative. These changes call disciples' beliefs and assumptions into question and move them to reevaluate how they make sense of their lives.[116] The following are brief descriptions of Hagberg and Guelich's six stages of faith as well as the process of moving from one stage to another.

Stage One: Recognition of God

Those living in Stage One encounter for the first time a divine reality larger than themselves. They experience God as powerfully present and active in their lives. Some in this stage experience God's acceptance for the first time. This allows them to begin life afresh, with renewed purpose.[117] Often a sense of innocence and naiveté accompany this phase. People in this phase believe that the problems of the world would be easily solvable if everyone would give God a chance.[118]

Moving to Stage Two occurs when people begin to accept their self-worth, when they believe that they are loved as they are. Moving to Stage Two also requires that people move out of isolation and into a caring community.[119]

---

[116] Hagberg and Guelich, 13.

[117] Hagberg and Guelich, 37.

[118] Hagberg and Guelich, 40.

[119] Hagberg and Guelich, 47.

Stage Two: Life of Discipleship

This stage is characterized by both belonging and learning. Those in this stage find meaning from belonging to a community of faith that understands them and walks with them in their journey of faith. They learn about God through the words and actions of fellow members of their community.[120] Those in this stage also experience a sense of security in their faith primarily due to the comfort, safety and security provided by their community of faith.[121]

Movement from Stage Two to Three occurs when people recognize that they are created uniquely and intentionally by God, when they begin to identify their gifts, when they see themselves as worthwhile to others, and when they view themselves as contributors rather than consumers.[122]

Stage Three: Productive Life

This is a "doing" stage,[123] a time of significant productivity and personal fulfillment as disciples exercise their gifts and skills for the benefit of God's kingdom. Those in this stage begin to discover their uniqueness in their community of faith.[124] Their gifts are being used in a way that expresses the unique way God created them.

---

[120] Hagberg and Guelich, 53-4.

[121] Hagberg and Guelich, 58.

[122] Hagberg and Guelich, 65.

[123] Hagberg and Guelich, 73.

[124] Hagberg and Guelich, 74.

People in this stage are also seeking more responsibility, usually within the context of a formal or informal leadership role within the community.[125]

Moving from Stage Three to Four is usually precipitated by a crisis of some sort. This movement is often alarming to people because many cherished beliefs and attitudes toward life and faith may be called into question.[126] Often people moving to Stage Four feel a sense of being abandoned by God. It becomes difficult to hear God's voice. Thus, it is critical that people moving to Stage Four be surrounded by healthy Christian community, particularly people who have already traveled this portion of the journey.[127]

Stage Four: Journey Inward

Those living in Stage Four are forced to confront their unresolved emotional and spiritual issues.[128] As mentioned above, Stage Four often begins with a life crisis that strikes at the core of one's faith.[129] For those in Stage Four faith no longer seems to work; it no longer helps make sense of the situation in front of them.[130] As a result, people in Stage Four begin to search for direction, rather than answers. They want deep healing and the ability to come to terms with God, themselves, and the world around them.[131] In their search, people in Stage Four are forced to release God from the box they have

---

[125] Hagberg and Guelich, 75.

[126] Hagberg and Guelich, 83.

[127] Hagberg and Guelich, 84.

[128] Hagberg and Guelich, 93.

[129] Hagberg and Guelich, 94.

[130] Hagberg and Guelich, 95.

[131] Hagberg and Guelich, 97.

constructed around him.[132] As they do, they discover a God who will not be used simply as a coping mechanism. Instead they discover a God who is both wholly other and deeply personal. People journeying through this stage often appear to others (and even to themselves) as if they have lost their faith. These people may not only question their beliefs, they may question the cherished beliefs of the group as well.[133]

The Wall

This important phase of the spiritual journey actually belongs to Stage Four, and is a prerequisite for moving to Stage Five.[134] It is the place of "our will meeting God's will face to face."[135] When people first encounter the Wall, they try to respond to it by using all the problem solving and coping skills they have used in past crises.[136] But gradually they stop trying to deal with the Wall on their own terms and allow God to bring them through the Wall.[137] As God brings people through the Wall, they are healed both spiritually and psychologically. They discover a "life without grasping," a life where they can let God be God and surrender their will to him.[138]

---

[132] Hagberg and Guelich, 98.

[133] Hagberg and Guelich, 99.

[134] Hagberg and Guelich, 127.

[135] Hagberg and Guelich, 114.

[136] Hagberg and Guelich, 114.

[137] Hagberg and Guelich, 119.

[138] Hagberg and Guelich, 115.

Stage Five: Journey Outward

While the primary focus of Stage Four is inward, the primary focus of Stage Five is outward in renewed surrender to God and attention to the neighbor.[139] Those in Stage Five are still aware of the broken portions of their lives, but those portions no longer affect their sense of identity.[140] Stage Five often brings them a profound sense of God's acceptance. They often view their shortcomings with a sense of humor and understand their wholeness less in terms being perfect and more in terms of allowing God to flow through them.[141] In this stage, God's purposes and their own deep longings converge into a life oriented toward others, often in fresh and surprising ways.[142]

Moving from Stage Five to Stage Six is subtle, imperceptible to those on the outside.[143] To those making the transition, the move to Stage Six feels like an intensification of their spiritual life. They have an increasingly clear view of themselves as an extension of God's loving activity in the world.[144] They see God at work in all activities, both positive and negative.[145]

Stage Six: Life of Love

Stage Six is, in many ways, an extension of Stage Five. People in this stage give themselves away without any sense of sacrifice. At the same time, they feel themselves to

---

[139] Hagberg and Guelich, 133.

[140] Hagberg and Guelich, 133.

[141] Hagberg and Guelich, 134-35.

[142] Hagberg and Guelich, 236.

[143] Hagberg and Guelich, 146.

[144] Hagberg and Guelich, 147.

[145] Hagberg and Guelich, 146.

be most fully alive as the person God made them to be.[146] Those in Stage Six engage in an unceasing conversation with God, both during their daily activities and in times intentionally set aside for experiencing God's presence.[147] They more easily experience God's presence in the middle of the challenges and crises that come their way. They gain wisdom from difficult situations, forgive more easily and feel deep compassion for those around them who are suffering.[148] Because their identity is in God, they find fulfillment in even the most menial of tasks. God's calling matters to them more than position and influence.[149] These people are fully surrendered to God's call on their lives. Their own personal needs are secondary and yet often met in their obedient response to God's call.[150]

In their model, Hagberg and Guelich only briefly focus on how disciples become influencers as a result of their journey of faith. By contrast, the primary focus of Clinton's Leadership Emergence Theory in *The Making of a Leader* is influence. Based on a study of Biblical leaders, characters throughout Church history and more recent Christian leaders,[151] Clinton's theory describes how God uses relationships, events and circumstances to shape leaders over their lifetime.[152]

---

[146] Hagberg and Guelich, 152.

[147] Hagberg and Guelich, 153.

[148] Hagberg and Guelich, 154-55.

[149] Hagberg and Guelich, 156.

[150] Hagberg and Guelich, 157.

[151] Robert Clinton, *Leadership Emergence Theory: A Self-Study Manual for Analyzing the Development of a Christian Leader* (Altadena, CA: Barnabas Publishers, 2003), 27.

[152] Clinton, *The Making of a Leader,* 22.

Clinton defines a leader as a person who has a God-given capacity to influence "a specific group of God's people toward His purposes for the group."[153] Like Reese and Loane, Clinton defines leadership as influence rather than position.[154] This allows Leadership Emergence Theory to be applied to the journeys of ordinary disciples as well as those in formal leadership roles.

Like *The Critical Journey,* Clinton's theory is also divided into six phases: Sovereign Foundations, Inner-Life Growth, Ministry Maturing, Life Maturing, Convergence, and Afterglow (Celebration). While these six phases are generally chronological, there can be significant overlap between them, particularly between the Ministry Maturing and Life Maturing phases.[155] Crucial to Clinton's development theory are what he calls "process items." These are situations, events, relationships, and interior journeys God uses to identify leaders and move them forward in their development and effectiveness.[156] Below are brief descriptions of the six phases of development that describe Clinton's overall pattern of life development.

Phase One: Sovereign Foundations

In this first phase God uses significant relationships, circumstances and events (both positive and negative) from leaders' childhood through young adulthood to lay the foundation for emerging leaders' character, values and general attitude toward life.[157]

---

[153] Clinton, *The Making of a Leader,* 10.

[154] Clinton, *The Making of a Leader,* 10.

[155] Clinton, *The Making of a Leader,* 37.

[156] Clinton, *The Making of a Leader,* 36.

[157] Clinton, *The Making of a Leader,* 26.

Movement to phase two is usually initiated by a conversion experience where emerging leaders surrender their life to God.[158]

Phase Two: Inner-Life Growth

In this second phase, emerging leaders learn the importance of a two-way conversation with God.[159] Usually leaders in this phase either volunteer or are invited to participate in a particular task, often within the congregational context. Usually there is some type of informal training connected to this task where emerging leaders learn through the imitative process of an informal on-the-job apprenticeship. During this time, emerging leaders often have a mentor who helps them with their new responsibility.[160]

Movement to Phase Three may occur through a series of process items: the Integrity Check, where God evaluates a person's character by observing if inner values align with outward behavior,[161] the Obedience Check, where God teaches a person to identify, comprehend and follow his voice,[162] the Word Check, where God evaluates a person's ability to hear his word for them and act on it,[163] and the Ministry Task, an assignment that God gives a person to evaluate faithfulness in executing and completing a given task.[164]

---

[158] Clinton, *The Making of a Leader,* 27.

[159] Clinton, *The Making of a Leader,* 38.

[160] Clinton, *The Making of a Leader,* 27.

[161] Clinton, *The Making of a Leader,* 50.

[162] Clinton, *The Making of a Leader,* 54.

[163] Clinton, *The Making of a Leader,* 57.

[164] Clinton, *The Making of a Leader,* 70.

Phase Three: Ministry Maturing

In this third phase leaders are now engaging in either full-time ministry or marketplace employment. Often leaders have had some formal training for their position. Leaders may also continue with more training, through books, conferences or an ongoing mentorship. Clinton notes that the primary training leaders receive in this phase comes directly from the work itself and the natural challenges it presents.[165]

This phase lasts the longest of all the developmental phases and consists of four stages: entry, training, relational learning, and discernment.[166] In the entry stage emerging leaders are given tasks that reveal their capacity for loyalty, submission, giftedness, potential, and the ability to take initiative.[167] In the training stage, leaders sense the need for further training to respond to the requirements of the task at hand. This training can be as formal as seminary or graduate work or as informal as a short-term apprenticeship.[168] In the relational learning stage, leaders' lessons surface primarily from their interactions with those around them: their supervisors, their colleagues and those they lead. In the discernment stage, God seeks to enlarge leaders' awareness of the spiritual aspects of life and ministry and to increase leaders' capacity to hear and respond to God's voice in their life and ministry.[169]

---

[165] Clinton, *The Making of a Leader,* 27.

[166] Clinton, *The Making of a Leader,* 67.

[167] Clinton, *The Making of a Leader,* 70.

[168] Clinton, *The Making of a Leader,* 77.

[169] Clinton, *The Making of a Leader,* 95.

Phase Four: Life Maturing

In this phase leaders begin the transition from leading primarily out of what they do to leading out of who they are. Leaders in this phase lead out of a combination of experience, skill and spiritual giftedness. Leaders also begin to lead through "modeling," that is, they now influence others simply through the lives they lead.[170] God often matures leaders in this phase through significant challenge and adversity, which can manifest as life crises, conflicts and even periods of isolation.[171] As leaders emerge out of these challenges and adversities, they experience increased spiritual authority in their leadership. Clinton notes that authority is a byproduct of their growth, not a goal.[172]

Phase Five: Convergence

In this phase, God places leaders in roles that closely match their skills and experience as well as their giftedness and temperament. These roles take advantage of leaders' "sweet spots," where who they are and what they do come together to be fully utilized for the task at hand.[173] When leaders find themselves in convergence they feel fully engaged and greatly enjoy carrying out their responsibilities.

Phase Six: Afterglow (Celebration)

This is a phase very few people reach in their lifetime. In this phase influence is primarily indirect and is a byproduct of reputation and legacy. Where there is direct leadership it is usually in the realm of mentoring relationships, where people seek out

---

[170] Clinton, *The Making of a Leader,* 29.

[171] Clinton, *The Making of a Leader,* 135.

[172] Clinton, *The Making of a Leader,* 145.

[173] Clinton, *The Making of a Leader,* 40.

these leaders for their wisdom and experience.[174] In this way, leaders in Afterglow now become one of the many ways God uses to shape other leaders.

A third model useful for understanding the developmental aspects of discipleship is the Spiritual Continuum model proposed by Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson. While their model is also built around stages of faith, Hawkins and Parkinson's Spiritual Continuum model is unique in that is it based on a survey involving over 1,000 congregations and over 250,000 individual respondents.[175]

Hawkins and Parkinson divide their model into four segments: Exploring Christ, Growing in Christ, Close to Christ, and Christ Centered.[176] Each of these segments contain several catalysts that create forward movement from one segment to another. These catalysts are grouped into four areas: spiritual beliefs and attitudes, church activities, personal spiritual practices, and spiritual activities with others.[177] The following are descriptions of the four segments of spiritual growth, their characterizations and the catalysts that move people from one segment to another.

Segment One: Exploring Christ

People in this segment have a sense that there is a God, but are unclear about who Jesus is and what he might mean for their lives.[178] They are regular church attenders, but

---

[174] Clinton, *The Making of a Leader,* 40.

[175] Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 18.

[176] Hawkins and Parkinson, 21.

[177] Hawkins and Parkinson, 107.

[178] Hawkins and Parkinson, 21.

do not report a personal relationship with Christ.[179] For people to move from Exploring

Christ to Growing in Christ they need to develop a solid base of spiritual beliefs and

attitudes.

Hawkins and Parkinson identified thirteen catalysts influential in moving people

from Segment One to Segment Two. (1) Some catalysts belonging to Spiritual Beliefs

and Attitudes are belief in salvation by grace, belief in the Trinity, belief in a personal

God, belief that Christ is first in one's life, and belief in the authority of the Bible. (2)

Some catalysts belonging to Church Activities are serving the church, attending weekend

services and participating in small groups. (3) Some catalysts belonging to Personal

Spiritual Practices are reading and reflecting on Scripture as well as prayer to confess sin

and to seek guidance. (4) Within the category of Spiritual Activities with Others, spiritual

friendships emerge as a catalytic practice for movement to Segment Two.[180] Hawkins and

Parkinson also discovered that the most important factor overall for spiritual growth in

any segment was the regular practice of reflecting on Scripture.[181]

Segment Two: Growing in Christ

People in this segment are becoming clear about who Jesus is and his role in their

lives. They trust him both for now and eternity and are growing in their relationship with

Christ as their Lord and Savior.[182] In terms of their spiritual growth, they are slow but

---

[179] Hawkins and Parkinson, 35.

[180] Hawkins and Parkinson, 127.

[181] Hawkins and Parkinson, 19.

[182] Hawkins and Parkinson, 21.

steady in their movement from one Segment to another.[183] To move from Growing in Christ to Close to Christ, people in Segment Two must begin to think of Christ in relational terms. They need time to develop regular spiritual practices that facilitate an increasing intimacy with Christ.[184]

Hawkins and Parkinson identified twenty catalysts belonging to four areas that are influential for movement to Segment Three. (1) Some catalysts belonging to Spiritual Beliefs and Attitudes are belief in a personal God, belief in salvation by grace, belief in the authority of the Bible, belief that Christ is first, and belief that one's identity is in Christ. (2) Some catalysts belonging to Church Activities are serving those in need through their church, serving the church, small groups, weekend services, and adult education focused on spiritual topics. (3) Some catalysts belonging to Personal Spiritual Practices are reflecting on Scripture, prayer to seek guidance, tithing, journaling, solitude, and Bible reading. (4) Some catalysts belonging to Spiritual Activities with Others are evangelism, spiritual friendships, serving those in need on their own (not through their church), and acquiring spiritual mentors.[185]

Segment Three: Close to Christ

People in this segment have learned to depend on Christ daily. They turn to him on a regular basis and ask for help and guidance for the issues that confront them each

---

[183] Hawkins and Parkinson, 53.

[184] Hawkins and Parkinson, 22.

[185] Hawkins and Parkinson, 141.

day.[186] For those in Segment Three, sharing their faith is as natural as breathing.[187] These people are also known for their love of those around them. It is that love that often propels them to take the lead in their church's service projects.[188] As people move toward Segment Four, people in Segment Three exchange their self-centered consumer orientation for a posture of self-sacrifice. They live out their love for Christ and others through increased outreach activities, particularly evangelism.[189] Much of their disciple-life now takes place outside the church, in their workplace, their city, or their neighborhood.[190]

As with other segments, Hawkins and Parkinson have identified several catalysts that are influential for movement to Segment Four. (1) Some catalysts belonging to Spiritual Beliefs and Attitudes are giving away my life, Christ is first, embracing an identity in Christ, authority of the Bible, and stewardship. (2) Some catalysts belonging to Church Activities are serving those in need through my church and attending additional teaching/worship services. (3) Some catalysts belonging to Personal Spiritual Practices are reflection on Scripture, Bible reading, tithing, solitude, prayer to confess sins, journaling, and prayer to seek guidance. (4) Some catalysts belonging to Spiritual

---

[186] Hawkins and Parkinson, 21.

[187] Hawkins and Parkinson, 73.

[188] Hawkins and Parkinson, 76.

[189] Hawkins and Parkinson, 22.

[190] Hawkins and Parkinson, 155.

Activities with Others are evangelism, spiritual mentors and serving those in need on their own (not through their church).[191]

Segment Four: Christ Centered

People in this final segment understand their relationship with Christ to be the most important relationship in their lives.[192] Their relationship with God and his Word is characterized by total submission and serves as a guide for how they orient their lives.[193] People in this segment desire to serve Christ and his mission in the world. They live lives of loving obedience and service.[194] According to Hawkins and Parkinson those in this segment are Christ's workforce. They serve in the local church, care for the poor, share their faith, and tithe regularly.[195]

Each of these resources, *The Critical Journey, The Making of a Leader,* and *Move* offer a unique perspective on the developmental aspect of discipleship. Even so, they all believe that the journey of faith is a lifelong process, occurring in stages, where God uses disciples' life experience to shape them for his mission and their wholeness in Christ. This lifelong journey also involves the gradual transformation of disciples' beliefs, perspective, values, and behavior. This transformation ultimately leads outward toward the neighbor in witness, service and influence.

---

[191] Hawkins and Parkinson, 155.

[192] Hawkins and Parkinson, 21.

[193] Hawkins and Parkinson, 86.

[194] Hawkins and Parkinson, 93.

[195] Hawkins and Parkinson, 87.

The Missional Aspect of Discipleship

The New Testament records several instances where Jesus sends his disciples into the world to proclaim and embody the gospel of the kingdom of God—and to make disciples who will do the same. Throughout history, this "sending" has been understood as the primary mission of the church and its members. Recently, however, the nature of this mission has become the subject of controversy. Some Christian groups, emphasizing the social and ethical aspects of the gospel, see the mission of the church to be primarily about working for justice and peace in society. Other groups, emphasizing the personal aspects of the gospel, see the mission of the church to be primarily about saving souls for eternal life. Consequently, terms like "mission" and "missional discipleship" have lost clarity in meaning because of the different ways various groups have defined them.[196]

In *The Missional Church in Perspective,*[197] Craig Van Gelder and Dwight Zscheile trace the evolution of the terms "mission" and "missional discipleship" and the recent controversy surrounding these terms. Following the First World War, questions arose regarding the relation between the "younger churches" in Africa and the older churches in Europe and North America. What shape of church was appropriate for the younger churches? What was the biblical, theological basis for making that decision? Most importantly, what was the essential nature and mission of the church regardless of its cultural context?[198]

---

[196] Christopher Beard, "Missional Discipleship: Discerning Spiritual-Formation Practices and Goals within the Missional Movement," *Missiology: An International Review* 43, no. 2 (April 2015): 176.

[197] Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011).

[198] Van Gelder and Zscheile, 21.

Similar questions were raised by Karl Barth who understood the church's mission to be grounded in the "sending" nature of God himself: "the Father sent the Son, and the Father and the Son sent the Spirit."[199] For that reason, Barth proposed that God and his mission (sending), not the church, are the proper starting place for talking about mission. This means that the church does not "have" a mission, rather the church and all it does is an expression of God's mission.[200] The church, then, is the result and manifestation of God's own mission.[201]

The effect of Barth's work as well as conversations emanating from the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh was to broaden the concept of "gospel." As a result, "gospel" no longer referred strictly to the salvation of individuals for eternal life; "gospel" also embraced the concept of the reign of God as proclaimed by Jesus. The church, then, was derivative of the gospel, which now included the in-breaking of God's redemptive reign into human history, what was to be called the *missio Dei.*[202]

Responding to Barth, the conversations from the Edinburgh conference, and the current controversy surrounding the words "mission" and "missional discipleship," Van Gelder and Zscheile offer a definition of "gospel" that includes both individual personal salvation and the *missio Dei,* the in-breaking of the kingdom of God into human history. Based on this definition of "gospel," Van Gelder and Zscheile define discipleship as "following Christ into participation in God's mission in the world in the power of the

---

[199] Van Gelder and Zscheile, 26.

[200] Van Gelder and Zscheile, 32.

[201] Van Gelder and Zscheile, 27.

[202] Van Gelder and Zscheile, 29.

Spirit."[203] For them missional and Spirit-driven discipleship is at the center of the

church's mission and identity.[204] As the community partners with God in its missional

context, so also do individual

disciples.

Van Gelder and Zscheile argue that there is no set of rules or series of practices

that define missional discipleship. Rather, missional discipleship is shaped by the

church's missional context and its partnership with God in that context.[205] Churches

must teach their members how to discern God's presence and action within their

workplaces, schools, homes and neighborhoods and how to partner actively with God

within those contexts.[206]

Van Gelder and Zscheile stress that the formation of disciples must be an

outward-bound project, where disciples learn to expect God's presence in the neighbor.[207]

To be on mission is at the core of both the disciple's and the church's identity. To be a

disciple is to be a missionary.[208] Furthermore, being the church within a secular

pluralistic culture means that Christian identity needs to be cultivated slowly, carefully

and primarily within the community of the congregation. This will be a challenge for

---

[203] Van Gelder and Zscheile, 148.

[204] Van Gelder and Zscheile, 148.

[205] Van Gelder and Zscheile, 149.

[206] Van Gelder and Zscheile, 154.

[207] Van Gelder and Zscheile, 150.

[208] Van Gelder and Zscheile, 153.

many churches, given the individualistic nature of the surrounding culture and its influence on contemporary Christian communities.[209]

Similar to Van Gelder and Zscheile, Christopher Beard, in "Missional Discipleship: Discerning Spiritual-Formation Practices and Goals within the Missional Movement," argues for a non-compartmentalized, incarnational and holistic missional discipleship, which includes both individual salvation and the in-breaking of God's kingdom into human history.[210] For Beard, the mission of the disciple is integral to the disciple's identity; all of life is missional.[211] The mission of the disciple is incarnational because disciples are sent by Jesus into the world for the world, just as the Father sent the Son to the world.[212] The mission of the disciple is holistic in that the missional disciple "is concerned with issues of justice, the marginalized in society, stewardship of the earth's resources, for example, just as he or she is concerned with bringing salvation to those who need it."[213]

Beard calls for the church to adopt a "missional imagination." Churches and disciples who possess a missional imagination view their mission as an obedient response to God's invitation to join him in his mission. As a result, missional churches and disciples have developed the ability to "be in tune with the Holy Spirit to determine *where* and *how* God is working," rather than "starting an endeavor and then asking God

---

[209] Van Gelder and Zscheile, 148.

[210] Beard, 188.

[211] Beard, 188.

[212] Beard, 189.

[213] Beard, 189.

to bless it."[214] Discerning through the Spirit where and how to join God in his work allows disciples and churches to become sensitive to their mission context and agile in their responses.

Another voice in the missional discipleship conversation is Darrell Guder. In his 2005 article in *Word and World*,[215] Guder examines the situation in the present North American church regarding missional discipleship and offers alternative ways of thinking about discipleship for both the church as community and for individual disciples. Guder believes that in the post-Christendom West, salvation still tends to be understood in terms of the individual and his or her eternal destiny. As an alternative, missional theology understands salvation as that which ultimately involves God restoring the entire creation to its original wholeness (Rom. 8:18-21). Guder argues that the individualistic understanding of salvation so prominent in the West gives rise to a distorted understanding of the doctrine of election. Questions such as "Who is saved and who is not? and "Why some and not others?" become primary when salvation is understood in individualistic terms.[216]

Following Newbigin and Barth, Guder suggests that election is not so much about entitlement as it is about the responsibility to be "the instrument of God's mission" for the benefit of all God's beloved creation.[217] To be such an instrument is to be a witness of the gospel of Jesus to the world. Guder also believes "that the New Testament

---

[214] Beard 191

[215] Darrell L. Guder, "Worthy Living: Work and Witness from the Perspective of Missional Church Theology," *Word & World* 25, no. 4 (Fall 2005): 424- 32.

[216] Guder, 425.

[217] Guder, 425.

concept of "witness" should be the overarching definition of Christian life and practice."[218] To make his point, Guder draws upon several New Testament passages, such as Acts 1:8, where Jesus tells his followers, "you are my witnesses." He notes that as the narrative in the book of Acts unfolds, Jesus' disciples become precisely that: witnesses. They live their whole lives, both individually and communally, as witnesses to the gospel of Jesus.[219]

Guder points out the "sending" nature of Jesus' disciples in the gospel of Mark, where they are called apostles, literally "sent-out ones."[220] For Jesus, discipleship as such was not the goal. Rather, Jesus trained his disciples to be sent out to proclaim and embody the gospel. According to Guder, this theme of "discipleship for mission" shows up in all four gospels. In Luke-Acts, it takes the form of witness. In Matthew, it takes the form of the command to "disciple the ethnicities."[221] In John's Gospel, Guder observes that those who are called by Jesus to "come and see" almost immediately invite others to do the same. In this way, disciples such as Andrew and Phillip "moved almost immediately from their formation as disciples to their mandate as apostles."[222]

If it is true that the goal of discipleship is mission, then the goal of the church as a community of disciples is not to create a society of the morally upright and righteous, but "to demonstrate before the world the nature of the love and healing that God had made

---

[218] Guder, 428.

[219] Guder, 428.

[220] Guder, 429.

[221] Guder, 429.

[222] Guder, 430.

real for all in Christ."[223] Thus, it is crucial that the focus of the church should be on the "lay apostolate,"[224] the nurturing and formation of missionally oriented disciples.

Guder is calling for the church's focus to be on forming missionally oriented disciples. David Miller's focus is on applying the concept of missional discipleship to the marketplace and other places outside the church.[225] In his article, "The Faith at Work Movement," Miller observes the gradual shift of the term "Ministry of the Laity" from meaning ministry by laity in all of daily life to ministry by laity inside the church.[226] In response, Miller suggests a conversation between church leaders and businesspeople with the goal of integrating faith and work. Miller lists four areas of integration where this conversation might focus: (1) ethical integration that relies on Scripture for guidance in business situations, (2) experiential integration that understands work as a vocation and not merely a job, (3) enrichment, which utilizes spiritual disciplines as a way of staying grounded amid all the turbulence typical of the business environment, and (4) evangelization, which seeks opportunities within the workplace to give witness to the gospel.[227] Miller believes that "overcoming the Sunday-Monday gap may be one of the most powerful means to help feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and welcome the stranger."[228]

---

[223] Guder, 431.

[224] Guder, 431.

[225] David W. Miller, "The Faith at Work Movement," *Theology Today* 60, (2003): 301-2.

[226] Miller, 303.

[227] Miller, 306-7.

[228] Miller, 309.

For Van Gelder and Zscheile, Beard, Guder, and Miller, the missional aspect of discipleship is at the core of the disciple's identity. To be a disciple is to be on mission. Furthermore, the missional aspect of discipleship is grounded in the sending nature of God himself. As the Father sent the Son on mission to the world, so the Son sent his disciples on mission to the world. While there is diversity in understanding regarding the precise nature of missional discipleship, the authors of these resources agree that missional discipleship goes beyond the walls of the church and proclaims equally, in word and deed, the free gift of personal salvation as well as the in-breaking of God's kingdom in the world.

Discipleship within the Lutheran Tradition

In the generations following the Reformation, Lutherans have struggled to articulate a robust theology of discipleship. Some Lutheran theologians have taught that all life transformation springs solely from God's justifying work. Any effort on the believer's part to grow spiritually is regarded as an unhealthy preoccupation with the self, attempting to do what only God can do, and coming dangerously close to self-justification before God.[229] Other Lutheran theologians have taught that the life of faith is a constant oscillation between temptation and sinning, on the one hand, and repentance and forgiveness, on the other.[230] They warn that any serious effort to move beyond this back and forth movement is viewed as not taking seriously the believer's captivity to sin.

---

[229] Gilbert Meilaender, "Hearts Set to Obey," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 43, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 45.

[230] Meilaender, 45.

Both ways of understanding Christian living have unfortunately caused many Lutherans to take a passive posture regarding the practice of discipleship.

This passive posture led Dietrich Bonhoeffer to complain that Lutheran theologians have essentially rejected the biblical understanding of discipleship, and in its place, inserted what he calls "cheap grace." Cheap grace is "the grace which amounts to the justification of sin without the justification of the repentant sinner who departs from the sin and from whom sin departs."[231] Such a grace, in Bonhoeffer's opinion, is a "grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate."[232] Biblical grace, however, is a costly grace. Bonhoeffer wrote, "Costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus, it comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and the contrite heart. Grace is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him."[233]

In many ways Bonhoeffer's views on discipleship reflect Luther's own views. A review of Luther's writings reveals that, while Luther did not use the words "disciple" or "discipleship," he still had much to say regarding how Christians lived out their faith in daily life. Two early writings, "Two Kinds of Righteousness" and "The Freedom of a Christian," offer readers a glimpse into Luther's thinking regarding discipleship.

In his 1519 sermon, "Two Kinds of Righteousness," Luther teaches that when a believer is justified, he or she experiences two kinds of righteousness. The first is what he

---

[231] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R. H. Fuller (New York: Touchstone 1995), 44.

[232] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 45.

[233] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 45.

calls an "alien righteousness," a righteousness which comes from Christ, "by which he

justifies through faith."[234] Luther argues, making use of bridal imagery found in

Ephesians 5:29-32, that because the believer is married to Christ (Rev. 19:6-9), all that

belongs to Christ also belongs to the believer. Likewise, all that the believer has belongs

to Christ. The result is a kind of "happy exchange," where Christ takes on the believer's

sin and death and the believer takes on Christ's righteousness and salvation.[235] In this

way, Christ's alien righteousness becomes the believer's righteousness. Thus, the

believer is justified not by his or her own righteousness but by the righteousness of

Christ, coming from this happy exchange.

Luther next focuses on the effect of Christ's righteousness on the daily life of the

believer. For Luther, one effect of Christ's righteousness is that it "daily drives out the

old Adam more and more in accordance with the extent to which faith and knowledge of

Christ grow."[236] The theme of "daily driving out the old Adam" would later show up in

Luther's Small Catechism, where it addresses the sacrament of baptism:

> [Baptism] signifies that the old creature in us with all sins and evil desires is to be
> drowned and die through daily contrition and repentance, and on the other hand
> that daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in
> righteousness and purity forever.[237]

---

[234] Martin Luther, "Two Kinds of Righteousness (1519)," in *Luther's Works, vol. 31: Career of the Reformer: I*, eds. J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, and H. T. Lehmann (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 297.

[235] Luther, "Two Kinds of Righteousness," 297.

[236] Luther, "Two Kinds of Righteousness," 299.

[237] Martin Luther, "Small Catechism," in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, eds. Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, and Charles P. Arand (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 360.

The idea of daily driving out or drowning the old Adam so that a new person may rise up characterizes the non-linear spiral aspect of Luther's understanding of discipleship. It recognizes the constant daily struggle believers face in their disciple journey and the need always to begin again and again. The danger of this way of understanding discipleship, however, is that it can easily degenerate into a static life of faith that endlessly oscillates between sinning and forgiveness.

Luther, perhaps sensing this danger, introduces a second kind of righteousness, what he calls "proper righteousness," a righteousness which springs from Christ's alien righteousness.[238] Because proper righteousness is the fruit of alien righteousness, Luther goes so far as to call proper righteousness the "fruit of the Spirit."[239] Proper righteousness manifests itself in three ways: (1) in "slaying the flesh and crucifying the desires with respect to the self," (2) in love toward the neighbor, and (3) "in meekness and fear toward God."[240] Luther asserts that the primary orientation of proper righteousness is toward the neighbor. Proper righteousness "hates itself and loves its neighbor; it does not seek its own good, but that of another, and in this its whole way of living consists."[241]

While Luther's 1520 essay, "The Freedom of a Christian," covers much the same ground as "Two Kinds of Righteousness," it focuses more on the life of faith and the goal of good works. Luther begins his essay by positing two contradictory statements: "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none," and "A Christian is a perfectly

---

[238] Luther, "Two Kinds of Righteousness," 299.

[239] Luther, "Two Kinds of Righteousness," 300.

[240] Luther, "Two Kinds of Righteousness," 299.

[241] Luther, "Two Kinds of Righteousness," 300.

dutiful servant of all, subject to all."[242] Luther's biblical basis for these statements is found in 1 Corinthians 9:19, where Paul writes, "Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible."

According to Luther, Christians have two natures, the inner nature and outer nature. Because of these two natures, Christians live a contradictory existence where one thing may be true of the one nature, but not of the other.[243] This concept parallels Luther's understanding of the old Adam and new Adam in "Two Kinds of Righteousness."

The first half of "The Freedom of a Christian" deals with two concepts crucial to Luther's understanding of the life of faith: (1) the use of Law and Gospel and how faith is engendered through the proclamation of the Gospel and the power of the Spirit, and (2) the "three powers of faith" and how they form the foundation for the life of faith. Regarding Law and Gospel, Luther focuses on what Lutherans call the "second use" of the Law, where the Law functions as a mirror revealing human rebellion and the need for Christ.[244] Next, Luther focuses on the Gospel or the promises of God, which are received by faith in Christ. Luther boldly asserts, "Whoever has faith will have everything and whoever does not have faith will have nothing."[245]

At this point, Luther introduces what he calls the "three powers or benefits of faith." The first power of faith empowers the believer (by the Spirit) to receive Christ and

---

[242] Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian (1520)," in *Luther's Works, vol. 31: Career of the Reformer: I*, eds. J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, and H. T. Lehmann (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 344.

[243] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," 344.

[244] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," 348.

[245] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," 348-49.

thus receive salvation. The second power of faith gives honor to God through its trust in God. The third power of faith "unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom."[246] As in "Two Kinds of Righteousness," Luther uses the image of the bridegroom and the happy exchange that it implies to make sense of his opening statement: "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none," since "all things work together for good for the elect."[247]

In the second half of "The Freedom of a Christian," Luther deals with the place of works within the life of faith. He states that Christians are not only kings but also priests, whose responsibility is to pray for others and "teach one another divine things."[248] From here Luther quickly turns to the nature of works. As in "Two Kinds of Righteousness," Luther calls works the "first fruits of the Spirit," first fruits of the eventual harvest of righteousness, which are only partially realized in this life. It should be noted here that Luther refers to spiritual progress several times in this essay. He states that good works help the outer nature catch up to the reality of the inner nature.[249] Luther further writes that one should "increase this faith until it is made perfect." These statements suggest a sense of spiritual process and growth within the life of faith.

As Luther focuses on the role of works, he returns to his second statement: "A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all." This is so because Christians, being married to Christ, not only share in Christ's righteousness, but also in Christ's

---

[246] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," 350-51.

[247] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," 354.

[248] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," 355.

[249] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," 358.

servant posture as well. The sharing of Christ's servant posture plays a crucial role in Luther's understanding of the primary role of works in the life of a Christian, which are in service to the neighbor. Luther observes that God created human beings as social animals, to live in community. Because this is so, Christians must discipline their bodies through various spiritual practices and subject them to the Spirit so that they do not hinder the inner nature.[250] In this way the inner nature is freed to do what it desires, serving the neighbor. Luther believed that the point of being human was to live "for all men on earth."[251] While explaining the role of works, Luther emphasized that the believer does not need these works for his or her salvation. The only reason for these works is the needs of others.

> Therefore [the believer] should be guided in all his works by this thought and contemplate this one thing alone, that he may serve and benefit others in all that he does, considering nothing except the need and the advantage of his neighbor. . . . Here faith is truly active through love.[252]

Ultimately for Luther, true faith always finds its expression in love toward the neighbor. Any claim to faith that does not result in love toward others is no faith at all.[253]

Conclusion: The Multi-Faceted Journey of Discipleship

Taken together, the above reviewed resources suggest in various ways that biblical discipleship, above all, is an integrated relational, developmental and missional enterprise. Discipleship is a relational enterprise involving communities of all shapes and sizes where members speak God's Word of grace to each other and to the world.

---

[250] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," 358-59.

[251] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," 364.

[252] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," 365.

[253] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," 370.

Christian community can occur within groups, mentoring relationships and peer relationships of mutual encouragement and guidance. Learning in these communities usually occurs informally through apprentice-like environments involving observation and imitation on the part of the learner.

Discipleship is also a developmental journey, where God uses events, circumstances and relationships to shape disciples into the image of Christ. At the beginning of their journey, disciples often focus on themselves and their relationship with God. Their identity is defined by external circumstances such as their church, its teachings and its leadership. As their journey continues, disciples focus more on sharing their faith and serving others. Their identity is defined more by God's gracious and healing Word and less by external circumstances.

Finally, discipleship is a missional activity, where disciples partner with God in his mission for the world.[254] Because God is oriented toward the world, discipleship also orients itself toward the world. Missional discipleship involves proclaiming and embodying the kingdom of God, becoming like Jesus and helping others do the same, and proclaiming the free gift of salvation in Christ to the world.

All three aspects of discipleship are also regarded as essential to the Lutheran understanding of discipleship. For Lutherans, the relational aspect of discipleship is foundational to a flourishing Christian faith. It is in community where disciples confess their sins to each other, hear God's Word of salvation from each other, and find their identity and calling in Christ. Lutherans also understand the life of faith to be a

---

[254] Van Gelder and Zscheile, 148.

developmental journey. Luther himself held that the believer's faith and knowledge of Christ grows daily in a life-long journey that finds its fulfillment in the resurrection. Lutherans also believe that the life of faith is missionally oriented toward love and service toward the neighbor. As Luther writes, "By faith [the believer] is caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbor."[255]

---

[255] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," 371.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCIPLESHIP IN LUTHERAN MEGA-CHURCHES

This project addressed the problem of cultivating a relationally, developmentally, and missionally-oriented adult discipleship environment within a Lutheran mega-church. Responding to this problem, a project was designed as a collective case study focusing on three Lutheran mega-churches. John Creswell defines a case study as "a methodology: a type of design in qualitative research that may be an object of study as well as a product of inquiry."[256] According to Creswell, a collective case study may involve several cases at one site or several cases at multiple sites, as with this collective case study.[257] The purpose of this study was (1) to understand how members experience their faith journey within their congregations, (2) to discover how the congregational staff view the task and challenge of making disciples, and (3) to examine how each congregation's discipleship programming and resources support and/or hinder the formation of a relational, developmental and missional discipleship environment.

Background

In qualitative research, one of the researcher's tasks is to bracket personal understandings, assumptions, and biases and instead assume a posture of curiosity within the inquiry process.[258] Hence, it is helpful for the reader to be aware that the researcher is

---

[256] John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches,* 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2013), 97.

[257] Creswell, 99.

[258] Creswell, 83.

a white, single, upper middle class North American male living in a culturally

homogeneous mid-western city. The researcher is also a Lutheran Christian with an

Evangelical approach toward Scripture and the life of faith. In his present context, the

researcher is an ordained Lutheran pastor, serving as a Pastor of Discipleship at Hope

WDM, one of the three data collection sites of this project. Prior to his position at Hope

WDM, the researcher was an Associate Director of Evangelism for the Churchwide

offices of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). His focus areas included

worship and evangelism, congregational revitalization, and ministry within post-modern

culture. The researcher has been involved in discipling others and receiving discipleship,

both in para-church and congregational contexts for almost thirty years.

Data Collection

Three Lutheran mega-churches served as sites for primary data collection. In

determining eligible congregations, this researcher used the Hartford Institute for

Religion Research's definition of a mega-church. According to the Hartford Institute,

mega churches generally have:

> two thousand or more persons in attendance at weekly worship, counting adults
> and children at all worship locations, a charismatic, authoritative senior minister,
> a very active seven day a week congregational community, a multitude of diverse
> social and outreach ministries, an intentional small group system or other
> structures of intimacy and accountability, innovative and often contemporary
> worship format, and a complex differentiated organizational structure.[259]

The original project design called for four Lutheran mega-churches to be data collection

sites. Unfortunately, of the seven eligible congregations, two were unable to participate

---

[259] Hartford Institute for Religion Research. "Megachurches," accessed December 11, 2018, http://hirr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/megachurches.html.

due to pastoral transitions and three others failed to respond to repeated attempts at contact both through emails and phone calls during a period of three months prior to the study.

The following congregations served as sites for primary data collection: Lutheran Church of Hope, West Des Moines, Iowa, Hope Lutheran Church, Fargo, North Dakota, and St. Andrew's Lutheran Church, Mahtomedi, Minnesota. Lutheran Church of Hope, the setting of this project, is a multi-site congregation with six campuses in the Des Moines metro area and four "local sites" (weekly worship sites consisting of ten to one hundred people). Three of the local sites are in Iowa and one in Shawnee, Kansas, a suburb of Kansas City. Hope WDM's total average weekly attendance is 13,340. Hope Lutheran Church in Fargo, North Dakota is a multi-site congregation with two campuses, both in Fargo. Hope Fargo's total average weekly attendance is 4,820. St. Andrew's Lutheran Church is a multi-site congregation, also with two campuses, both in Mahtomedi, a suburb of St. Paul, Minnesota. St. Andrew's total average attendance in weekly worship is 2,509.[260]

The reader may wonder how a congregation the size of Hope WDM fits into a collective case study with two significantly smaller congregations. The themes emerging from the collected data and the lessons learned, however, reveal that the three congregations have more in common in terms of challenges, opportunities, assets, and liabilities than one might initially expect. At each congregation four types of data were collected: (1) semi-structured interviews with congregational members, (2) semi-

---

[260] Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Research and Evaluation. "Congregational Trend Report," accessed December 12, 2018, https://www.elca.org/tools/FindACongregation.

structured interviews with congregational staff members, (3) print and website

documentation relevant to adult discipleship, and (4) observational protocols

documenting personal observations and reflections from on-site visits to each

congregation.

Semi-Structured Interviews of Members and Staff

As mentioned, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews (interviews

"generally organized around a set of predetermined questions, with other questions

emerging from the dialog between interviewer and interviewee/s")[261] with two groups of

people from each congregation: four lay members and two staff members (appendix A).

The lay members, two men and two women, were chosen by the congregation's

discipleship director for their spiritual maturity. "Spiritual maturity" was defined as a

person who has a vibrant relationship with God, is Biblically literate, emotionally

healthy, regularly attends weekend worship service, is active in a small group, and serves

in a ministry either inside or outside the congregation. The goal of the interviews with

congregational members was to explore their faith journeys, particularly the relational,

developmental, and missional aspects, and discover how those journeys interacted with

their respective congregations.

The researcher also conducted semi-structured interviews with two staff members

from each congregation: the senior pastor and the director of adult discipleship. The goal

of these interviews was to explore how staff members understood discipleship with

regard to its relational, developmental and missional aspects and how they were

---

[261] Barbara DiCicco-Bloom and Benjamin F Crabtree, "The Qualitative Research Interview," *Medical Education,* 40, (2006): 314-321, accessed January 3, 2019. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2929.2006.02418.x.

facilitating the discipleship process for their members. Since the researcher is the director of discipleship at Hope WDM, the director of men's ministry, who is also the director of leadership development, was chosen instead as the discipleship staff person to be interviewed. This person is responsible for a large enough portion of adult discipleship in this congregation to be able to provide similarly robust interview responses as the researcher. In order to minimize bias, staff interviews at Hope WDM were conducted by a Hope WDM staff person outside the reporting structure of the two staff members interviewed.

In all interviews, follow up questions were kept to a minimum so as to maintain consistency in relation to the questions asked throughout the interviews. All interviews were transcribed and converted into Word documents by Rev.com,[262] an online transcription service.

Other Types of Data Collection

In addition to the semi-structured interviews of staff and lay members, the researcher collected documentation related to each congregation's adult discipleship, care, and service opportunities. Both print and online sources were collected. Print sources consisted of weekly worship bulletins, newsletters, vision statements, course curriculum, and brochures for newcomers. Online sources consisted of discipleship pathways, descriptions of discipleship courses, care ministries, and service opportunities. The researcher scanned and converted the print sources into PDF file format for data analysis. Online resources originated from each congregation's website and consisted of

---

[262] Rev.com, accessed December 11, 2018, https://www.rev.com.

discipleship pathways, ministry area overviews, course offerings, service opportunities, and care resources. These were also converted either into PDF files or Word documents for data analysis. Observational protocols as well were converted into Word documents for data analysis.

Research Analysis

The researcher conducted his analysis of the data utilizing MAXQDA Qualitative and Mixed Methods Data Analysis Software.[263] The four data types, interviews of congregational members, interviews of staff, scanned and online documentation, and observational protocols, were loaded into MAXQDA for coding and memoing. The researcher began his analysis by applying initial descriptive coding[264] (identifying a topic emerging from a particular set of data) and values coding[265] (identifying attitudes, values, and beliefs emerging from a particular set of data) to each type of collected data. Given that each data type had its own unique characteristics, each type was coded separately from the others.

After the initial coding, the researcher utilized focused coding[266] to organize both descriptive and values coding within each data type into clusters of topically related codes. For example, the descriptive coding emerging from the interviews of congregational members was grouped into the following topics: Relationships, Church,

---

[263] Anne Kuckartz, Julia Gerson, Murat Esmer, and René Lori. *MAXQDA* Qualitative and Mixed Methods Data Analysis Software (version 2018.1). Mac. Berlin: VERBI Software GmbH, 2018.

[264] Johnny Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers,* 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2013), 102.

[265] Saldaña, 131.

[266] Saldaña, 240.

Worship, Faith Journey, Courses and Personal Study, Serving, and Challenges to Faith. Where necessary, the codes were divided again into sub-topics. Serving, for example, was divided into Serving inside the Church, and Serving outside the Church.

After grouping the codes into topics and sub-topics, the researcher examined the data for codes in each topic cluster that occurred significantly more than others. As these codes surfaced, each code occurrence was assigned to one of three groups, each corresponding to the congregational sites from which they emerged. These three site groups were then ranked according to frequency of occurrence. Within each group, the researcher then identified other codes that overlapped the recurring code. These overlapping codes were separated into groups of descriptive codes and values codes. Codes within each site group were again ranked according to frequency of occurrence. After ranking the overlapping codes in each group, the researcher compared the ranked codes from each site group to the other two, paying attention to similarities and differences among the three groups.

Next, the researcher examined the frequently occurring codes and the associated overlapping codes of each overall data type, searching both for similarly occurring codes as well as frequently occurring codes unique to its own data type. Similar to the grouping of codes within each data type, the combined analysis of the four data types was then divided into three congregational site groups. Finally, the researcher explored the relationship of these three groups of data with each other, again paying attention to similarities and differences.

In order to facilitate this process of coding and analysis, the researcher wrote memos, reflecting on the relationships between the data clusters within and across the

various data types, particularly as they related to the relational, developmental, and missional aspects of discipleship and the Lutheran mega-church. Memos also consisted of observations and reflections regarding possible emerging themes and eventual lessons learned. From the analysis of the collected data and the observations and reflections captured by the memos, several themes emerged, which the researcher employed to generate lessons learned. These themes and lessons learned will be presented and discussed in the following chapters.

CHAPTER FIVE: SIX KEY DISCIPLESHIP THEMES

This chapter summarizes the analysis and findings from data collected through lay

interviews, staff interviews, online and print media, and personal observations of the

three congregations that are part of this multiple case study. The researcher began

analysis by observing codes which occurred most frequently. These codes were then

grouped under focused codes, often three tiers deep. For example, both values and

descriptive codes referring to relationships of some kind occurred with particularly high

frequency (seventy occurrences as values codes, 130 occurrences as descriptive codes).

These codes were divided into groups of sub-codes, the majority of which referred to

various formal and informal influential relationships, including small group communities.

Out of these groupings emerged the theme "Relationships in Discipleship."

The findings and analysis from the collected data have been organized into six

themes: "Experiencing Discipleship," "Atmosphere, Energy and Spirit," Relationships in

Discipleship," "Understanding Discipleship," Strategies for Discipleship," and finally,

"Challenges to Discipleship."

Experiencing Discipleship

In order to understand how members from the congregations under study

experience discipleship, members from each congregation were asked during their

interviews to describe their faith journey. Through the process of initial and focused

coding, a pattern of gradual development emerged from their interviews, consisting of six

stages: (1) Early Family and Church Influence, (2) Leaving the Church, (3) Returning to

Church, (4) Getting Engaged with the Church, (5) Influential Relationships, and (6) Searching for More. While this developmental pattern shares much in common with the spiritual development models proposed by Clinton[267] as well as Hagberg and Guelich,[268] it also reveals the extent which influential relationships, and the congregation as an organization, influence that development. Below are the six stages in detail.

Stage One: Early Family and Church Influence

As they described their journey of faith, all twelve congregational members interviewed referenced their family of origin. Eight described a positive experience with their families of origin while three mentioned their families without any evaluation. Only one interviewee spoke of significant family dysfunction in her formative years. Five members referenced the positive influence family members had on their faith formation, usually parents or grandparents. Four experienced an active faith life during their childhood years. In contrast to their family experience, only three interviewees described their church experience as positive. Typical of the experiences of the other nine, one interviewee reflected, "We lived right across the street, and my dad was the president of the congregation for a long, long time, so I went 'cause I had to. It was fine, it was a pretty small church. I wasn't . . . didn't really get much out of it, you know? And . . . just kind of went through the motions." Of these nine interviewees, six felt they "didn't get much out of" their initial church experience and three described their childhood and young adult relationship with the church as nominal.

---

[267] Clinton, *The Making of a Leader,* 37-40.

[268] Hagberg and Guelich, 6-7.

Stage Two: Leaving the Church

Taking into account their childhood experiences in church, it is not surprising that all but two of the members interviewed became either nominally engaged or completely disengaged from church during their young adult years. One interviewee left the church because of a friend's death during their college years: "What little faith I had was kind of flipped upside down," he reflected. An interviewee from a different congregation seemed to represent the sentiment of the others who left the church: "I was raised in the church, [but] as soon as I was confirmed, I had graduated from church and didn't plan on going back except when mom and dad wanted us to go with them on the holidays." Even many who had positive initial church experiences still left the church in their teen or young adult years. Another interviewee, who experienced a very robust faith life within their family and church, still described a slow drift away from faith and church during his adolescent and young adult years: "I suppose during my later high school years, I still attended church, but probably not very intentionally, not much heart in it, and I was in the military then after high school, and I probably attended church outside my visits home maybe two or three times."

Admittedly, twelve interviewees constitute a small sample, but their comments suggest that, at least for them, neither their childhood church experiences, nor the influence of their parents' or other relatives' faith have a strong correlation to interviewees either leaving or remaining in church during their young adult years. It would be interesting to study this phenomenon with a significantly larger sample size.

Stage Three: Returning to Church

Eleven of twelve congregational members interviewed spoke of returning to church during a time when their children were young, when they were experiencing

restlessness in life, or when they were living through a crisis. While two interviewees took the initiative to find a congregation, the other nine were invited either by a friend or relative to a church or a group-based course dealing with issues of faith such as Bible Study Fellowship or Alpha. Usually these classes were associated in some way with the church they eventually began to attend. Of the two members interviewed who remained active in a church throughout their lives, one came to her present congregation as a result of moving to another state. The other joined his present congregation as a result of seeking a church in which both he and his wife would feel comfortable.

As congregational members related their experience of attending their present church for the first time, most were struck by how significantly different the church was from others they had attended. Those differences included the noticeable hospitality and warmth of the congregation, the vibrancy and informal style of the worship service, and the way the sermon was both intellectually and emotionally engaging. Congregational members also reported an overall sense of God's Spirit present in the church. One member remarked, "[T]he exciting thing is going to church and leaving with that spirit filled feeling" Another member commented, "[I]t doesn't even matter what I'm here for, the Holy Spirit is just so present here and whether I'm coming to hang out with you or band practice or whatever, dropping something off or whatever, it just doesn't matter. It's just, it's awesome."

From these interviews it appears that, while there are primarily three reasons these congregational members became open to returning to church (children, restlessness and life crises), it was an invitation from a friend or relative that actually connected them to their church or a group-based course associated in some way with their church. What

caused these interviewees to return for a second or third visit, however, was the quality of the congregation's hospitality, worship experience, preaching, and a powerful intangible factor most interviewees referred to as the presence of God's Spirit.

Stage Four: Engaging with Church

As these congregational members became comfortable with their present churches, all of them in some way became actively engaged with their church. Many of them described becoming involved with group-based learning experiences, small groups or some kind of group-based course. During their involvement with a group or group-based course, their faith began to grow, and in some cases, members experienced significant spiritual awakening. One interviewee described a spiritual awakening he experienced at a retreat that was part of Alpha, a group-based introduction to Christianity.

> In '02, I think, we took Alpha, which was, which was great, learned a lot there, and went to the retreat and [I] distinctly remember that and we went up to take communion and, and I'm just, just crying and it was at that retreat—that is when God became real to me. I mean, like, everything changed at that moment, you know?

Another interviewee recounted how a group-based Bible study at his congregation began to impact many areas of his life: "Little did I know that, you know, when I started attending a Bible study here, it really made a difference in my prayer life, my, you know, how I felt about things, how I cared about other people, and started, really started increasing my prayer life." Another interviewee's small group experience served as a catalyst to increase her hunger for more: "I started to feel more as [I] got engaged in small groups, more about this relationship with God, that just wasn't something I grew up with. And so, I just became more and more curious." These interviews suggest that when these members engaged with their congregations, their primary experience was some kind of transformative community, which became a catalyst for further spiritual growth.

Stage Five: Informal Mentorship

After joining a small group or group-based class, the next step for most congregational members interviewed was to receive guidance through some kind of informal mentorship. When asked about relationships that had a positive impact on their lives, eleven of twelve members mentioned people in their church who had mentored them. Six members mentioned being mentored by either a pastor or a ministry director, usually as the result of taking a class led by one of them. Four members mentioned being mentored by another member of their small group or a friend within their church. One mentioned being mentored by their Alpha group facilitator and another by both a ministry leader and a fellow member of his worship team.

For several members, their mentoring relationships helped them move from participation in their church's discipleship ministry to engaging in leadership roles within their church. In one case, a member's mentor helped her discover her spiritual gifts, strengths and passions. As a result, she became a small group facilitator in one of her church's discipleship courses and a member of the women's ministry leadership team. Similarly, through a mentoring relationship, another member became an Alpha small group facilitator and recently changed his career path to become a Christian life-coach. It appears from Congregational members' descriptions of their mentoring relationships that these relationships often move members to serve in some kind of leadership capacity, be it formal or informal. It would be interesting to explore a larger sample of congregational members to determine the frequency of those who engage in leadership as the result of mentoring relationships.

Stage Six – Searching for More

As members described the current stage of their faith journey, many spoke of an increased restlessness and confusion in terms of their life direction. Many also expressed a desire for something beyond their present experience. One member, now a leader in her church's women's ministry, expressed a yearning to understand her purpose: "I'm still on this journey, but I have this yearning to understand like, "Who does God want me to be?" Another member, when asked about challenges to her faith, expressed dissatisfaction with her church's recent sermon series as well as a small group Bible study she and her husband attend: "[I]t's [the current Bible study] that doesn't maybe speak to you as much and it seems a bit, maybe, repetitive." Still another member spent several minutes expressing frustration at being underutilized and not having any sense of guidance: "I feel like there's a lot more work I should be doing and (this is crass) I don't know what the hell it is." This same member also revealed that he and his wife had begun to attend weekend worship less frequently and were slowly disengaging from their church. There is a sense from them that members at this stage in their faith journey may be at a crossroads in terms of their church involvement and spiritual growth.

Observations

Several observations emerge from this theme. The first is that, analogous to stages of faith, there appear also to be (possibly related) stages of church engagement. The second observation is the apparent lack of correlation between childhood family and church experiences and the likelihood of a person remaining in church during his or her young adult years. The third observation is the important role group-based learning experiences and mentoring relationships play in helping people engage (Stage Three), remain (Stage Four) and grow spiritually (Stage Five) within their local church. The final

observation is that many members in their faith journey experience feelings of restlessness, confusion and a desire for "something more" (Stage Six). If these feelings are not addressed, members at this stage may be in danger of disengaging from their church.

Atmosphere, Spirit and Energy

Congregational members were also asked about how their congregation or congregation's discipleship ministry has impacted their faith journey. Seven out of ten members' responses referenced the atmosphere, energy or spirit experienced within the worship services of their congregations as well as within the congregations as a whole. For at least three members interviewed, the unique atmosphere, spirit and energy of the church was a determining factor in their decision to become part of their present congregation.

Here are six interview excerpts from five congregational members regarding the energy and atmosphere of their congregations. Five of the six reference the Holy Spirit in some way: (1) "I think the exciting thing is going to church and leaving with that Spirit-filled feeling." (2) "Oh goodness! There is, there is a Spirit of God here." (3) "Obviously, there is a definite Holy Spirit thing going on in this church, unlike anything I've ever seen." (4) "The Holy Spirit is just so present here and whether I'm coming to hang out with you or band practice or whatever, dropping something off or whatever. . . . It just doesn't matter. It's just, it's awesome." (5) "There's something about this place that's, it's an intangible, but you can't quite put your finger on it, you know. And, yet it's there very clearly, you know, many people talk about it being the presence of God's Spirit." (6) "So . . . [I] felt like I was at a Phish concert. Every song just there's no end . . . you know, and

people are clapping . . . like, you can't clap in church, you know? But by the, by the third time I was absolutely hooked." While containing fewer code segments than other themes, this theme is significant in that its code segments represent comments made by the majority of congregational members interviewed, as well as personal observations during site visits to the congregations.

Between interviews and observations, codes referencing atmosphere, energy and Spirit emerged from data collected from all three congregations. The code "Unique Atmosphere" occurred nine times, reflecting comments made by six interviewees. The code "Spirit" occurred eight times, reflecting comments made by seven interviewees (the same six plus one additional interviewee). "Spirit" referred to the Holy Spirit seven times and the spirit of community once. Four out of eight occurrences also reference some type of small group experience. From personal observations at site visits, the code "Energy," describing both traditional and contemporary worship services, occurred five times. The code "Energy and Smiles" occurred once, referring to volunteer and staff hospitality at one congregation's all-church community evangelistic event.

Observations

The codes and excerpts emerging from member interviews and personal observations suggest that visitors make decisions about whether to become part of a congregation based, in part, on their experience of a congregation's atmosphere, energy, spirit and the perceived presence of God's Spirit. The challenge for congregational leaders is that these kinds of experiences are not easily measurable, apart from comments by guests and newcomers to the congregation. Understanding the factors that contribute to these types of experiences is equally challenging. Nonetheless, the data suggest that

these types of experiences impact guests' and newcomers' decisions and behaviors regarding engagement with their congregation and their faith journey as a whole.

Relationships and Discipleship

During the interview process, the researcher asked congregational members about relationships that have been influential in their faith journey. Apart from this particular question, the theme of relationships permeated each member's entire interview. All interviewees mentioned two types of relationships that had impacted their faith journey: (1) informal influential relationships, such as mentors, family members and friends, and (2) group-based learning experiences, such as small groups or courses which in some way employed small groups as part of the learning process.

Informal Influential Relationships

Several members interviewed described how a teacher (often a pastor or staff member), small group facilitator or even a peer began to meet with them to foster their spiritual growth. "I would say my first strong [relationship that] really connected . . . would be my facilitator in Alpha," commented one member. "And she was an elder, and she knew how to talk to me. She knew how to read me; she knew how to ask me the questions." A member from another church recounted how many female friends in her church had been good mentors to her. Still another member spoke of how a staff member at her church helped her "better understand my strengths and the gifts that God had given me in a way that I hadn't done before."

Within the descriptive focused code "Relationships" (132 occurrences total) "Informal Influential Relationships" occurred fifty times, reflecting comments made by all twelve interviewees. The descriptive code "Informal Influential Relationships" indicated relationships which emerged informally and were positively influential. There

was also significant overlap between "Informal Influential Relationships" and the codes "Pastors" and "Staff." Taken together, "Pastors" and "Staff" overlapped with "Informal Influential Relationships" eighteen times.

The impact of Informal Influential Relationships on the members interviewed appears also to be corroborated by values code segments. Within the focused values code "Relationships," members expressed value for "Mentors" twenty times, the most frequent code occurrence within "Relationships," The second most frequent code occurrence was "Church-Related Community and Relationships," occurring seventeen times.

Group-Based Learning Experiences

During the interviews, ten out of twelve members indicated how much they valued small groups and group-based studies as a significant part of their faith journey. One member described the friendships she developed through her small group Bible study: "[I]f you stay with a group for years and years, they become more than, they're just good friends. You share prayer requests and they really know you. [You] might not see them hardly outside of [the] Bible study but you have this connection." Another spoke of the many ways members of his leadership team actively strengthened each other's faith: "[T]here was twelve of us plus John and as we met, we leaders . . . we'd always gather, check in with everybody, seeing if anybody needed any prayers, we'd all pray before any agenda and we did everything we could to help the men get a closer walk with the Lord."

Descriptive and values codes seemed to indicate as well that small groups and group-based courses have had significant positive impact on the congregational members interviewed. Within the focused descriptive code "Growth Opportunities," occurring sixty-two times, the code "Group-Based Study," the code with the largest number of occurrences, occurred thirty-nine times. This code included both small groups and group-

based courses. Similarly, under the focused values code "Growth," occurring forty-six times, the code "Group-Based Study" occurred twenty-five times, the largest number of occurrences within "Growth."

The descriptive and value code segments assigned to the data collected from print and online media seemed to indicate that the three congregations under study also placed high value on group-based learning experiences. Under the focused descriptive code "Growth Opportunities," occurring 372 times, code segments related to group-based learning experiences occurred 113 times. These were: "Group-Based Studies" for adults, occurring thirty-two times, "Group-Based Studies" specifically for women, sixteen times, "Group-Based Studies" specifically for men, seventeen times, and "Small Groups and Community Life," fifty-two times.

Values code segments assigned to data, which emerged from the collected media offered similar results. One of the congregations under study placed the following paragraph on their website:

> One of our Core Values at Hope is that following Jesus is a growing experience. We can't outgrow Christian faith. As modern-day disciples of Jesus Christ, we are called to move from spiritual infancy to spiritual maturity (Philippians 3:13-14, Ephesians 4:12-14). For this reason, we strive to bring people into an ever-growing relationship with Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:19). *This growth best happens in life groups* [italics added] (Acts 2:42-47). As we grow in faith, we turn our hearts to God, giving of ourselves and our resources – freely and cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7).[269]

For all three congregations, under the focused value code "Disciple Growth," occurring 209 times, code segments related to group-based learning experiences occurred ninety-

---

[269] Lutheran Church of Hope, "Grow," accessed September 30, 2019, http://www.lutheranchurchofhope.org/west-des-moines/grow/.

two times. These were: Small Groups, occurring twenty-nine times, "Group-Based

Learning–Women," thirty times, "Group-Based Learning–Men," eighteen times,

and "Group-Based Learning–Adults in General," ten times.

Observations

The combined data from the interviews of congregational members and the

collected media suggest that the congregations under study recognize and respond to the

value their members place on small groups and group-based study opportunities. In

contrast, that same data reveal that no congregation presently has any formal mentoring

system in place. One congregation under study attempted twice to create a formal

mentoring program. Neither attempt resulted in the creation of a significant amount of

mentoring relationships. The interviews suggest, however, that mentoring relationships

are less the result of intentional programming and more a result of volunteer and staff

leaders "noticing" the potential and hunger of members within their sphere of influence.

That is, most mentoring relationships mentioned are informal rather than formal in

nature. Perhaps, rather than creating mentoring programs, congregations may consider

equipping their staff and volunteer leaders with skills to identify and informally mentor

people who are good candidates for such relationships.

Understanding Discipleship

Staff Interviews

When congregational staff were asked how they understood discipleship, all of

them responded with the statement, "Discipleship is following Jesus." As they unpacked

that statement, their responses were reflected in three focused values codes: "Discipleship

is developmental," occurring thirty-three times, "Discipleship is relational," twenty-eight

times and "Discipleship is missional," twenty-six times.

Within "Discipleship is developmental," "Discipleship is a journey in growth,"

occurring seven times and "Discipleship is growing in your identity in Christ," six times,

emerged as the two largest code occurrences. Statements similar to these in both codes

often referenced the transformational nature of discipleship. As one pastor remarked,

> And so I think, that whole journey of unpacking [our identity in Christ]: what
> does it mean to be loved unconditionally? What does that mean for now? What is
> my mission? What are my gifts? All of that is wrapped up in this idea of living
> out this identity, which at the end of the day, means you're gonna look a lot like
> Jesus. So that, all that to say I think, living out the process of growing and living
> out your identity in Christ to, to the point where you look more and more like
> Jesus is probably how I would define discipleship.

When asked about his congregation's discipleship strategy another pastor replied,

> The Strategy is relational. And in that, we mean that . . . I think . . . we're betting
> everything on the fact that growth happens through life on life (i.e., relational)
> experiences. So being connected deeply to other people, letting them challenge us,
> and walk with us, and, and pour into us. I think life and community as well, just
> every facet of life is rooted in this idea that we need other people's perspective to
> grow.

Statements similar to these in both codes often referenced the transformational nature of

discipleship.

Within "Discipleship is relational," "Discipleship is living with Christ as the

center," occurred sixteen times. Statements within occurrences of this code referred to the

disciple's identity in Christ, commitment to Christ, relationship with Christ and the

disciple's ability to experience Christ's love and grace within that relationship. Four other

values codes reflecting beliefs, occurring a total of eight times, referred to disciples'

relationships with others, particularly in relationships that promoted growth. They are:

"Discipleship is a relationship with Christ and his people," occurring four times, "Growth

happens through relational experiences," occurring twice, "Discipleship is personal and

communal," and "Mentoring promotes spiritual growth," both occurring once. Values

codes indicating value for small groups, group-oriented classes, spiritual direction, and

mentoring occurred one time each.

Within "Discipleship is missional," the two largest codes, "Discipleship is living

it out," occurred sixteen times and "Growth is for the sake of loving the neighbor," five

times. Both focused on the disciple's mission, calling in life and service to others. The

same pastor who commented above described the missional nature of discipleship as

follows.

> Well, I think it's as we grow, and into our identity as Christians, we become the kind of people who are naturally generous, and servants, and social. And so we find ourselves being sling-shotted back out of this building every week, or daily, or whatever it is, to achieve those exact same objectives in terms of connecting people with God, experiencing the Holy Spirit, and the love of God in living rooms, and workplaces, and all that.

Other statements from two of the three congregations reflected the priority of

evangelism within the discipleship enterprise. "Evangelism preceded discipleship"

occurred two times and "Discipleship is making followers of Jesus," twice.

It is worth noting here that for Lutherans "evangelism" typically means the act of

proclaiming the Good News of Christ's victory over sin, death and the devil through his

life, suffering, death and resurrection. Evangelism is also the proclamation of the

kingdom of God and an invitation to become part of that kingdom through trust in Christ

as Lord and Savior. Evidence of conversion is based less on a prayer or decision in the

past or even a certain kind of piety; rather, it is based more on a present confession of

trust in Jesus Christ. Lutherans rarely ask, "When were you saved?" Rather, the crucial

Lutheran question is, "Do you trust in Christ and his promises for you?"

Online and Print Media

Congregational Focus

Collected online and print media from all three congregations appeared to reflect the staff understanding of discipleship and its part within the larger congregational mission. The descriptive code "Mission Statements," occurring forty-two times, emerged from media collected from all three congregations. One congregation printed its mission statement on the front of its monthly newsletter as well as on the front page of its website. Another congregation included its mission statement, along with its values statements, on a bookmark, in its annual report, its visitor brochure, and the "about us" page of its website. This congregation's mission statement was also included in an advertisement for its mobile social media application. Still another of the three congregations included its mission statement within the header of every page of its bi-monthly newsletter as well as on the "What We're About" page on its website. Here are the mission statements from the three congregations studied for this project: (1) "Proclaim Jesus Christ, Live in Christ, Serve!" (2) "To Encourage All People to Know the Love of Christ," and (3) "Reach out to the world around us and share the everlasting love of Jesus Christ!"

Not surprisingly, all three congregations contain missional elements in their mission statements such as, "proclaim . . . serve," "encourage all people" and "reach out to the world around us and share." All three also contain relational elements such as, "live in Christ," "know the love of Christ" and "the love of Jesus Christ." While it could be argued that all three mission statements imply discipleship growth ("experiencing Christ's love" or "living in Christ" are certainly transformative), it is interesting to note that none of them explicitly reference the developmental aspect of discipleship.

The descriptive code "Vision Statement," occurring forty-one times, emerged from media collected from all three congregations. Similar to "Mission Statement" the three congregations also included their vision statements in visitor brochures, bookmarks, annual reports, and "about us" or "who we are" pages on their websites. The same congregation that included their mission statement within the header of every page of their bi-monthly newsletter also included their vision statement within the footer of every page. Here are the three congregations' vision statements: (1) "Empowered by God's love, we help transform lives, communities and the world so that everyone may know Christ's healing power," (2) "We are people of faith dedicated to following Jesus and serving Him. We do this through innovative outreach, unparalleled acts of service, and passionate discipleship," and (3) "Powered by the Spirit to bring Christ to all cultures, revive the world with God's love and make heaven more crowded!" As with the mission statements, all three congregations' vision statements contain missional elements: "we help transform," "innovative outreach, unparalleled acts of service" and "revive the world with God's love and make heaven more crowded!" On the other hand, only one vision statement contains relational elements: "we help transform lives, communities."

Finally, in contrast to the mission statements, all three vision statements contain developmental elements: "Empowered by God's love . . . transform …Christ's healing power," "passionate discipleship" and "Powered by the Spirit . . . revive the world" One congregation also had a formal statement of values, which is as follows: (1) Jesus is life. The rest is details, (2) Lost people matter to God and so they matter to us, (3) We worship God, not tradition, (4) Following Jesus is a growing experience, and (5) We are one body, united in Jesus Christ. The second statement suggests a missional emphasis, the fourth

statement suggests a developmental emphasis, and the fifth statement suggests a relational emphasis.

Program Offerings

Based on collected online and print media from all three congregations, the communication of program opportunities also appeared to reflect the staff's understanding of discipleship. Of the 707 discipleship events and opportunities included in the focused descriptive code, "Events and Opportunities," 372 codes were included in "Growth Opportunities," both relational and developmental, and 223 codes were included in "Service Opportunities," both inside and outside the congregation. The next largest code, "Care Ministry - Receiving Care," occurred thirty-six times.

Within "Growth Opportunities" the sub-code "Small Groups and Community Life" occurred thirty times. The sub-code "General Adult Ministry," occurring ninety-five times, also included thirty-two occurrences of the code "Group-Based Studies," referring to small group studies and courses which intentionally employed small groups as part of the learning process. Under the focused code "Disciple and Leadership Development," twenty-nine relational and developmental opportunities were identified. Within that code, "Leadership Conferences" occurred seven times, "Ongoing Leadership Development" six times, "Life Path Discernment Courses" nine times, and "Discipleship Pathway" seven times. Codes referring to traditional lecture-style topical and Bible courses occurred only thirteen times.

Of the 631 opportunities identified under the focused values code "Discipleship," 296 codes emerging from all three congregations were included in the focused values code "Missional Discipleship." Codes from all three congregations were also included in

the focused values code "Developmental Discipleship," occurred 209 times. Codes from the three congregations included in the focused values code "Relational Discipleship" occurred 106 times. Finally, codes included in the focused values code "Supporting Discipleship with Resources" occurred twenty times, again from all three congregations. All three codes suggest that the three congregations place high value on missional, developmental and relational discipleship opportunities and invest resources in these three areas.

The online and print media from all three congregations appear to indicate in all three cases an alignment between congregational focus (mission, vision and values statements) and the programs these congregations offer. Mission and vision statements reflect these congregations' commitment to relational, developmental and missional discipleship, although developmental discipleship is the least emphasized. All three congregations' program offerings also reflect this commitment, with a stress on groups and group-based learning opportunities.

Observational Protocols

As part of this project the researcher spent at least two days at each of the three congregations under study for this project. The timing of these site visits was influenced by the availability of the lay and staff members being interviewed. Two of the site visits, where significant travel was involved, occurred over a Friday through Sunday period. Within that timeframe, the researcher was able to collect observational data on major community evangelistic events at two congregations, as well as both traditional and contemporary weekend worship services at all three. Observational data from the researcher's own congregation were also collected during a Friday through Sunday time

period, similar to the other two congregations. The descriptive codes emerging from the observational protocols were organized into four focused codes: "Worship," occurring forty-four times, "Hospitality," thirty-nine times, "Evangelism," thirteen times, and "Serving," occurring ten times. These particular focused codes reflect the researcher's experience during the three site visits. These four focused codes also reflect how each congregation uses major gatherings, such as weekend worship services and all-church evangelistic events, to support all three aspects of discipleship. All three congregations, for example, utilize their weekend worship services as places for disciple growth, community formation, attractional evangelism, and an opportunity for lay leadership.

Within "Worship," codes relevant to discipleship are: "Spiritual Energy," occurring five times, and "Sense of Community," four times. "Spiritual Energy" refers to the researcher's observation of excitement and anticipation among the participants in the worship services of all three congregations. Congregational members interviewed also referred to the same experience. Their comments were coded under the descriptive code: "Unique Atmosphere," occurring nine times. "Sense of Community" refers to the strong sense of community the researcher observed, both at the evangelistic events and the worship services.

Within "Hospitality," relevant descriptive codes are: "Relational Hospitality," occurring ten times, and "Food Hospitality," occurring four times. "Relational Hospitality" refers to the researcher observing volunteer greeters and ushers actively welcoming all who entered the worship space. "Food Hospitality" refers to all three congregations creating a space with food where community could develop. One

congregation serves hot meals before and between their weekend worship services and encourages small groups to have their regular gatherings during this time.

Within "Evangelism," relevant descriptive codes are: "Community Event as Evangelism," occurring eight times, and "Worship Event as Evangelism," occurring five times. Within "Serving," relevant descriptive codes are: "Serving Inside the Church," occurring eight times, and "Serving Outside the Church," occurring two times. Most of the occurrences of both codes refer to the researcher observing volunteers engaging in hospitality or leading in some capacity in the worship services and community evangelism events. For Lutherans, evangelistic activities are those that either proclaim the Good News of Christ or prepare the way for such proclamation. These include but are not limited to sharing one's faith, inviting others to church, offering seeker-friendly worship experiences, providing seeker-oriented courses and events such as Alpha and Vacation Bible School, and serving the local community through feeding the homeless, providing affordable housing, and offering English as a Second Language (ESL) courses.

Values codes emerging from observational protocols were also organized into the same four categories: "Worship," occurring forty-seven times, "Hospitality," twenty-two times, "Evangelism," seven times, and "Serving," occurring five times.

Within "Worship," values codes relevant to discipleship are the belief that "Worship is evangelistic," occurring five times, and "Music is an effective outreach tool," also occurring five times. Both codes refer to what the researcher experienced in the three congregations' contemporary and traditional worship services. One church uses its many large traditional choirs for all ages as a way to engage seekers and new disciples with entry-level service and community opportunities. The researcher observed that all

three churches are intentional about making both their contemporary and traditional services welcome and accessible to guests. This intentionality is reflected in each congregation's building design, print material given to worshippers, the diversity of worship services offered, the kind of music selected, and the care worship leaders took to including guests in congregational singing.

Within "Hospitality," there are two relevant values codes. One represents the belief that "Hospitality is an effective evangelism tool," occurring three times, and the other represents the value of "Hospitality," occurring thirteen times. Within "Evangelism," one code represents the belief that "Outreach events are an effective evangelism tool," occurring three times, and the other represents the value of "Evangelistic Celebrations," occurring once. Both codes refer to the researcher's observation of the noticeably high number of non-members, particularly Muslim families, enjoying one congregation's evangelistic event.

Within "Serving," relevant codes expressing value for "Volunteerism" occurred two times, "Servant Leadership" also twice and "Local Mission Partnership" once. "Volunteerism" refers to the many volunteers in these three congregations who were involved in hospitality for both the worship services and the evangelistic events. "Servant Leadership" refers to volunteers engaged in significant leadership roles in both services and events. "Local Mission Partnership" represents a mission fair of local mission partners at one congregation's community evangelistic event.

One additional values code expressing value for resources in theological education and application of faith to life occurred two times. This code represents a large library at one congregation and a large bookstore at another.

Observations

Staff responses to questions about the nature of discipleship suggest an awareness among the pastors and staff interviewed of current academic and practitioner literature regarding discipleship. These staff leaders affirm the literature that proposes a discipleship model with relational, developmental and missional components. These leaders understand discipleship as a journey of growth in relationship to Christ and the neighbor, which involves the transformation of identity, values, purpose, and behavior. They also understand the value of peer and mentor relationships in the formation of disciples.

This understanding of discipleship is reflected in the hardcopy and online media their congregations produce, relating both to their congregations' mission, vision and values statements, and the programs they offer to their members. Program offerings include relational, developmental and missional discipleship opportunities, with a preference for group-based learning and serving.

Data collected through personal observations of worship services and all-church community evangelistic events at two of the congregations reflected in-part the understanding of discipleship expressed by staff at the three congregations. At the worship services of two of the congregations there was considerable lay participation in hospitality, choirs, ensembles, and in worship leadership roles. At the evangelistic events members were involved in hospitality and some areas of leadership. There was also an attempt by one congregation to use the evangelistic event to engage their own members in service opportunities in the surrounding community.

Strategies for Discipleship

Staff Interviews

General Discipleship Strategy

When asked to describe their congregation's adult discipleship strategy, staff

members' answers to this question were divided into two descriptive codes: "Aspirational

Strategy," occurring four times, and "Evolving Strategy," two times. "Aspirational

Strategy" indicates that while a congregation does not presently have a discipleship

strategy, staff and volunteer leaders have given significant thought toward what such a

strategy would look like. The following comment from one pastor reflects the current

state of discipleship at two of the congregations.

> I think we've done a lot of adult discipleship or had a lot of adult discipleship
> opportunities. . . . But it's only been in the last, say, four years that we've become
> very strategic about building a team around that and thinking about an overall
> plan and direction for that. And so we're at this point where we, we really are
> growing and thinking [sic] about what are all the avenues or ways that adults can
> be engaged in their faith to gain greater knowledge of Scripture but also greater
> knowledge of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ and to use their gifts
> to serve in our church and our community.

This and similar statements reflect a significant desire among the staff and members in

these two congregations to create a strategy for adult discipleship. Indeed, both

congregations have a full-time adult discipleship pastor on staff. One congregation even

assembled a task force to work with their discipleship pastor in formulating an adult

discipleship strategy. Nonetheless, for a variety of reasons, these two congregations have

not yet produced a discipleship strategy (see discussion below in the theme "Challenges

to Discipleship").

"Evolving Strategy" indicates that a congregation presently has a discipleship

strategy and it is continually being adapted to a challenging and changing context. Both

occurrences of this code come from one congregation. One pastor remarked, "The [discipleship] strategy continues to evolve, which I think is really exciting." He continued by outlining four steps of his congregation's discipleship strategy: (1) communicating need and benefit, (2) teaching for the head, (3) moving from head to heart, and (4) moving from heart to "living it out and breathing it," so that "it just becomes quite naturally who we are because the spirit of Christ is in us." Note that this pastor differentiated between moving from head to heart and moving from heart to "living it out." This distinction between personal growth and missional living is evident in his congregation's programmatic emphasis on missional living through local and global service opportunities (see discussion above on program offerings under online and print media in "Understanding Discipleship"). This pastor also described these steps as "exciting," "evolving" and "challenging." Although his description of his congregation's discipleship strategy reflects a clear awareness of the difficulty of helping members move from head to heart and ultimately to "living it out and breathing it," his description also seemed to reveal excitement and engagement on his part with these challenges. Whether a congregation possesses an actual or aspirational discipleship strategy, staff member responses reveal several priorities these leaders hold in common in regard to discipleship. These are categorized by four focused descriptive codes: "Relational," occurring twenty times, "Developmental," occurring five times, "Missional," four times, and "Lutheran Theological Perspective," seven times.

"Relational" was by far the most frequent occurring code. Within the focused code "Relational," "Groups" occurred six times, "Group-Driven Classes" four times, "Spiritual Directors and Mentors" four times, "Relational Strategy" three times,

"Informal Relationships" twice, and "Pastoral Care" once. Staff responses coded with "Relational" reflected the different emphases of the three congregation's program offerings for relational discipleship. All responses coded under "Groups" and "Spiritual Directors, Mentors and Coaches" came from one congregation, while all responses coded under "Informal Relationships" all came from another congregation. Only responses in "Group-Driven Classes" came from all three congregations. Reflecting on his congregation's discipleship strategy, one pastor remarked,

> The strategy is relational. And in that, we mean that, I think, we're betting everything on the fact that growth happens through life on life [relational] experiences: . . . being connected deeply to other people, letting them challenge us, and walk with us, and, and pour into us. I think life and community as well—just that every facet of life is rooted in this idea that we need other people's perspective to grow in that.

In general, regardless of particular emphasis, staff from all three congregations said they believed relationships and community were key components to the discipleship journey.

Within the focused code "Developmental," "Traditional Classes" occurred four times, "Developmental Strategy" twice, "Leadership Development" also twice, and "Growth through Life Experiences" once. Responses within "Developmental," were even less similar than were responses within "Relational." For example, one pastor viewed disciple development primarily as a leadership generator for his own congregation's discipleship ministry. He spoke of the need to create a "replicating culture" that would produce a "long bench" in all areas of discipleship leadership. A pastor from another congregation focused on the identity aspects of disciple development. For him, the developmental journey is "the process of growing and living out your identity in Christ to the point where you look more and more like Jesus." A pastor from the third congregation is still developing his understanding of the overall characteristics of the

developmental journey: "So what does it mean to live our lives with Christ at the center? . . . [W]hat does that look like? . . . If we want to use the marks of discipleship, whatever that would be, what did, what does that look like?"

Interestingly enough, all staff responses coded under "Missional" come from one staff member. Within the focused code "Missional," "Growth through Service" occurred once, "Growth in Service" once, "Relational Discipleship" once, and "Diverse Contexts" once. Here is a statement from this staff member regarding his congregation's strategy for missional discipleship.

> I think our strategy is for people to be connecting, and growing, and serving. And as they get further and further down the road, that looks different for people. At the beginning, serving might be ushering, or picking up trash. Uh, not just on this property, right?—ushering at a church service, or picking up trash in a local park or neighborhood. But eventually that moves to the point of being able to help people with their grief, or process, you know, major setbacks in life, being able to walk with people, sharing our faith with them.

This statement suggests that, for this staff member, discipleship as a missional activity is expressed informally within the context of everyday relationships.

Within the focused code "Lutheran Theological Perspective," "Grace-Centered" occurred three times, "Theological Challenges" twice, "Christ-Centered" once, and "Neighbor-Focused" once. While one might expect the Lutheran perspective to hold to a grace-centered, Christ-centered and neighbor-focused understanding of discipleship, the code "Theological Challenges" reveals how the Lutheran perspective can also pose challenges to effective discipleship strategies. Reflecting on the strong emphasis on grace within the Lutheran tradition, one staff member remarked, "I think, to be honest, we're so grace oriented and so wanting people to know that they're loved by the grace of God that I think often, we're a little bit, negligent, maybe, whatever the word is—soft on

discipleship." Another pastor commented, "You know, partly because of our, my Lutheran background and training, sanctification was always something that was maybe looked at a little "loosey-goosey," or was suspect." These two comments reveal the challenge these leaders face in reconciling the Lutheran understanding of justification by faith alone with the developmental aspect of discipleship.

In addition to the descriptive codes emerging from staff member responses regarding their congregation's adult discipleship strategies, the following values codes also emerged. Values codes expressing attitudes were: "Positive Attitude toward Discipleship Strategy," occurring seven times in responses from staff member in all three congregations, and "Negative Attitude toward Discipleship Strategy," occurring three times, all from one congregation. Several values codes expressing positive value also emerged: "Many and Diverse Programming," occurring three times, "Focused Programing," two times, Organizational Alignment" once, "Large Events," once, and "Classes," also once.

Discipleship Pathway

As a follow up to describing their congregation's discipleship strategy, staff members were also asked if their congregation utilized any kind of discipleship pathway as a guide to help their members navigate their many program offerings. If their congregation presently utilized or were considering utilizing a pathway, they were asked to describe the nature of that pathway. As a result, the following descriptive codes emerged: "Have Pathway," occurring four times, all from one congregation, "No Pathway Yet," three times, from the other two congregations, "Ideal Pathway," three times, also from the other two congregations. When asked regarding the nature of the

pathway, the following descriptive codes emerged from all three congregations:

"Relational," occurring five times, "Developmental," four times, and "Missional," three

times. The codes "Prayer," occurring twice, and "Worship," once emerged from one of

the congregations that did not yet have a pathway. Here is a description from a pastor

whose congregation presently utilizes a discipleship pathway.

> I have a vision that I share, which is we want to move people around [the] Circle of Hope. We want to move people from step one to two to three and beyond. We want them to, to seek, to go from, you know, seeker to believer, believer to follower, follower to servant leader . . . where the idea is, the deeper you go, the further down the bottom you get of the circle. And so that's intentional, too, is that you kind of come into it and you feel like you're way down here and you don't know anything. And then you sort of grow around the circle and you move from believer to follower. But by the time you go from follower to servant leader, you're down [at the bottom of the circle], it's a first shall be last kind of thing. And it's a, you know, the greatest among us, amongst us are the chief servants.

For this pastor, the end goal of his congregation's pathway is to help seekers eventually

become servant leaders who serve their neighbors with joy and invite others to begin the

Circle of Hope (hence, the circular nature of the pathway). As another staff member put

it, the goal is to produce "disciple-making disciples."

Online and Print Media

Since two of the congregations did not yet possess a discipleship strategy, as

expected, all the collected data from online and print media related to one congregation's

discipleship strategy and pathway. From the data two codes emerged. "Life Path

Discernment Courses," occurring nine times, referred to a set of three courses and three

weekend learning events, all designed to help members identify their place on their

journey of faith and develop strategies for moving forward in that journey. "Discipleship

Pathway," occurring seven times, referred directly to that congregation's discipleship

pathway. A picture of the congregation's discipleship pathway, a description of the

pathway and tools for successfully navigating the pathway were all included in the gathered data. This congregation's pathway is referred to both as the Hope Circle and Circle of Hope (see figure 6.2, p. 179).

This pathway is designed to help "Develop your relationship with Christ and your identity in him [and] acquire the essential knowledge and skills for a joyful and high-impact life with Christ."[270] The Hope Circle contains the following four segments: Seeker, Believer, Follower and Servant Leader. According to the Hope Circle, during the Seeker phase, "God is at work, moving us to say "yes" to him." During the Believer phase, "God is at work revealing our true selves and calling." During the Follower phase, "God is at work shaping us in the image of Christ and helping us live out our calling." Finally, during the Servant Leader phase, "God is at work, moving through us to empower others and pass on his story."[271] Each of the four phases is also segmented into three areas of discipleship: Connect (into community), Grow (in Bible, prayer, healing, and life purpose) and Serve (in all facets of life, both locally and globally).[272] Within these three areas, specific community, growth and serving opportunities inside and outside the congregation are offered as starting points for engaging in these areas.

Observations

Interview and media data collected from all three congregations indicate that these congregations share a common understanding that discipleship involves not only information but transformation "from head to heart." All three congregations view

---

[270] "Hope Circle," Lutheran Church of Hope, Digital Archive, February 28, 2019.

[271] "Hope Circle."

[272] "Hope Circle."

community and service to the neighbor as powerful catalysts in the transformational process. The data also indicate that only one of these congregations has been able to put in place an adult discipleship strategy and pathway that reflects these understandings of discipleship. Even so, that pathway and strategy are continually evolving and adapting to congregational members' changing and diverse life experiences and contexts.

Challenges to Discipleship

Perspective of Congregational Members

When asked about challenges to their faith journey, congregational members enumerated several different challenges which were collected into three focused descriptive codes: "Situational Challenges," "Personal Challenges" and "Relational Challenges." "Situational Challenges," occurring thirty-seven times, included the codes "Time/Busyness," occurring ten times, "Cultural Influences," occurring eight times, "Church Programming/Resources," seven times, "Work," five times, "Crisis Situations," four times, and "The Devil," three times. "Personal Challenges," occurring twenty times, included "Self," seventeen times, and "Direction," three times. "Relational Challenges," occurring eight times, included "Isolation," four times, "Loss of Relationship," two times, and "Church Conflict," once.

There were likewise six values codes related to faith journey challenges. These also overlapped with the above descriptive codes. Values codes reflecting attitudes were: "Negative Attitude toward the Local Church," occurring three times, "Negative Attitude toward Present Bible Study," two times, and "Negative Attitude toward Mega-Church Programming," one time. Values codes reflecting beliefs were: "Growth Is Challenging," occurring three times, "Staying Focused Is Important," once, and "Actions Must Match Words," also once.

The code "Self" was the largest single occurring descriptive code within the focused code "Challenges to Faith." Nine of twelve congregation members indicated that they were their own greatest challenge to their journey of faith. Recurring topics emerging from "Self" included: distractions in life, unresolved guilt, and issues of motivation such as boredom and complacency. Regarding distractions in life, one member remarked, "like many I would suspect, you know, I see the squirrel and all of a sudden, I'm looking the other way." Another member described how distractions and busyness aggravated the gap between belief and behavior in her life.

> Um, but then I just find it so challenging sometimes, by the time I get to work, like I've already said something I wish I wouldn't have said to somebody. You know, you get in this hurry, and it's like . . . "I just prayed about this." So, knowing what's right in your heart . . . and walking out the door saying you're going to do this, but then the distractions of this world.

In relation to unresolved guilt, one congregational member reflected, "Well I guess . . . maybe I carry Catholic guilt and will for the rest of my . . . but I still feel like I don't measure up. You know, the difficulty is, I think I could be a better guy. I could be a better Christian." Regarding issues of motivation, one member's response illustrates how an under-stimulating environment can be a challenge to the journey of faith.

> I would say, you know, they've for many years done sermon series. And, you know, it's just like any Bible study that you might be doing . . . one may grab your attention . . . and you, a little bit more than the next . . . and we have had a lot of, of been, we, my husband and I have been involved in several couple's studies over that, and it's one that doesn't maybe speak to you as much, and it seems a bit, maybe, repetitive? To try and stay engaged, and positive . . . sometimes [that] has been challenging.

Another member reflected on how complacency and apathy challenged her journey.

> And, I think [the devil] gets to me through just kind of being complacent. You know? And, I have to recognize that. Okay, let's get back. Let's come on get back here. . . . But sometimes I just get kind of lazy and apathetic. You know? And it's

> kind of like over the summer we have our break and I kind of get a little bit lax in getting back into the word and stuff.

Congregations may not have control over the distractions in their members' lives, and their members' unresolved guilt might best be addressed in pastoral care or therapy. Congregations should, however, be able to address issues of motivation such as boredom and complacency, at least within the scope of their discipleship ministries. The issue of motivation is related to the question of whether members experience their congregation's discipleship programming as interesting and beneficial to their lives. This would include both courses and small groups. Is there sufficient perceived benefit to motivate members to take time out of their busy and distracting lives to engage in their church's discipleship programming?

Relevant to issues of motivation and the journey of faith is the emergence of the code, "Church Programming/Resources" within the focused descriptive code "Situational Challenges." As observed above, values codes reflecting negative attitudes regarding the local church, present Bible studies and mega-church programming were also associated with this code. Five out of seven occurrences of "Church Programming/ Resources" overlapped with these negative values codes.

At first glance, it seems surprising that programming and resources should actually be a challenge to the faith journey of mega-church members. Mega-church programming and resources are typically known for their excellence and abundance. Nonetheless the code "Church Programming/Resources" occurred seven times with seven out of twelve members interviewed. Recurring topics emerging from "Church Programming/Resources" included: uneven program quality, lack of connection in programming between faith and social issues, lack of effective mentors and teachers, lack

of guidance relating to calling and purpose, lack of programming and resources for people with busy lives, and unfocused programming with no overall strategy.

One member commented how the lack of an apparent discipleship strategy in his congregation's programming actually hindered people from engaging in the church community. He noted that newcomers were overwhelmed by all the programming options and had difficulty knowing where to begin. Furthermore, he felt that his church's programming "makes people busier and—they're good, they do a lot of good things and, help people get connected—but the centeredness may not necessarily be there."

Another member, commenting on the difficulty people have finding time to engage with her congregation, concluded, "I think we need to find the model and the way to [address the busyness and exhaustion in people's lives] and not go on our standard practices." Two members referred to the lack of mentoring availability in their congregation, both for spiritual formation and the discernment of life direction. Expressing frustration, one member remarked, "I feel like there's a lot more work I should be doing, and this is crass, I don't know what the hell it is. . . . [T]here's an emptiness and I don't know what it's gonna take to fill it. I am, I'm totally fricking clueless."

From the topics and comments associated with "Church Programming/ Resources," it appears that, while these members' congregations may have plentiful and well-executed programming and resources, they do not seem to address the major needs and challenges articulated by their members in relation to their journey of faith. As one pastor remarked, it is important that congregations not waste their time "answering

questions no one is asking." This makes the question of programming and perceived benefit to members all the more pressing.

Based on the perspectives of church members interviewed, congregations under study may need to address issues of program quality, relevance of content and the larger issue of overall program strategy. In particular, it may be helpful to establish a set of desired developmental learning outcomes for congregational members. These would be biblically based goals that take into account the context of the learner. Along with establishing learning outcomes, program and staff resources would need to be aligned with these outcomes. This may include the elimination or modification of some program offerings and the possible establishment of new offerings. Congregations may also need to address the challenge of providing program offerings for people with increasingly busy lives. This might mean providing resources such as online courses and virtual small groups through video conferencing software such as FaceTime[273], Skype[274] or Zoom.[275]

Perspectives of Staff

During their interviews, staff members were asked about the challenges they face in helping congregational members grow in their faith. Their responses yielded six focused descriptive codes and two focused values codes. The six focused descriptive codes were: "Strategy and Programming," occurring thirteen times, "Communication Challenges," twelve times, "Engaging People," thirteen times, "Congregational

---

[273] "Use FaceTime on your iPhone, iPad, and iPod Touch," Apple Inc. (US), accessed May 13, 2019, https://support.apple.com/en-us/HT209022.

[274] "What is Skype?" Microsoft | Skype, accessed May 13, 2019, https://support.skype.com/en/faq/ FA6/what-is-skype.

[275] "About Zoom," Zoom, accessed May 13, 2019, https://zoom.us/about.

Resources," eleven times, "Spiritual Formation Challenges," eight times, and "The

Nature of Discipleship," three times. The two focused values codes were: "Beliefs about

Organizational and Leadership Issues," occurring eighteen times, and "Beliefs about

Spiritual Formation," fourteen times.

Descriptive Codes

Within "Strategy and Programing," there was no one predominant code. None of

the nine codes occurred more than three times; most occurred only once. Nonetheless

these codes can be clustered into the following topics: overreliance on "experts" (clergy

and staff) and classroom learning, confusing information with transformation, and

inadequate programming strategy. Reflecting on the difference between information and

transformation, one staff member observed how much larger the journey of discipleship

is than simply classroom learning and information:

> [W]e know discipleship isn't just taking classes. And it isn't just education. It's the
> experience of following Christ. How do we get them to serve? How do we get
> them to give? How do we get them to volunteer? How do we get them to practice
> the spiritual disciplines? How do we get them to do the things that we know
> disciples of Jesus do and would be life changing?

Another staff member, referring to his congregation's lack of a discipleship strategy,

commented,

> I was just looking over our discipleship document here and also our strategic
> goals over it all and there's no language in our overall goals about making
> disciples. I mean, it's something that's sort of on paper but in terms of
> implementing it, I'm not sure that our members realize that that's what we're
> trying to do.

Comments from staff under "Strategy and Programming" from all three congregations

reflect views similar to those cited above. Staff members acknowledge that discipleship is

more than taking classes and receiving information; for them the challenge is successfully

creating and implementing a program strategy that also reflects that understanding.

Within "Communication Challenges," "Communicating Need and Benefit"

occurred eight times and "Communicating Vision" twice. Staff from all three

congregations articulated the necessity of communicating to their members the need and

benefit of engaging in discipleship. One pastor commented,

> It's not just, "Gee, you should," or . . . "you should be compelled to do this." But to perhaps help them understand the benefit. The difference, the transformation. The new life that awaits them on the other side of that. We all have the need. It's just hard to see it in this world. So that's the first big challenge, is to communicate the need.

A pastor from another congregation summed it up this way: "So the challenge is, how do

we speak into uh, depth that really is where people struggle for—who are we, who am I?"

These and similar comments under "Communication Challenges" suggest that staff

members struggle with helping members understand in concrete ways how the

discipleship journey is both transformative and beneficial for them.

Within "Engaging People," "Busyness" occurred four times, "Outside Cultural

Values" three times and "Diversity of Need" twice. Three other codes clustered around

the topic of attendance challenges, occurred altogether four times. One pastor remarked,

> I think the other challenge is that we just continue to live in a culture that's busy and doesn't value what really seems to yield transformation. So, the idea of taking things slowly, listening well, being thoughtful in our responses and really trying to be even intentional in the way we structure our lives, is counter-cultural and so there are lots of challenges with that.

That same pastor spoke of how the diversity of members' needs challenges the capacity

of his congregation's discipleship ministry.

> [T]he messiness [of disciple-making] continues to be a challenge because different people need different things. And when you have anywhere from five to

> 20,000 people asking for something, and needing slightly different things, it's become really challenging to get people in the right place, the right time, for the right reason.

These and other statements reflect the challenges all three churches face in engaging their members.

Within "Congregational Resources" three codes emerged: "Competing Congregational Priorities" occurred four times, "No Leadership or Congregational Support" also occurred four times, and "Prioritizing Resources" occurred three times. At least one staff member from all three congregations under study commented on the challenge of prioritizing resources. One staff member articulated the challenge this way:

> Our mission is "To Encourage all People to Know the Love of Christ." And that has revolved around worship and kids in this place, almost exclusively for many, many years. Those aren't going to go away; those are our main drivers right now. So, the challenging piece, I believe for us, is how do we move adult growth up into that driver position, alongside of these two drivers? Because, in terms of the strategy and structure . . . it's almost like you gotta pull youth down and push adult growth up, and we don't want to do that. So, the challenge for us is, how do we do this side by side? And it is truly a challenge. Because you're talking about a whole 'nother team, more staff [or] piling more stuff on top on the staff that already exist, if you don't add staff.

According to these staff members, resource and organizational limitations make it difficult to strengthen their adult discipleship ministries without weakening other crucial ministries.

Within "Spiritual Formation Challenges" four codes emerged: "No Prayer Formation" occurred three times, "No Understanding of Biblical Fellowship" occurred twice, "Biblical Illiteracy" also twice, and "Inherited Faith" once. Related to these codes, two staff members from the same congregation commented on the difficulty of getting their members to come together as a community for prayer as well as the lack of emphasis on prayer among Lutherans in general. These same pastors reflected on the

general biblical illiteracy of their members and the challenge of helping them distinguish between biblical fellowship and casual friendships.

Within "The Nature of Discipleship" two codes emerged: "Messiness of Discipleship" occurring twice and "Difficulty of Discipleship" occurring once. Both codes emerged from pastors from another congregation reflecting on the "messiness" (non-linear nature) and difficulty of the disciple-making process, regardless of congregational context.

Values Codes

Staff responses to the question regarding challenges to discipleship also generated two focused values codes: "Beliefs about Organizational and Leadership Issues" and "Beliefs about Spiritual Formation," together fourteen times. These values codes tended to overlap with descriptive codes with similar descriptions, emerging from the same responses. Within "Beliefs about Organizational and Leadership Issues," seven codes reflecting beliefs emerged. "A Vision is necessary for congregational discipleship" occurred four times. "Pastoral leadership is key for effective discipleship," "Teams are better than solo leadership," "Limited resources are a challenge to discipleship ministry," and "Communicating the need for discipleship is crucial" all occurred three times. Two other codes, "Integrity is necessary for effective disciple leadership" and "A Large Church creates logistical challenges for discipleship" both occurred once.

Within "Beliefs about Spiritual Formation," eights codes emerged. The largest, "Busyness is a challenge to spiritual growth," occurred five times. Closely aligned with "Busyness is a challenge to spiritual growth" are "Superficiality and comfort are challenges to growth," "Privatized faith is a challenge to spiritual growth" and "Apathy is

a challenge to spiritual growth," all occurring once. These three codes reflect spiritual formation challenges reinforced by the surrounding culture. The codes, "Discipleship in general is difficult," occurring once, and "Spiritual growth is non-linear and messy," occurring twice, both deal with the overall nature of discipleship in any congregation. Two codes "Illiteracy in Bible, prayer and fellowship are challenges," occurring twice, and "Mistaking Lutheran cultural heritage for discipleship is a challenge," occurring once, both refer to discipleship challenges characteristic of twenty-first century Lutheran church culture. Finally, two codes reflect the perceived challenges Lutheran theology and clergy can pose to discipleship: "Some see Sanctification as Theologically Suspect" and "Some Pastors are Soft on Discipleship," both occurring once.

Observations

During the interviews church staff and members were asked different questions about the challenges to discipleship. While staff were asked about the challenges in helping congregational members grow in their faith, members were asked about the challenges in their own journey of faith. Nonetheless, even with different questions, there were many commonalities between staff and member responses. Both staff and members cited the busyness of congregational members as a major challenge, both as a roadblock to helping members grow in faith (people lacked the time to engage in church programming and there was little programming taking members' busyness into account), and as a direct challenge to the journey of faith itself (no time for personal devotion or any significant self-reflection). Staff and members also cited the inherent challenge of the disciple journey itself. Both groups commented that spiritual growth in general is a difficult journey. Several times members mentioned they felt that they were their own

greatest challenge to discipleship. Staff also reflected on the non-linear and "messy" nature of discipleship and its challenges to programming in a large-scale setting.

Finally, both staff and members cited church programming as a challenge, both to the journey of faith and to assisting members on that journey. Members focused primarily on issues such as: little or no apparent discipleship programming strategy within their congregation, lack of stimulating courses and small group curriculum, uneven program quality, and lack of mentors and other resources for discerning calling and purpose. Staff leaders also focused on the logistical difficulties a mega-church has in serving the diverse needs of their many members and the challenge of supporting an effective discipleship programming strategy within the constraints of limited staff and financial resources.

Conclusion: Lessons Learned

The data collected from the interviews, media and personal observations suggest four key lessons learned in regard to discipleship, catalytic relationships and the role intangible experiences play in terms of engagement with the church.

The Discipleship Journey and Its Challenges

Both staff and congregational members recognize that discipleship is a developmental journey through various stages of faith that also includes stages of church engagement. Members and staff also recognize that discipleship involves relational, developmental and missional components. This recognition is reflected in the diverse relational, developmental and missional discipleship offerings found in the online and print media of all three congregations.

Staff and congregational members also recognize that discipleship is a difficult journey that includes many challenges. Members cited themselves as the greatest challenge to their own faith journey, particularly through distractions, apathy, personal

lifestyles, and the general busyness of life. Interestingly enough, members also cited their church's discipleship programming as a challenge, particularly where there is no obvious strategy or guidance to that programming. Another challenge to discipleship cited by members is the experience of restlessness, confusion and a desire for "something more." While these experiences, if interpreted and guided, may lead to greater faith formation, when left unaddressed, they may lead to disengagement from the church community, as the case with one interviewed member.

Programming Challenges

Church staff members also recognize the challenge of creating effective discipleship programming for their members. During the interviews staff focused on the difficulty of implementing an effective program strategy and guide to that programming. In fact, only one congregation under study has put into place a working strategy and pathway guide. Even so, both strategy and pathway are constantly evolving to respond to new challenges and changing contexts.

Church staff also focused on the limitation of staff and financial resources. Staff from two of the three congregations stated that they believe the challenge of limited resources is the chief obstacle to implementing an effective discipleship strategy for their congregation. In contrast to these statements, data from online and printed media from these congregations indicate that both congregations already offer members multiple discipleship growth, community and service opportunities. Both congregations have large men's and women's ministries predominantly based on a group-based learning approach. Both offer several fellowship-based service opportunities for their members. Both also offer Bible study and survey courses or partner with outside programs such as Bible Study Fellowship. One of these congregations even wrote its own curriculum designed to

survey the Scriptures over a year. With some improvements to program quality, it appears that both congregations have all the personnel and programming resources in place for an effective relational, developmental and missional discipleship strategy. What seems to be missing is a discipleship strategy and pathway that is clear, understandable and compelling to the congregation. This appears to the researcher to be more of a leadership and communication issue than a resource issue.

The Importance of Relationships in Discipleship

Data from staff and member interviews, as well as from collected online and printed media indicate the importance of groups, group-based learning experiences and informal mentoring relationships. Throughout their interviews congregational members described the impact of relationships on their discipleship journey, particularly informal mentoring relationships. Staff members also recognize the importance of a relational environment for discipleship. This realization is reflected organizationally through the amount of opportunities for community within their congregation's discipleship programming.

Staff leaders struggle, however, with developing effective relational strategies. One congregation attempted twice to create a formal mentoring program, both times with no real success. On the other hand, when members described their mentoring relationships, these relationships were always informal in nature and emerged organically from within their context. These members' experiences suggest that, rather than struggling to create a formal mentorship program, staff members might consider developing a strategy for promoting informal mentoring relationships and spiritual friendships. Equipping existing leaders with the skills to identify, mentor and coach individuals within their sphere of influence would be an important part of such a strategy.

The Role of Intangible Experiences

Finally, every congregational member interviewed mentioned the positive atmosphere, energy and/or presence of God's Spirit they encountered the first time they visited their present church. These members made their decision to get involved with their churches based on these experiences. Furthermore, these members continue to experience this atmosphere, energy and presence of the Spirit, both in worship services and discipleship activities, particularly in small group settings. While these experiences are admittedly intangible and cannot be manufactured, conversations between staff leaders and members may help leaders identify the conditions in place where these experiences already occur. This knowledge would help leaders to create space in other areas of their congregation for these experiences to occur.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCIPLESHIP FOR A LUTHERAN MEGA-CHURCH

This chapter presents, discusses and evaluates a relational, developmental and missional discipleship model for a Lutheran mega-church, particularly, Lutheran Church of Hope.[276] The researcher developed this model by drawing together observations from three data sources. The first source consists of data from biblical and theological reflection on the word μαθητής (disciple) and its related concepts. The second consists of data from a review of relevant literature. The third source consists of print and electronic media, site observations and interviews from the three Lutheran mega-churches included in the field research.

The researcher used the analysis of these three data sources to identify insights and lessons learned in regard to discipleship within a Lutheran mega-church. These insights and lessons learned contributed to the development of a relational, developmental and missional discipleship model for Hope WDM. This model utilizes components from the Hope Circle,[277] the original discipleship model of Hope WDM, including its name and much of its terminology. Employing components from the original Hope Circle will help give the congregation a sense of familiarity with the introduction of a new model rather than a radical break from the original one.

---

[276] Lutheran Church of Hope, Main Campus, 925 Jordan Creek Parkway, West Des Moines, IA 50266: 515-222-1520, https://www.lutheranchurchofhope.org.

[277] Lutheran Church of Hope, "Hope Circle" (1996).

The Original Hope Circle

Developed by staff and volunteers in 2002, the original Hope Circle was designed

both to be a discipleship pathway for congregational members and a blueprint for

organizing discipleship programming.

Figure 6.1. The Hope Circle, Lutheran Church of Hope

The Hope Circle

HEAR the Word, **ACCEPT** it and **PRODUCE** a crop. *Mark 4:20*

Based on Rick Warren's "Life Development Process,"[278] the original Hope Circle

contained four faith stages and four corresponding actions: Seekers who hear the Word,

Believers who accept the Word, Followers who produce a crop, and Servant Leaders who

complete the circle as they share God's Word with Seekers. To represent the discipleship

pathway of Hope WDM, a circle was used instead of Warren's baseball diamond, both to

prevent it from suggesting an upward linear discipleship pathway (of which Lutherans

remain skeptical) and to illustrate that, in the final faith stage, Servant Leaders in a

---

[278] Richard Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growing without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 144.

certain sense begin the circle again as they revisit the first stage through friendship and invitation with seekers who are just beginning the journey of discipleship.

The original Hope Circle also integrated Jesus' explanation of the parable of the sower (Mark 4:20) into each of its four faith stages. The sower sows the Word, which Seekers *hear* and become Believers. As Believers *accept* the Word of God, they become Followers, who, as they become Servant Leaders, *produce* a crop. Stages two, three and four also included a set of spiritual practices for use by disciples within each stage of their journey.[279] These practices formed the basis of descriptions for each of the Hope Circle's four stages, which are as follows:

Seekers: those who are investigating the truth about Jesus Christ.

Believers: those who have heard the Word of God and trust in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. They are beginning to worship weekly, learning to pray, read the Bible and give of their time and resources, and discover their spiritual gifts.

Followers: those who have accepted the Word of God and strive to live with Jesus as the Lord of their life. They worship weekly, have a daily devotional life, regularly attend classes, are part of a small group, are exploring where their spiritual gifts may be used, and are participating in church-sponsored service events.

Servant Leaders: those who are experiencing continuous personal transformation and are producing a "crop" of new believers. In addition to worshipping weekly, even when they are out of town, Servant Leaders give cheerfully of their time and resources,

---

[279] Lutheran Church of Hope, 2004, *Adult Ministry Fall 2004 Catalog*, internal Lutheran Church of Hope report, unpublished, 7-8.

know and use their spiritual gifts and volunteer within the church as leaders within the congregation's various ministries.

For approximately seventeen years the original Hope Circle functioned as a way to organize adult discipleship programming and to suggest appropriate spiritual practices and local and global service opportunities for members journeying through the various stages of the Hope Circle. Nevertheless, for all its effectiveness as a discipleship tool, the original Hope Circle did contain some limitations. As a discipleship model and programing strategy tool, it did not recognize the dynamic relationship between interior (being) growth processes and exterior (doing) growth processes. It also did not take into account informal drivers of change, both positive and negative, such as circumstances, events and relationships, which impact the life-long developmental journey of the disciple. Finally, while the Hope Circle emphasized knowing and utilizing spiritual gifts within the church, it did not fully address the relationship between growth in Christ and service to the neighbor.

As a result of these limitations, by 2010, the Hope Circle had fallen into disuse as the main discipleship tool for members and staff. In its place, the adult discipleship staff adopted a strategy, common to many mega-churches, of offering as many course, seminar, retreat and small group opportunities as possible, covering as many topics as possible. The objective was to give members as many options as possible for them to choose according to interest and need.

The New Hope Circle

By 2013 the senior pastor and adult discipleship staff of Hope WDM realized that the present strategy of offering as many opportunities as possible was becoming

unsustainable in terms of demand on staffing and resources. Beginning in 2013 the adult

discipleship staff began searching for more sustainable program strategies that better

addressed the needs of Hope WDM's members. Specifically, adult discipleship staff

desired a discipleship model that would include: (1) the relational, developmental and

missional aspects of discipleship, (2) both formal program and informal day to day

aspects of disciple development, (3) the dynamic interplay between interior and exterior

growth processes, and (4) the resources of the Lutheran theological tradition. This search

also prompted the researcher to enroll in Bethel Seminary's Doctor of Ministry in

Organic Leadership Development Program, which includes this thesis project: the

development of an intentionally Lutheran model of a relational, developmental and

missional adult discipleship ministry within Hope WDM.

A key step to developing this discipleship model was providing it with a

comprehensive foundation. Building on the insights and lessons learned from this

project's findings, this foundation involves a synthesis of data gathered from the project's

biblical-theological reflection, review of related literature and findings from field

research at three Lutheran mega-churches. From the synthesis below, four conclusions

were drawn, regarding the nature of discipleship and its relation to Lutheran theology.

The Relational Aspect of Discipleship

An exegetical study of the word μαθητής (disciple), and its use in Old Testament,

Intertestamental and New Testament literature, indicates that those who were disciples

engaged in a relational environment where they were called to "follow their rabbis so

intently, listen so closely to their words, and walk so closely behind them that they would

become covered in the dust that their rabbis kicked up as they walked along the sandy

roads."[280] Jesus' own strategy for shaping his disciples involved a similar relationally-driven process where his disciples closely followed, observed and imitated his teaching and actions. This apprenticeship process was further supported by Jesus' use of "family" language when describing the community of his disciples. Jesus referred to his disciples as "brothers and sisters," "little ones" and "children" of their heavenly Father. In a particularly striking moment, Jesus defined family as "those who hear God's word and put it into practice" (Luke 8:19-21).

A review of relevant literature revealed a consensus among the examined resources that discipleship is an "intentional communal process"[281] involving communities of all shapes and sizes where members encounter one another "as bringers of the message of salvation"[282] to each other and to the world. These communities occur primarily as small groups, mentoring relationships and peer relationships of mutual encouragement and guidance. Learning in these communities usually occurs informally through apprentice-like environments involving observation and imitation on the part of the learner.

Field research data collected from interviews of staff and members as well as from online and printed documents also indicated the importance of groups, group-based learning experiences and informal mentoring relationships for disciple development. Throughout their interviews congregational members described the impact of relationships on their discipleship journey, particularly informal mentoring relationships.

---

[280] Csinos, 56.

[281] Wilhoit, 23.

[282] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together,* 23.

Members also highlighted the positive atmosphere, energy and presence of God's Spirit

they regularly encounter in their congregation, particularly in small group settings.

Staff members also recognized the importance of a relational environment for

discipleship. Online and printed documents from each congregation indicated the

importance of relational discipleship through the sheer volume of opportunities for

community of various kinds within each congregation's discipleship ministry. Staff

leaders struggled, however, with developing effective relational strategies. One

congregation attempted twice to create a formal mentoring program, both times failing.

On the other hand, when members described their mentoring relationships, these

relationships were always informal in nature and emerged organically from within their

context.

The Developmental Aspect of Discipleship

An investigation of Luke's and Matthew's Gospel narratives reveals how Jesus

took a group of obviously unfit disciples and, over time, shaped them into effective

Spirit-empowered leaders. In order to accomplish this, Jesus typically employed two

modes of teaching: systematic and occasional.[283] Jesus' systematic teaching is best

reflected in Matthew's gospel, the most obvious example being the Sermon on the Mount

(Matt. 5-7). In this sermon, Jesus addressed topics such as the disciples' identity and

mission, how they were to live together in community and how they were to pray.

As the disciples encountered challenges in ministry or as arguments arose

between them, Jesus would utilize these occasions to teach the disciples about the nature

---

[283] Samra, 223.

of the kingdom of heaven. The feeding of the five thousand provides an example of Jesus utilizing a challenging situation to teach the disciples about the nature and mission of both the kingdom of God and Jesus' own identity and mission. These examples and others show that to be a disciple is to grow in knowledge, skill, trust, and in character.

Systematic and occasional ways of learning also surface in the reviewed literature on developmental discipleship. The literature addresses these two learning modalities within their descriptions of how disciples grow within their lifelong journey of faith. They describe how God utilizes systematic and occasional learning within events, circumstances and relationships to shape disciples over a lifetime.[284]

The reviewed literature also analyzes the journey of faith in terms of inner and outer life stages. In the initial stages, disciples tend to focus on themselves and their relationship with God. Their identity is defined by external circumstances such as their church, its teachings and its leadership. In the final stages of development, disciples focus more on serving others, which includes sharing their faith. In these final stages their identity is defined predominately by God's gracious and healing Word.[285]

Data gathered from congregational interviews suggest that for the majority of congregational members interviewed, their discipleship journey also included several stages of church engagement. These stages are (1) Early Family and Church Influence, (2) Leaving the Church, (3) Returning to Church, (4) Receiving Informal Mentorship, and (5) Searching for More. These five stages of church engagement roughly coincided with the stages of faith proposed by Clinton and also Hagberg and Guelich. In their

---

[284] Clinton, 22.

[285] Hagberg and Guelich, 11.

interviews, staff also recognized the developmental nature of discipleship, often in terms of moving "from head to heart." Interestingly enough, although staff from all three congregations spoke about the need for a discipleship "pathway," only one congregation has to date implemented any kind of pathway.

The Missional Aspect of Discipleship

The synoptic gospels and the book of Acts establish through their narratives that discipleship is a missional enterprise, where disciples move beyond their familiar environment and engage the world with witness, proclamation and acts of service, healing and restoration—all toward the goal of making more disciples.

The reviewed literature addressing the missional aspect of discipleship, suggests that, among protestant theologians and church leaders, there appears unfortunately to be no consensus concerning the definition of "missional discipleship." Some theologians and leaders define "missional discipleship" primarily as the process of following and becoming like Jesus while inviting others to do the same. Others understand discipleship as "following Christ into participation in God's mission in the world,"[286] where the focus is less on personal growth and more on proclaiming and embodying the kingdom of God to the world. Still other theologians and church leaders offer a both/and approach by bringing together God's mission (proclaiming and embodying the Kingdom of God), spiritual formation (becoming like Jesus) and evangelism (proclaiming Christ to the world), *all* under the term "missional discipleship." Despite their differing perspectives,

---

[286] Van Gelder and Zscheile, 148.

what these theologians and leaders do hold in common is a belief that discipleship, whatever else it may be, is an activity that orients itself toward the neighbor.

Data collected from field research suggest that the "both/and" approach to missional discipleship is supported by staff leaders, as evidenced by the significant amount of missionally oriented programming offered. There is, however, a significant gap between staff support for missionally oriented programming and interviewed members' references to the missional aspect of discipleship within their daily lives. Outside of volunteering at their church and aspirational references to witnessing to friends and colleagues, congregational members rarely mentioned the missional aspect of discipleship as part of their overall journey of faith.

By contrast, collected online and print documents suggest that all three churches place a high value on the missional aspect of discipleship. Within weekend worship bulletins as well as other online and hardcopy media, the occurrences of the code Missional Discipleship Opportunities occurred second only to Children's Opportunities in the worship bulletin, and second only to Growth Opportunities in online and print documents outside of the worship bulletin.

Discipleship in the Lutheran Tradition

Throughout history most Lutheran theologians have struggled to develop a theology of Christian living that involves some kind of discipleship process. Many were (and still are) suspicious of any description of discipleship involving a developmental aspect. In *The Cost of Discipleship* Dietrich Bonhoeffer complains that German Lutheran theologians, in their attempt to define discipleship without a developmental aspect, have in reality replaced biblical discipleship with "cheap grace," a grace "which amounts to the justification of sin without the justification of the repentant sinner who departs from

the sin and from whom sin departs."[287] Instead, Bonhoeffer insists that biblical grace or

"costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus, it comes as a word of

forgiveness to the broken spirit and the contrite heart. Grace is costly because it compels

a man (sic) to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him…"[288] Bonhoeffer also argues

for a discipleship journey with a strong relational aspect. For him, Christian community

is sacramental in nature, "a reality created by God in Christ in which we may

participate."[289]

Martin Luther's own essays, *Two Kinds of Righteousness* and *Freedom of a*

Christian, reveal that Luther himself understands the life of faith to be a developmental

journey, oriented toward love and surrender to God and love and service to the neighbor.

In *Two Kinds of Righteousness,* Luther argues that believers experience two kinds of

righteousness when they are justified. The first kind Luther refers to as "alien

righteousness," a righteousness that springs from Christ that justifies the believer. Luther

calls the second kind "proper righteousness," which originates from Christ's own

righteousness and leads to "slaying the flesh and crucifying the desires with respect to the

self," love toward the neighbor and "meekness and fear toward God."[290] In *Freedom of a*

Christian, Luther summarizes his theology of discipleship as he writes, "By faith [the

believer] is caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into

---

[287] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 44.

[288] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 45.

[289] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together,* 30.

[290] Luther, "Two Kinds of Righteousness," 299.

his neighbor."[291] Any claim to faith that did not result in love toward others is for Luther no faith at all.[292]

Conclusion

From the above summary, the following conclusions may be drawn regarding the nature of discipleship and its relationship to the Lutheran theological tradition. These four conclusions form the biblical and pedagogical foundation of the new discipleship model for use by Hope WDM.

Discipleship is by nature relational, involving individual and communal relationships. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus uses the language of "family" to describe his relationship with the disciples and their relationships with each other. In its first century context, the word μαθητής (disciple) itself implies a learning environment within a close relationship between the master and the one who follows. Additionally, findings from this project's field research suggest that personal transformation occurs most frequently within various kinds of community relationships, particularly informal mentoring relationships.

Discipleship is by nature developmental, involving a life-long journey of growth in Christ. The gospel narratives indicate that Jesus used both systematic teaching (formal instruction) and occasional teaching (leveraging events, circumstances and relationships) to shape his disciples' identity (being) and behavior (doing). Reviewed literature confirms that these two modalities are still effective learning strategies for discipleship, impacting both identity and behavior. Clinton notes that God utilizes occasional teaching

---

[291] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," 371.

[292] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," 370.

in an organic way throughout the life of a disciple.[293] The reviewed literature also indicates that the discipleship journey involves several stages of faith, where disciples grow in their sense of identity, perspective, purpose and trajectory. Field research suggests that paralleling these stages of faith are also stages of church engagement.

Discipleship is by nature missional. To be a disciple is to enact and proclaim the Gospel for the sake of the neighbor. The New Testament insists that the mission of Jesus' first disciples was to proclaim and give witness to the Gospel through proclamation, service, healing, justice, restoration and invitation. Some theologians and church leaders seek to emphasize the service and justice aspects of missional discipleship, while others emphasize the proclamation and healing aspects of missional discipleship. However, an increasing group of theologians and church leaders advocate for a third way, a both/and approach, bringing together advocacy, justice and compassion, on the one hand, with personal and public evangelism, on the other. Interviews from field research indicate that individuals growing as disciples naturally begin to move outward missionally in these various ways, both inside and outside the church.

Discipleship is foundational to the Lutheran understanding of Christian living, scholarly skepticism notwithstanding. While much theology produced by Lutheran scholars since the Reformation has been (to say the least) quietist in nature, Martin Luther, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and others believed that biblical discipleship is indeed relational, developmental and missional in nature. For Luther and others, discipleship is relational because it involves ongoing relationships between both God and the neighbor.

---

[293] Clinton, 22.

The relational aspect of discipleship is also a place where the "real presence" of Christ exists in relationships between believers, thus giving relationships a sacramental character. Discipleship is developmental in that it is a journey where one crucifies the desires of the flesh, submits to the yoke of Christ and follows him in all aspects of life. Discipleship is missional in that all aspects of discipleship are ultimately oriented toward God and the neighbor.

Discipleship, then, is by nature relational, developmental, and missional. These three characteristics of discipleship are also essential to the Lutheran understanding of Christian living. Taken together they form the foundation for the development and implementation of a new discipleship model for Hope WDM.

From Conceptual Foundation to Practical Model

Utilizing these characteristics to form the foundation for the new Hope Circle, the researcher developed a comprehensive description of the new discipleship model's four faith stages. Each stage of the Hope Circle contains four components: (1) God's work in the disciple's life, (2) the church's response to God's work in the disciple's life, (3) the disciple's response to God's work, and (4) the disciple's eventual transition from one faith stage to the next. Each stage of the new Hope Circle also rests on the assumption that the primary driver of the disciple's faith journey is God, who is constantly at work in the disciple's life through circumstances, events and relationships. God's work moves the disciple to make discoveries about God, self and the world around him or her. These discoveries have the potential to generate turning points, challenges, growth, and transformation in the life of the disciple.

As the disciple moves around the four stages of the new Hope Circle, the church's staff and volunteer leadership respond to God's work in the disciple by (1) *welcoming*

and *embracing* the Seeker, (2) *engaging* the Believer, (3) *equipping* and *empowering* the Follower, and (4) *entrusting* the Servant Leader with opportunities that have potential for high-impact influence. In all four stages, disciples respond to God's work in their lives by (1) *connecting* to nurturing Christian community and influential relationships, (2) *growing* in relationship with God, leading to personal life transformation and an awareness of calling and contribution, and (3) *serving* others, inside and outside the church through various influential roles and relationships.

As the disciple experiences growth transitions, catalyzing them to move from one stage of the Hope Circle to the next, the church's staff and volunteer leadership respond to these transitions through personal guidance and group-based seminars and courses focused on calling, contribution and legacy. The church's response is intended to maximize the possibility that disciples will respond to God's work with continued growth in faith, character and influence. Here are the four stages of the Hope Circle in detail.

First Stage: Beginning the Journey as a Seeker

The journey of discipleship begins where *God is at work* in the family of origin as well as through significant childhood events and situations. Through all the mysteries and complexities of life, God organically reveals his presence and character, preparing seekers ultimately to say "yes," and embrace the good news of Christ's love and friendship and join him and his people in his kingdom and mission.

As Seekers' journeys intersect with the congregation and its members, both respond by actively welcoming and *embracing* Seekers through personal invitation and seeker-friendly worship and evangelistic events.

Seekers respond to God's work and the church's embrace as they *connect* to various community, learning and service opportunities, such as recreational and interest groups, sports teams and community service projects.

Seekers begin to *grow* in faith as they access the church's recovery and support ministries and participate in the Alpha Course,[294] a group-based learning experience designed to help seekers explore the Christian faith in a safe, non-judgmental environment, where they discover God and his story of love.

As seekers say "yes" to God and his story, they *transition* to the Believer stage of the Hope Circle. The church's ministry responds by helping them discover their next steps through the use of assessment tools and personal guidance.

Second Stage: Journeying from Seeker to Believer

As Seekers become Believers, *God is at work* in their lives, revealing their true God-given identity and calling. Through nurturing community and influential relationships, believers grow together in God's larger story as they discover their own personal story and God's presence within that story.

As believers begin their journey of faith, the church responds to God's work in their lives by *engaging* them in God's story through relational and discovery-based learning experiences and service and leadership/influence opportunities.

Disciples respond to God's work and the church's engagement with them as they *connect* with other Christians in disciple-making small groups.

---

[294] "Alpha Course," accessed June 29, 2019, www.https://alphausa.org/.

Believers continue to *grow* as they participate in group-based courses that introduce them to the Scriptures as well as the basics of prayer, witnessing and service. They also grow as they receive guidance through various influential relationships, both in formal and informal settings.

During this time, issues of spiritual and emotional health may surface. The church responds by providing healing prayer, recovery support, pastoral care, and referrals to Christ-centered counselors.

As Believers grow in their relationship with God and others, they also begin to *serve* through volunteer opportunities inside and outside the church. Service opportunities inside the church include prayer ministry, children's ministry, weekend hospitality, short term mission trips and local service projects. Service opportunities outside the church include volunteering at one of the congregation's many ministry partners located throughout the metropolitan area. At this stage believers also begin inviting their friends, fellow students and work colleagues to weekend worship services and other seeker-friendly events.

As Believers develop regular habits of Bible reading, prayer, community, witness, and service, and begin to perceive God's presence in their story, they begin to *transition* to the Follower stage of the Hope Circle. The church's ministry responds by helping Followers discover their next steps through discernment retreats, spiritual direction, coaching and appropriate assessment tools.

Third Stage: Journeying from Believer to Follower

As Believers become Followers, *God is at work* shaping them in the image of Christ and helping them live out their calling as Christ's followers. Together, they

discover how their story fits into God's story, learn how to live in and through God's story and also help others discover God's story.

The church responds by *equipping and empowering* Followers to live lives formed by God's Story through advanced courses in various topics, praxis-based group and self-directed learning experiences, as well as training, leadership and service opportunities. These opportunities are supported by spiritual direction, discovery-based personal guidance and prayer-based discernment experiences, all designed to help believers integrate their story into God's story, focusing in particular on issues of identity and calling.

Followers continue their journey of faith as they *connect* to various relationally based leadership opportunities within the church, such as worship leadership teams, children's ministry teams and small group leadership.

Continuing their faith journey, Followers *grow* as they explore the Scriptures, develop personal Bible study tools, discover their spiritual gifts, learn how to hear from and respond to God's voice, cultivate life and relational skills (such as marriage and parenting), and increase their ability to live lives of significance.

During this time, issues relating to ultimate purpose, destiny and contribution may surface. Unresolved emotional and spiritual issues may present themselves as well. Both types of issues may provoke a crisis of meaning for the Follower. The church responds by equipping its staff and volunteer leaders with the skills to notice when Followers experience such crises and initiate appropriate and helpful conversations with them. The church also continues to provide support for Followers through healing prayer, pastoral

care, structured peer-based friendships, spiritual direction, coaching and referrals to Christ-centered counselors.

Followers also *serve* as they assume greater leadership and influence roles, inside and outside the church. At the same time followers are increasing their capacity to discern into which particular service and leadership opportunities God is calling them. In addition to inviting others to weekend worship, Followers are learning how to share their faith more freely with others as God leads them.

As Followers increase their capacity to live in and through God's story, and their ability to help others discover God's story, they begin to *transition* to the Servant Leader stage of the Hope Circle. The church's ministry responds by helping followers develop organic, self-directed and God-centered habits of confident humility, constant learning, selfless generosity, and the ability to pass on to others what God has given them. This resourcing is accomplished primarily through intentional conversations with peers, informal influential relationships and high-impact leadership and service opportunities, all working together to help followers grow in their love for God and those around them, as they accomplish God's missional purposes for them.

Fourth Stage: Journeying from Follower to Servant Leader

As Followers become Servant Leaders, *God is at work* through them impacting the world around them in significant ways. Servant Leaders are becoming more deeply united to God and his story in every sphere of their lives. As Servant Leaders fully live out their story in God's story, they also help others discover and grow in God's story and empower them to live lives as high-impact servant leaders.

The church responds by *entrusting* those growing as Servant Leaders with opportunities to make a significant impact on others, inside and outside the church, as

they teach lead, guide and empower other Seekers, Believers, Followers and Servant Leaders. The church provides support for emerging Servant Leaders through formal higher education opportunities, peer learning groups and on-the-job training to develop them for the unique roles to which God has called them. Through these equipping opportunities Servant Leaders may learn advanced skills in Bible study, teaching, preaching, relational leadership (as opposed to positional), leadership development, event and project management, and even skills in starting up for-profit or non-profit enterprises. The church also helps emerging Servant Leaders increase their capacity to discern and respond to God's voice in all the ways God speaks. This may be accomplished, for example, through spiritual direction, silent retreats and regular times of prayer and reflection with others.

Servant Leaders nurture their journey of faith as they *connect* primarily to informal (but still intentional) peer relationships of mutual friendship, encouragement, support, prayer, and accountability. Servant Leaders also find community in ministry teams within the congregation and through the friendships of those they mentor.

At this stage of their journey, Servant Leaders *grow* less through formal church programming and more through self-directed study, informal relationships and lessons learned as they live out their God-given calling in life. Although they remain constant learners, they typically serve as active partners with church staff as they together disciple others.

While Servant Leaders may *serve* through formal evangelism and social ministry opportunities, most of their witness and service becomes a natural outgrowth of their lifestyle as a follower of Jesus. Led by God's Spirit, Servant Leaders regularly experience

conversations with others where it seems only natural to share what God has done in their lives. They enjoy looking for creative and natural ways to serve those around them. Servant Leaders are often teachers, guides, mentors, and leaders of other leaders, both inside and outside the church. Often, they lead entire ministry areas within the congregation. They may even create their own ministries or agencies dedicated to some form of service, advocacy or social change.

As Servant Leaders continue to move forward in their journey of faith, they may find themselves under-challenged by the congregation. They often have questions about how the church can help them grow and serve in a way that is both challenging and fulfilling. They may even wonder if the church has a place for their experience, gifts and contribution. Reviewed literature and field research both suggest that if these questions remain unanswered, Servant Leaders may look for another church or drift away from the church entirely. The church responds to this developmental challenge in two ways: by creating significant space in its ministry and leadership structures for Servant Leaders as they grow into their full God-given potential and contribution, and by providing learning, training, apprenticeship, and peer community support for Servant Leaders as they live out their unique calling and contribution within their neighborhood, workplace, and civic settings.

Non-linear Moments on the Discipleship Journey

While these faith stages are essentially progressive in nature, they are not exclusively so. Circumstances and events may cause disciples to revisit earlier stages, become stuck in a particular stage, or even move through a stage at an accelerated pace. Tragedies or suffering can cause disciples to reassess long-held beliefs about God. Growth in prayer and wisdom can be initiated by unanswered prayer or a sense of God's

absence in disciples' lives. Similarly, internal restlessness, tragedies and suffering can positively or negatively impact a disciple's growth trajectory. In this developmental model, staff and volunteer leaders are equipped with active listening skills that promote reflection, discovery and action that enable them to engage disciples experiencing these non-linear moments and help them process their experiences in a healthy and productive manner.

Navigating the New Hope Circle

Redesigning the Graphic Illustration and Its Descriptions

The new Hope Circle (see figure 6.2 below) is a redesign of the original Hope Circle graphic illustration, as well as an unwinding of the Hope Circle into a pathway with brief descriptions accompanying each stage of the Hope Circle. These descriptions explain how God is at work in disciples' lives at each stage of the Hope Circle, and how disciples can connect, grow and serve in ways appropriate to each stage. This model also includes a statement of purpose: to help "develop your relationship with Christ and identity in him," and "acquire essential knowledge and skills for a joyful and high impact life with Christ." Finally, the description of the new Hope Circle emphasizes that it should function as a "helpful resource," for disciples as they grow in their faith, not as a regimented process or checklist of tasks the church expects its members to accomplish.

Developing an Assessment Tool: The Next Steps Compass

A major element designed to assist disciples in navigating the Hope Circle and associated community, learning and service opportunities is the Next Steps Compass assessment tool (appendix B). Designed by Andy Hermanson, an adult discipleship team staff

Figure 6.2. New Hope Circle Illustration and Description

THE HOPE CIRCLE PROVIDES A PATHWAY TO HELP:

- Develop your relationship with Christ and your identity in him
- Acquire the essential knowledge and skills for a joyful and high-impact life with Christ

The below **Hope Circle Pathway** is a more detailed outline of the journey many experience from Seeker to Servant Leader. Please use this as a helpful resource, not as a step-by-step list of things you must do. Everyone's Christian journey is unique and develops in its own way.

HOPE CIRCLE

BELIEVER

FOLLOWER

SEEKER

SERVANT LEADER

God is at work revealing our true selves and calling

BEGINNING THE JOURNEY

God is at work moving us to say "yes" to him.

CONNECT BY:
- Going to church (weekend worship, REVIVE or Page 2)

GROW BY:
- Taking The Alpha Course
- Seeking wholeness through ministries like Prayer, Care, Celebrate Recovery, Support Groups and more.

SEEKER

God is at work revealing our true selves and calling.

NEXT STEPS

CONNECT BY:
- Joining/starting a Life Group
- Getting connected within Men's or Women's Ministry

GROW BY:
- Taking a class beyond Alpha, like CORE, Apprentice Series or Bible studies

SERVE BY:
- Volunteering at Hope
- Volunteering with a mission partner or in the community
- Joining the Prayer Team

BELIEVER

CONTINUED GROWTH

God is at work shaping us in the image of Christ and helping us live out our calling.

CONNECT BY:
- Getting involved in various ministry teams (both at Hope and in the community)

GROW BY:
- Taking classes that help you …
  - Create a positive impact (Pneuma course)
  - Live your life on purpose (Purposeful Living classes; Adult Ministry retreats)
  - Grow in leadership (EQUIP course)
  - Discover emotionally healthy spirituality

SERVE BY:
- Volunteering with local and global missions

FOLLOWER

God is at work moving through us to empower others and pass on his story.

HIGH-IMPACT LIVING

CONNECT BY:
- Helping others grow and develop

GROW BY:
- Impacting those around you (your neighborhood, church and world)

SERVE BY:
- Utilizing your passion for advanced leadership opportunities

SERVANT LEADER

member at Hope WDM, and this researcher, the Next Steps Compass helps disciples assess for themselves which discipleship resources might be most helpful for them as they move through the various stages of the Hope Circle. This tool is available in hardcopy format and will be available online in spring 2020.

The Next Steps Compass consists of thirty-one statements covering ten categories, which address the relational, developmental and missional aspects of discipleship. Users indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement, utilizing a five-point Likert-type scale, where "0" indicates greatest disagreement and "4" indicates greatest agreement. Attached to each statement is a letter ("A" through "J") indicating to which of the ten categories each statement belongs.

In the hardcopy version, after responding to all thirty-one statements, on a separate sheet of paper, users determine how many points they have given to each of the ten categories through their responses. The online version does this automatically. Each category contains a list of community, learning and service opportunities appropriate to that category. Users are invited to explore the opportunities listed under the three categories possessing the greatest number of points. A discipleship resource catalog organized around the ten categories supports the Next Steps Compass with detailed descriptions and schedules for all listed resources.

The Next Steps Compass is intended to be used with trained guides who help users interpret the results of the Compass. Even so, where a guide is not available, the Next Steps Compass still provides helpful information and direction. For those who do not wish to use the Next Steps Compass, the Adult Discipleship staff also provides a

comprehensive online catalog of all community, learning and service opportunities offered by the congregation.

<p align="center">*Aligning Staff and Program Resources*</p>

Data from staff interviews and collected documents from all three churches under study suggest that the primary challenge to creating a relationally, developmentally and missionally oriented discipleship environment in a congregational setting is not the lack of staffing or resources but the lack of alignment of staffing and resources and the effective communication of that alignment. Building on this insight, the transition from the present Hope Circle to the new discipleship model requires three major initiatives.

The first initiative involves the alignment of the congregation's many community, learning and service opportunities to the four faith stages of the new Hope Circle, taking into account the relational, developmental and missional nature of discipleship. Staff leaders responsible for changes will find it helpful to partner with primary and secondary school educators trained in instructional design. Both staff and volunteer leaders will also need to acquire a basic understanding of faith stage theory: how disciples develop over time, the behaviors and attitudes that accompany various stages of disciple development, and the circumstances, events and relationships that either help or hinder disciples in that development.

The second initiative involves a significant shift in staff and volunteer leadership roles. In this discipleship model, instead of being primarily instructors and administrators, staff members now become mentors and developers of volunteer leaders, who, in turn, mentor and develop others. Because of the equipping they receive, volunteer leaders in this model become the primary presenters and facilitators within the church's community, learning and service opportunities. Their position on the front lines of ministry also

allows these leaders to partner with staff in strategic planning. In order to serve in these new roles, staff and volunteer leaders will require training in leadership recruiting and development, active listening and discovery-based mentoring.

The third initiative involves a coordinated congregation-wide communication strategy led by the senior pastor, in partnership with the Adult Discipleship and Communications staff. Because the senior pastor is responsible for the overall direction of the congregation, he or she is best positioned to cast a compelling vision for any significant change within the congregation. There are five basic components to this communication strategy: (1) introduce the new discipleship model and its benefits, (2) provide a compelling rationale for the need to change to the new model, (3) describe clearly the process of change from one model to the other, (4) explain how members can influence and participate in the change, and (5) honor the original model and all those who have invested in that model.

The New Hope Circle: Benefits and Challenges

Benefits to the Practice of Ministry

The benefits of this discipleship model to the practice of ministry at Hope WDM are manifold. This model provides members with an accessible relationally based, developmentally oriented and missionally focused discipleship process supported by community, learning and service opportunities aligned to a four-stage developmental pathway. Additionally, this discipleship process is supported by assessment and navigation tools designed to help members locate their place on the developmental pathway and access opportunities that will help them move forward on their discipleship journey. This model also takes into account informal discipling relationships by intentionally creating environments for such relationships to occur. One way these

environments are facilitated is through group-based learning opportunities. These opportunities, while still providing instruction, are designed primarily as participatory workshop-style learning environments where small groups provide a place for reflection, consolidation and application.

The benefits of this discipleship model are equally significant for staff and volunteer leaders. This model provides leaders with a biblical and theoretical foundation that serves as the basis for strategic planning. The relational, developmental and missional nature of this model also provides a blueprint for program design, creation, alignment, and evaluation. Finally, this model is more sustainable than conventional mega-church discipleship models in that it allows for greater strategic focus of staff time and programming resources, thus reducing overall demand on both.

Challenges to the Practice of Ministry

While this model contains significant benefits to the practice of ministry, it also contains several challenges. The first challenge is the task of realigning all adult programming to the three-fold nature of discipleship as well as the four developmental faith stages of the Hope Circle. This realignment process will require the careful evaluation of all community, learning and service opportunities, the elimination or redesign of some of those opportunities and the addition of new opportunities where needed. All this will require added time from staff and volunteer leaders.

The second challenge involves introducing and negotiating the significant shift in both staff and volunteer leadership roles. Staff shift from being primarily teachers and program managers, to being primarily mentors and leader developers. Many volunteers will transition from primarily being logistical and teaching assistants, to mentors, teachers and group facilitators. To meet this challenge staff and volunteer leaders will

need to be equipped with the organizational and leadership skills necessary to negotiate this significant reorientation of roles and responsibilities.

The third challenge involves tending to staff and volunteer leadership morale and passion for ministry during the transition. Any significant organizational change places added stress on those implementing the change and those impacted by the change. In order for this transition to succeed, the senior pastor and staff overseeing this change process will need to pay attention to the stress levels the congregation, staff and volunteer leaders and support them with constant encouragement and respite where needed. Where necessary, staff overseeing this transition may need to reduce the pace of change, so as to preserve the health of the congregation and its leaders. Taken together, these actions will help maintain the transition's forward momentum.

The fourth challenge is to maintain a constant learning posture in regard to the new Hope Circle. Staff and volunteer leaders will regularly need to assess the effectiveness of the New Hope circle and its ability to help disciples grow in the journey of faith. Such assessment will also require leaders to discern and respond to what God is doing in the constantly changing contexts of the congregation and the local mission field.

Transitioning to the new Hope Circle generates many benefits and challenges for the practice of ministry. The new Hope Circle benefits the practice of ministry in that it creates a relationally based, developmentally oriented and missionally focused discipleship environment, supported by programming aligned to a developmental pathway. The new Hope Circle challenges the practice of ministry in that it involves a significant organizational change as well as a temporary workload increase for staff and volunteer leadership.

Fortunately, if the transition process is successfully negotiated, demands on staffing and resources may very possibly decrease, in that programming will be more focused and involve more volunteer leadership. The primary role of staff will be identifying passionate Followers and equipping them to grow into effective Servant Leaders. Volunteer leaders will create similar spaces for Seekers and Believers.

Conclusion: Responding to the Challenge

This thesis project has been a response to the challenges Lutheran mega-churches face as they respond to the call to "go and make disciples." Few Lutheran mega-churches offer their members any kind of intentional process for wholistic disciple growth. Instead, ministry programming often seems to be based on criteria such as congregational tradition, staff preferences and organizational expediency.

Responding to this challenge, the researcher has explored the relational, developmental and missional aspects of discipleship for the purpose of proposing a discipleship model for use by Hope WDM and other Lutheran mega-churches. To accomplish this undertaking the researcher studied the biblical and historical sources related to discipleship, reviewed the relevant literature and conducted field research involving interviews, document collection and site observations at three Lutheran mega-churches. Data from these sources were then collated, coded and analyzed. With these data and utilizing components from Hope's WDM existing discipleship model, the researcher developed and presented within this report a model for relational, developmental and missional discipleship, for use within Hope WDM and hopefully other Lutheran mega-churches. This model includes a graphic illustration and description of the model, as well as assessment and navigation tools for members. Theological and organizational guidance are also included for staff and volunteer leadership as they

evaluate, eliminate, add, and change programming to align to the new discipleship model. It is this researcher's desire that this discipleship model and its tools and resources will also be applicable for mega-church and large church settings beyond the Lutheran tradition. It is hoped that this discipleship model will also move forward in some small way the present conversation regarding the nature of congregational discipleship strategies throughout the whole Body of Christ.

CHAPTER SEVEN: LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD

As with all research projects, this thesis project has its strengths and its weaknesses. This chapter provides an overview of those strengths and weaknesses and offers suggestions for possible avenues of further research. This chapter also contains the researcher's reflections in regard to the project's impact on him both professionally and personally.

Strengths of the Project

A major strength of this project is that it examined the relational, developmental and missional aspects of discipleship from three different perspectives. Each of these aspects were investigated individually, together as a whole, and also in terms of their interrelatedness to each other. This multi-faceted approach produced a robust set of insights addressing the complexities of discipleship as a wholistic formation process.

Another strength of the project is that it explores the process of discipleship in the unique congregational setting of the Lutheran mega-church in North America. Because many Lutheran mega-churches find it difficult to create effective discipleship ministries, this research is both timely and crucial. Furthermore, Lutheran congregations in general, face particular challenges in creating developmentally oriented discipleship environments, due to, at least in part, the historic Lutheran struggle in determining the relationship between grace, faith and human initiative. This project addressed that challenge through its literature review, analysis and creation of an identifiably Lutheran discipleship model.

A third strength of the project is that data collected from field research interviews allowed for a comparison between the beliefs, values and perceptions of congregational staff members, and those of congregational members. The results of this comparison revealed that staff understanding of the relational nature of discipleship had not taken into account the organic experience of their members. This insight from the interviews and the collected online and printed documents from each congregation profoundly influenced the relational aspect of the discipleship model the researcher has proposed.

Weaknesses of the Project and Suggested Modifications

One weakness of this project is its complexity, resulting from its large investigative scope. This project consisted of five different areas of investigation: the relational, developmental and missional aspects of discipleship, discipleship within the Lutheran tradition, and discipleship in a mega-church setting. Each of these areas required exploration in terms of biblical/theological reflection, literature review and field research. The collection, management and analysis of data for such a large project required more time than the researcher initially estimated. One possible modification of the project might include a focus on only one aspect of discipleship within a Lutheran mega-church. Another possible modification would be to conduct a more general investigation of discipleship practices within Lutheran mega-churches. Both modifications would reduce the areas of investigation and thereby simplify the project.

Another weakness of this project is the lack of demographic diversity among the interview samples. While there was a gender balance among congregational members interviewed, all staff members interviewed were male. Furthermore, all individuals interviewed, both staff and congregational members, were white and middle-aged. A potential modification to this project would be to ensure that the age, gender and ethnic

diversity of the congregation and staff would be reflected in the individuals chosen for interviews. This modification would most likely produce a more detailed picture of discipleship within the congregations under study.

Finally, while the initial project proposal included a study of the adult discipleship strategies, practices and outcomes of the four largest Lutheran mega-churches in North America, the researcher was only able to study three such churches. During the process of securing congregations for study, three congregations declined due to staff transition issues and two did not respond at all to the researcher's repeated email and phone call requests. Declining attendance and membership also caused several congregations to lose their mega-church status and thus decreased the total number of congregations available for study.

Suggestions for Further Research

Field research within this project revealed data from two Lutheran denominations showing a sustained rate of worship attendance decline for several Lutheran mega-churches over the last ten years.[295] As a result of this decline several large Lutheran congregations are no longer mega-churches (their attendance is now under two thousand).[296] One suggestion for further research would be an investigation into these former mega-churches to determine if there is any correlation between their membership and attendance decline and their discipleship practices. Findings from such a study might

---

[295] Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Research and Evaluation, "Congregational Trend Report," accessed December 12, 2018, https://www.elca.org/tools/FindACongregation; Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, "Find a Church," accessed, September 15, 2019, http://locator.lcms.org/nchurches_frm/church.asp.

[296] Hartford Institute for Religion Research, "Mega Church Definition," accessed September 15, 2019, http://hirr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/definition.html.

help reverse these congregations' numerical decline and help others to continue in their growth.

Another suggestion would involve an exploration of the discipleship practices of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), a rapidly growing Lutheran church body with 7,396,341 members,[297] making it the largest church body among Lutherans and one of the few growing Lutheran church bodies in the world. Such research into the effectiveness of EECMY discipleship practices might benefit not only North American Lutherans, but other Lutheran church bodies as well.

A third suggestion for further research would be a survey of discipleship practices within the various European, American and Third World pietist and renewal movements, which have emerged throughout the history of Lutheranism. This survey would also investigate the degree of impact, positively or negatively, these movements have had on the discipleship practices of the wider Lutheran church.

A fourth suggestion would involve increasing the number of those interviewed to include as many generations, ethnicities, cultures and economic groupings as possible within the congregations under study. Such an increase of those interviewed would provide a more robust picture of how diverse groups of people develop as disciples over time.

A final suggestion for further research would consist of an analysis of the relationship between the evolution of the Lutheran doctrine of justification and the evolution of discipleship practices within Lutheran congregations since the Reformation.

---

[297] Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, "A Brief History", accessed September 19, 2019, http://eecmy.org/eecmy/en/history.

Such an investigation might yield insights into the perplexing and persistent Lutheran struggle to develop and implement a robust discipleship environment within its congregations.

Final Reflections

This project is a response to the researcher's ongoing attempt to create a wholistic and sustainable discipleship environment within a Lutheran mega-church. As the researcher engaged the various phases of this project, God used this experience to grow him both professionally and personally.

A portion of this project involved the exploration of the ongoing struggle Lutherans have experienced in an attempt to articulate a robust theology of discipleship. In his study of Luther and other Lutheran theologians, the researcher discovered how deeply embedded the notion of discipleship as a relationally, developmentally and missionally based journey of faith was in Luther's own theology. This discovery provided the researcher with an identifiably Lutheran conceptual and linguistic framework within which to articulate a biblically based, relational, developmental, and missional discipleship model. The researcher was able to apply this framework to Hope WDM's adult discipleship ministry strategy, thus providing theological clarity for staff planning and development of new programming.

On a personal level, approximately a year before beginning this thesis project, the researcher became chronically ill for several years and was forced to engage his final year's courses and this project at a slower pace than preferred. Even so, throughout the process of project design, research, analysis, synthesis and the development of an implementable discipleship model, the researcher regularly experienced the loving, healing, challenging and encouraging presence of God.

For example, the literature by Clinton, Hagberg and others related to disciple development, together with the interviews of laity from the churches under study, helped the researcher gain greater understanding of the particularities of his own journey. Specifically, the researcher developed a greater understanding on a very personal level of how God continually uses his own circumstances, events and relationships to shape him for God's mission and his continuing growth into the image of Christ. Accordingly, this extended time of illness, together with this project, helped the researcher more effectively partner with God in his own spiritual formation. He learned to see God more clearly at work in his own life and actively surrender to that work. In addition to the findings and insights of his research, the researcher was able to reflect on his own experience of disciple growth, allowing the researcher to develop a more intentionally "God-driven" and organic discipleship model than perhaps might have otherwise been the case.

This discipleship model is also intended for use with the researcher's own congregation, Hope WDM. As of this writing, the implementation of this model is about seventy-five percent complete. Throughout the implementation process, the researcher continues to learn how to listen more carefully to God and the congregation, trust Hope WDM's adult discipleship team with the implementation process, hold all things with a certain looseness, not take himself so seriously, and have confidence in God's ability to sovereignly shape the outcome of the entire process.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questions for lay interviewees:

    (1)   Tell me about your journey of faith.

    (2)   What relationships have had a positive impact on you during your journey of faith?

    (3)   How has your congregation's adult discipleship ministry impacted your journey of faith?

    (4)   How has your congregation in general impacted your journey of faith?

    (5)   What have you found most challenging about your journey of faith?

Questions for staff interviewees:

    (1)   How would you define discipleship?

    (2)   How would you describe your congregation's adult discipleship strategy?

    (3)   How does that strategy fit within your congregation's overall ministry strategy?

    (4)   If your congregation has a discipleship pathway, what does it look like?

    (5)   What do you find are the challenges in helping congregational members grow in faith?

APPENDIX B: NEXT STEPS COMPASS ASSESSMENT TOOL

Next Steps Compass

A Self-Assessment Tool for Growth in Discipleship at Hope

Name (optional): _____ Age: _____ Male: _____ Female: _____

Step One

Circle the number that most reflects your level of agreement with the statement where "0" means strongly disagree and "4" means strongly agree.

	Disagree				Agree
I'm looking for a group of Christian friends to connect with. (D)	0 --- 1 --- 2 --- 3 --- 4				
Right now, life is a bit challenging for me. (B)	0 --- 1 --- 2 --- 3 --- 4				
I'm not sure who Jesus is and what I believe about him. (A)	0 --- 1 --- 2 --- 3 --- 4				
I often find Bible reading to be a challenge. (C)	0 --- 1 --- 2 --- 3 --- 4				
I desire to experience God as more loving and compassionate. (C, B)	0 --- 1 --- 2 --- 3 --- 4				
I'm not quite sure how to talk to God. (A, E)	0 --- 1 --- 2 --- 3 --- 4				
I would really like to get my finances under control. (J)	0 --- 1 --- 2 --- 3 --- 4				
I would like to know how to better meet my spouse's needs. (I)	0 --- 1 --- 2 --- 3 --- 4				
I'm often unclear about what God is teaching me through life's circumstances. (C, F, G)	0 --- 1 --- 2 --- 3 --- 4				
I would be interested in a refresher course on Christianity. (A)	0 --- 1 --- 2 --- 3 --- 4				
I would really like to see my marriage go from good to great. (I)	0 --- 1 --- 2 --- 3 --- 4				

I'm interested in what you have for
Young Adults. (D)   0 --- 1 --- 2 --- 3 --- 4

I'm looking for volunteer opportunities
at church. (H)   0 --- 1 --- 2 --- 3 --- 4

I'm having a hard time freeing myself
from the pain of my past. (E, B)   0 --- 1 --- 2 --- 3 --- 4

I really enjoy reading the Bible and
applying it to my life. (F)   0 --- 1 --- 2 --- 3 --- 4

I clearly understand what it means
to follow Jesus in everyday life. (C, G)   0 --- 1 --- 2 --- 3 --- 4

I'm looking for a group of men/women
to connect with. (D, H)   0 --- 1 --- 2 --- 3 --- 4

My spouse and I could really use some
"us" time. (I)   0 --- 1 --- 2 --- 3 --- 4

I'm interested in sports and/or fitness
opportunities. (J)   0 --- 1 --- 2 --- 3 --- 4

I would like to become part of Hope's
prayer ministry. (E)   0 --- 1 --- 2 --- 3 --- 4

I would like to understand the Bible
better. (F)   0 --- 1 --- 2 --- 3 --- 4

I'm seeking a group of people who
want to make a difference. (D, H)   0 --- 1 --- 2 --- 3 --- 4

I'd like to give more, but my finances
are tight. (J)   0 --- 1 --- 2 --- 3 --- 4

I'm struggling with some habits I'd
like to overcome. (B)   0 --- 1 --- 2 --- 3 --- 4

I would like to hear God's voice
more clearly. (E)   0 --- 1 --- 2 --- 3 --- 4

I want to see God's plan for my life
become a reality. (G)   0 --- 1 --- 2 --- 3 --- 4

I am unclear on how God wants to use
me to serve and impact others. (G, H)　　　0　---　1　---　2　---　3　---　4

I would like to know how to more
effectively meet my kids' needs. (I)　　　0　---　1　---　2　---　3　---　4

Reading the Bible can be challenging
at times. (F)　　　0　---　1　---　2　---　3　---　4

I want to make a difference as I serve
and lead others in Jesus' Name. (H)　　　0　---　1　---　2　---　3　---　4

I'm interested in leading a healthier
lifestyle. (J)　　　0　---　1　---　2　---　3　---　4

To add up your results please follow the instructions on the following page.

Scoring Your Results

Step Two

Below each statement on your survey is one to three letters. For each occurrence of the letter write down the amount of points you gave for the corresponding statement (for example, A. 1, 4, 0, 2, 2, 4).

After you have recorded all the points you gave for each letter add up the total points.

A. _____   Total: _____

B. _____   Total: _____

C. _____   Total: _____

D. _____   Total: _____

E. _____   Total: _____

F. _____   Total: _____

G. _____   Total: _____

H. _____   Total: _____

I. _____   Total: _____

J. _____   Total: _____

Step Three

After you have added up all the totals for each letter, go to the next page and write the total scores down in each corresponding category.

Categories for Connecting, Growing and Serving

A. Taking the First Step in Faith   (p. 5)
   (Score____)

Worshiping Together	5
Alpha	5
Revive (Young Adult Ministries)	6

B. Wholeness & Healing   (p. 6)
   (Score____)

Opportunities to Receive Prayer	6
Inner Healing Prayer	6
Recovery Ministries	7
Support Ministries	8
Financial Peace University	9

C. Building a Solid Foundation   (p. 10)
   (Score____)

After Alpha	10
Apprentice Series	10

D. Getting into Community   (p. 10)
   (Score____)

Life Groups	10
Men of Hope	11
Women of Hope	12
50+ Ministry	13
Revive Community (Young Adult)	6

E. Learning How to Pray   (p. 13)
   (Score____)

Let Prayer Change Your Life	13
The Circle Maker	14
School for Listening Prayer	14
Prayer Ministry Training	14

F. Getting to Know the Bible   (p. 14)
   (Score____)

After Alpha	14
Introduction to the Bible	14
Crossways: A Study of the Bible	14
Page 2 Bible Study	15
Pastor's Bible Study for Men	15
Pastor's Bible Sturdy for Women	15

G. Discovering God's Will   (p. 15)
   (Score____)

CORE Series	15
Purposeful Living Series	16
Life Discernment Seminars	19
Building a Life Map Timeline	17

H. Living a Life that Matters   (p. 17)
   (Score____)

Missions: Serving Locally	17
Missions: Serving Globally	17
Revive Serving (Young Adult)	18
Serving Opportunities at Hope	18
Leadership Development/EQUIP	19

I. Marriage and Parenting   (p. 20)
   (Score____)

Pre-Marriage Course	20
Alpha Marriage Course	20
Married People Night Out	20
Parenting Courses	20

J. Pursuing Healthy Lifestyle   (p. 21)
   (Score____)

Financial Peace University	21
Lifestyle, Fitness and Sports	21
Daniel Plan – Healthy Living	21
Taste of Hope Golf Outing	22

Step Four

After you have entered all the total points for each category, circle the three highest categories and, on the following pages, explore online the opportunities under the categories to see what might be a match for you. If you would like to meet with our staff to talk about your results, please email us at nextsteps@hopewdm.org.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alpha USA. "What is Alpha." Accessed September 30, 2019, https://alphausa.org/about.

Barna Group. *The State of Discipleship: A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with The Navigators.* Ventura, CA: The Barna Group. 2015.

Beard, Christopher. "Missional Discipleship: Discerning Spiritual-Formation Practices and Goals within the Missional Movement." *Missiology: An International Review* 43, no. 2 (April 2015): 175-94. Accessed September 30, 2019. https://doi.org/10.1177/0091829614563059.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. Translated by R. H. Fuller. New York: Touchstone, 1995.

_____. *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community.* Translated by John W. Doberstein. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1954.

Bruner, Frederick Dale. *Matthew: A Commentary.* Vol. 2*, The Churchbook: Matthew 13-28.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990.

Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005.

Carter, Warren. "Matthew 4:18-22 and Matthean Discipleship: An Audience-Oriented Perspective." *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (January 1997): 58-75. Accessed September 30, 2019. www.jstor.org/stable/43723802.

Clinton, J Robert, *Leadership Emergence Theory: A Self-Study Manual for Analyzing the Development of a Christian Leader.* Altadena, CA: Barnabas Publishers, 2003.

_____. *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development.* 2nd ed. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2012.

Collinson, Sylvia Wilkey. "Making Disciples and the Christian Faith." *Evangelical Review of Theology* 29, no. 3 (July 2005): 240-50. Accessed September 30, 2019. http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/articles/18750450/making-disciples-christian-faith.

Creswell, John W. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches.* 3rd ed. Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2013.

Csinos, David M. ""Come, Follow Me": Apprenticeship in Jesus' Approach to Education." *Religious Education* 105, no. 1 (2010): 45-62. Accessed September 20, 2019. https://doi.org/10.1080/00344080903472725.

DiCicco-Bloom, Barbara and Benjamin F Crabtree. "The Qualitative Research Interview." *Medical Education,* 40, (2006): 314-21. Accessed January 3, 2019. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2929.2006.02418.x.

Donaldson, Terence L. "Guiding Readers – Making Disciples: Discipleship in Matthew's Narrative Strategy." In *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament.* Edited by Richard Longenecker, 30-49. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996.

Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. "A Brief History." Accessed September 30, 2019. http://eecmy.org/eecmy/en/history.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. "Congregational Trend Report." Accessed September 30, 2019. https://www.elca.org/tools/FindACongregation.

_____. "Demographic Reports." Accessed September 30, 2019. http://www.elca.org/en/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Research-and-Evaluation/Demographic-Reports.

Garland, David E. *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary.* Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys Publishing, 2001.

Guder, Darrell L. ed. *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*. Gospel and Our Culture Series. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub., 1998.

_____. "Worthy Living: Work and Witness from the Perspective of Missional Church Theology." *Word & World* 25, no. 4 (Fall 2005): 424-32. Accessed September 30, 2019. https://wordandworld.luthersem.edu/issues.aspx?article_id=399.

Hagberg, Janet and Robert A. Guelich. *The Critical Journey: Stages in the Life of Faith*, 2nd ed. Salem, WI: Sheffield Pub., 2005.

Hartford Institute for Religion Research. "Mega Church Definition." Accessed September 30, 2019. http://hirr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/definition.html.

Hawkins, Greg L., and Cally Parkinson. *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011.

Hutson, Christopher Roy. "Martha's choice: A Pastorally Sensitive Reading of Luke 10:38-42." *Restoration Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (2003): 139-50. Accessed September 30, 2019. https://www.academia.edu/1854453/Marthas_Choice_A_Pastorally_Sensitive_Reading_of_Luke_10_38-42.

Kittel, Gerhard, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964. Logos Bible Software.

Kuckartz Anne, Julia Gerson, Murat Esmer, and René Lori. *MAXQDA Qualitative and Mixed Methods Data Analysis Software* (version 2018.1). Mac. Berlin: VERBI Software GmbH, 2018.

Longenecker, Richard N, "Taking Up the Cross Daily: Discipleship in Luke-Acts." In Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament, ed. Richard Longenecker. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996.

Luther, Martin. "The Freedom of a Christian (1520)." In *Luther's Works.* Vol. 31, *Career of the Reformer I*. Edited by J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, and H. T. Lehmann, 329-77. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999.

_____. "Small Catechism." In *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.* Edited by Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, and Charles P. Arand, 347-75. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000.

_____. "Two Kinds of Righteousness (1519)." In *Luther's Works.* Vol. 31*, Career of the Reformer I*. Edited by J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, and H. T. Lehmann, 295-306. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999.

Lutheran Church of Hope. "Grow." Accessed September 30, 2019. http://www.lutheranchurchofhope.org/west-des-moines/grow/.

Meilaender, Gilbert. "Hearts Set to Obey." *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 43, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 42-53. Accessed September 30, 2019. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.0012-2033.2004.00188.x.

Martin, Ralph P. "Salvation and Discipleship in Luke's Gospel." *Interpretation* 30, no. 4 (October 1976): 374. Accessed April 12, 2020. https://doi.org/10.1177/002096437603000403.

Miller, David W. "The Faith at Work Movement." *Theology Today* 60, (2003): 301-10. Accessed September 30, 2019. https://doi.org/10.1177/004057360306000302.

Moore. Thomas S. "The Lucan Great Commission and the Isaianic Servant." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154, no. 613 (January-March 1997): 53-56. Accessed September 30, 2019. https://www.galaxie.com/article/bsac154-613-03.

Newbigin, Leslie. "Can the West Be Converted?" *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 11, no. 1 (January 1987): 2-7.

Ogden, Greg. *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010.

Olson, Daniel V. A. "Making Disciples in a Liberal Protestant Church." In "*I Come Away Stronger": How Small Groups Are Shaping American Religion.* Edited by Robert Wuthnow. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1994, 127.

Reese, Randy D., and Robert Loane. *Deep Mentoring: Guiding Others on Their Leadership Journey.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012.

Saldaña, Johnny. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers.* 3rd ed. Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2013.

Samra, James G. "A Biblical View of Discipleship." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160, no. 638 (April 2003): 219-20. Accessed September 30, 2019. https://www.galaxie.com/article/bsac160-638-08.

Van Gelder, Craig, and Dwight J. Zscheile. *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011.

Warren, Richard. *The Purpose Driven Church: Growing without Compromising Your Message and Mission.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995.

Wenthe, Dean O. "Prophet, Priest, King, and Teacher: The Old Testament, Intertestamental, and Hellenistic Antecedents for Jesus' Role as Rabbi and Teacher." In *Lively Legacy: Essays in Honor of Robert Preus.* Edited by Kurt E. Marquart, John R. Stephenson, and Bjarne W. Teigen, 182-211. Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary, 1985.

Wilhoit, James C. *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.

Wilkins, M. J. *Discipleship in the Ancient World and Matthew's Gospel.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995.

Willard, Dallas. *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship.* New York: HarperCollins, 2006.

Wright, N. T. *Jesus and the Victory of God.* Vol. 2, *Christian Origins and the Question of God.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996.