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A Transformed Church: From Traditional Church to Parish Movement.

A Historical, Biblical, Theological and Practical Exploration of the Nature of the Parish Church as Movement from a Wesleyan Perspective

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C. Mark Batton

Kansas City, Missouri

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Student Name: Mark Batton

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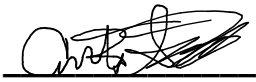

Faculty Advisor, Antonio Settles

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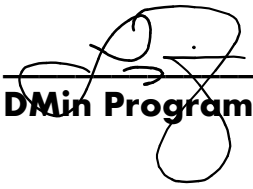

DMin Program Director, Levi Jones

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Abstract

A Transformed Church: From Traditional Church to Parish Movement. A Historical, Biblical, Theological and Practical Exploration of the Nature of the Parish Church as Movement from a Wesleyan Perspective.

The United States has been experiencing decline in traditional expressions of church for some time. Current research indicates that people seeking spirituality and community do so outside of the traditional church model. It also mimics national findings, revealing that approximately 52% of the population is “unclaimed” with no religious affiliation. Many have adhered to the “build it and they will come” sort of church mindset with an attractional focus. In the current context, those with no religious affiliation (“nones”) are reluctant to engage in our current models of “church.” This paper examines and engages ecclesiology from a Wesleyan perspective leading to a shift in identity to a parish movement.

Acknowledgements

The work of this project is immense. I thank my family, especially my wife Holly for her love, patience, and encouragement. Thanks to my children, Ella and Ayden, who have sacrificed “dad time” for this project. My mother Kay has been a lifetime inspiration in her love for me, Jesus, and the church. The Vandalia Church has been incredibly kind to encourage and allow me to take this journey.

I thank God for His love for me, the church, and our future mission together. May we all grow from Spirit-led renewal.

Abbreviations

COTN – Church of the Nazarene

Nones – Shorthand description of people with no religious affiliation.

SBNR – Spiritual But Not Religious

LJBNC – Love Jesus But Not the Church

Introduction

The mission of the church appears simple and straightforward at first glance. Christ compels us to go forward into all cultural arenas and engage people with the gospel's good news. The unanticipated challenge encountered is that many view the gospel as "old news" or "inauthentic," and they may not consider it "good". Our post-modern (and post-Christian) skepticism encourages people to accept nothing and question everything.

Jon Meacham's 2009 Newsweek article, *The End of Christian America,* announced nationally what many of us already knew; that our culture has been moving away from Judeo-Christian faith for some time.[1] Many of the values we hold as a nation seem to be in congruence with scriptural values, yet there is despair among many when it comes to our country's supposed "progress" since World War II. Columnist Cal Thomas said, '"No country can be truly 'Christian,'" --- "Only people can. God is above all nations, and, in fact, Isaiah says that 'All nations are to him a drop in the bucket and less than nothing.'"[2] This paper will examine some of the significant historical moments that have transformed our culture and perspectives. While many would view our current situation as bleak, there are stirrings of the work of God among people in our communities. What might appear to be loss could become confidence in the newness of what God is doing around us.

'Malaise' denotes "an indefinite feeling of debility or lack of health often indicative of or accompanying the onset of an illness" or a "vague sense of mental or moral ill-being."[3]

[1] Jon Meacham. "The End of Christian America." *Newsweek*, (4.3.09) https://www.newsweek.com/meacham-end-christian-america-77125 (Accessed 11.1.2021)
[2] Ibid.
[3] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/malaise. Accessed 9.20.21

There is evidence that something is amiss, yet pinpointing the problem is difficult. Charles Taylor introduces this malaise,

> "I want to write here about some of the malaises of modernity. I mean by this features of our contemporary culture and society that people experience as a loss or a decline, even as our civilization "develops." Sometimes people feel that some important decline has occurred during the last years or decades — since the Second World War, or the 1950s, for instance."[4]

Although civilization appears to be developing at ever astonishing speeds, we are uneasy about the sense of loss or decline. Taylor describes several current challenges, including the rise of individualism, human reason leading to disenchantment, and loss of freedom.[5] The rise of individualism has assigned the locus of truth to individual persons over the collective structures of faith or society. Reason has eliminated the ancient world's sacred (or enchanted) nature in which supernatural forces were at play in all areas of life. The loss of freedom (political or otherwise) threatens our stake in the fabric of society.

Alan Roxburgh describes the shift (malaise) in western life and the church as the "great unraveling". The metanarratives of human progress have come undone, which illustrates what many have sensed for some time. The advances of the previous four hundred years are astonishing yet have also shifted the societal landscape. This individualism or our 'buffered selves' runs counter to the images of connection and community in the Body of Christ. The church reflects these changes as well:

> These statistics illustrate the decline:
>
> • "If you were born between 1925 and 1945, there is a 60 percent chance you are in church today.
> • If you were born between 1946 and 1964, there is a 40 percent chance you are in church today.

[4] Charles Taylor. *The Malaise of Modernity.* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press,1991), Chap. 1, Google Play Books,
[5] Ibid. Chapter 1.

• If you were born between 1965 and 1983, there is a 20 percent chance you are in church today.
• If you were born after 1984, there is less than a 10 percent chance you are in church today."[6]

Our remedies to this unraveling languish because we ask church-centered questions, not God-centered. As losses mount in churches in the west, we push whatever buttons seem necessary that we might 'grow again.' In their efforts to move forward, many churches have sought the one thing (X factor) that could be changed or modified to stabilize or reignite passion in believers. These questions are typically church-centered and attempt to fix a perceived problem.

The nature of the church as movement has the opportunity to create a paradigm shift in the nature of how the church is embodied. The thesis proposed in this paper is that the church (local and global) embrace John Wesley's movement, parish praxis, and Christologically based mission and allow it to reshape and reconfigure the current and future incarnations of the church. Albert Outler summarized Wesley's view of the church: "significantly, and at every point, Wesley defined the church as act, as mission, as the enterprise of saving and maturing souls in the Christian life."

Overview

This chapter examines malaise in society as well as the church. Chapter two explores the literature of eccesiology, movement and Weslyan theology. Reading Wesley leads to new insights for our current context. Chapter three explores Wesleyan ecclesiology as 'event' or 'movement.' Reading Wesley at this pivotal time in church history reengages the true nature of his ministry, especially in relation to the institutional

[6] Alan J. Roxburgh. *Joining God, Remaking Church, and Changing the World: The New Shape of Church in Our Time.* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2015), Chapter 1, Google Play Books.

church. Chapter four explores theology of place from a Wesleyan perspective. The leadership of people in bands and classes firmly places the nature of ecclesiology in a rooted, local context. Chapter five begins a conversation about ecclesiology for the future. The 'via media' Wesleyan theology may prove helpful to the church in the future. Chapter six is a summary of the paper looking back at major themes throughout the paper.

Malaise in Context

"Malaise" appropriately names the sense of pastoral and church ministry in current experience. The optimism and growth of local churches in the post-World War II period led to confidence in a particular expression of church in late 21st century America. The combination of good (N. Atlantic) theological training, the desire to make the local church attractive to visitors (consumers), poor discipleship, and mission as a detached enterprise has led us to a very lukewarm result. Members and attendees move from engaged to disengaged (and vice-versa) regularly.

Statistical data is helpful and provides some evidence about the church's health. Relying on statistical data as the primary indicator of 'success' leads to discouragement and distorts the message of Christ who challenged all worldly measures of success. The reality of decline in the western church (pre and post covid) is that most churches (pastors) who had been 'successful' are now experiencing decline as well. These circumstances provide the church with the opportunity to examine our identity, embrace God's missional nature, and creatively engage in our local context.

'Spiritual but not Religious'

Current western culture has shifted from the "what" (content) of spirituality to the "how" (form) in terms of belief and practice. Andrew Root describes this reality,

> For instance, people can assert that they are spiritual but not religious only because the what has been replaced completely by the how, to a level that would make even Calvin or Luther blush. People all over our culture say, "I don't need to go to church, take communion, or care about baptism; that's not what I do. I think what matters is how you live your life, and I live mine spiritually."[7]

The implication is that traditional spiritual forms are now viewed as an impediment to spiritual life or as an optional exercise. Spirituality has become an untethered concept without specific beliefs or praxis.

In the current context, a common expression is: 'I'm spiritual but not religious.' The sacred (spiritual) has been detached from the religious (church, group), with each person as the source of their own "spiritual" life.[8] Prior to the 1970s many would have equated the terms' spiritual' and 'religious.' Following the cultural movements of the 1960s through the 1970s many have distanced themselves from religion with spirituality relegated to the private realm. To put it simply, 'spiritual' is a positive term and 'religious' is deemed negative in our current context. As Taylor says in his article, 'The second facet is that the buffered self can form the ambition of disengaging from whatever is beyond the boundary, and of giving its own autonomous order to its life." [9] Alan Roxburgh describes this as the "quicksand of radical individualism." [10] Taylor adds that in this movement to individualism, we move from external sources of meaning (the Bible, church, elders) to our personal choices as the highest authority. People have distanced themselves from the authority of

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[7] Andrew Root. *The Pastor in a Secular Age: Ministry to People Who No Longer Need a God*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), Chapter 5, Google Play Books.
[8] Charles Taylor uses the term "buffered self" for this detachment in various writings.
[9] Charles Taylor. "Buffered and Porous Selves." The Immanent Frame: Secularism, Religion and the Public Sphere,, Sept., 2, 2008. https://tif.ssrc.org/2008/09/02/buffered-and-porous-selves/
[10] Roxburgh. *Joining God, Remaking Church,* Introduction.

the Bible, the church, and its leaders. The post-modern perspective questions all master narratives of nationality, religion, or progress and treats institutions with suspicion.

Two key articles from the Barna Group in 2017 identify the growth of two prevalent attitudes. The first describes those who 'love Jesus but not the church' (LJBNC).[11] Culture continues to move toward secularity, and religion is in retreat. Almost half (49%) of America is currently unchurched. This study identifies people who self-describe as Christian but have not attended a local church in six months or more. 89% say they have made a personal commitment to Christ and describe faith as very important. This group is defined as the 'de-churched.' Their beliefs are orthodox and describe their spirituality as personal and private.

The follow-up article is 'Meet the *Spiritual but not Religious,'* which was released a few weeks later.[12] The terms 'spiritual' and 'religious' were once virtually interchangeable yet now are treated as antithetical. The term 'religious' conjures up images of rigorous church attendance, discipline, institutions, and scandals for many who hear it. As the Barna group notes,

> "The twin cultural trends of deinstitutionalization and individualism have, for many, moved spiritual practice away from the public rituals of institutional Christianity to the private experience of God *within*".[13]

Two groups comprising the 'spiritual but not religious' emerge. The first group (SBNR #1) considers themselves as spiritual but describes their faith slightly important.

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[11] "Meet Those Who "Love Jesus but not the Church," March 30, 2017. Barna Group https://www.barna.com/research/meet-love-jesus-not-church/. Following these references the acronym LJBNC will refer to those who "Love Jesus But Not the Church" and SBNR will refer to the "Spiritual But Not Religious."

[12] "Meet the "Spiritual but not religious". Barna Group. https://www.barna.com/research/meet-spiritual-not-religious/ (Accessed 11.4.20)

[13] "Meet the "Spiritual but not religious". Barna Group. https://www.barna.com/research/meet-spiritual-not-religious/ (Accessed 11.4.20)

Group two (SBNR #2) describes themselves as spiritual but have no claim to faith at all. Those in group two claim spirituality but might be atheist, agnostic, or unaffiliated.

Those who 'love Jesus but not the church' hold personal faith and practice as vitally important. The two groups in the SBNR category hold little importance for faith in their lives while clinging to the label "spiritual". Their views are less orthodox than the LJBNC with views of God as a "higher consciousness," for example. Further definition of what 'spiritual' means to these groups is required. They value the freedom to define spirituality in uniquely personal terms.

A Pew Research Study found similar results. About one-quarter of U.S. adults (27%) would resonate with the label "spiritual but not religious".[14] At the time of writing (2017), this was 8 percentage points up from the previous five years. Approximately 5000 people contributed to the compilation of this data. As part of a more extensive survey, they asked two questions. The first was, 'Do you think of yourself as a religious person or not' and then followed up by, 'Do you think of yourself as a spiritual person or not?'

The research in *Churchless* by Barna and Kinnaman delves deeper into the lives of the people studied with over 20,000 participants over six years. They chronicle the increase in 'churchless' Americans which has risen by 33% in the previous 20 years with about half (49%) being churched.[15] They break down the groups as follows:

"1. The **Actively Churched** (49%) attend at least once a month.

2. The **Minimally Churched** (8%) attend infrequently and whose attendance patterns are unpredictable. C.E.O.'s are those who come only on Christmas and Easter.

[14] Michael Lipka and Claire Gecewicz. "More Americans now say they're spiritual but not religious." Sept. 6, 2017. Pew Research. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/06/more-americans-now-say-theyre-spiritual-but-not-religious/

[15] George Barna and David Kinnamon (Ed.). *Churchless: Understanding Today's Unchurched and How to Connect With Them*. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum. 2014), Chapter 1, Google Play Books.

3. The **De-Churched (33%)** are those who have been 'churched' in the past but are no longer active. Often there are cycles of connection and disconnection over periods. The authors discovered that this group is the fastest-growing segment.

4. The **Purely Unchurched (10%)** are those who neither currently or have never attended a Christian worship service.[16]"

The PRRI group led by Dr. Robert P. Jones defines spirituality as feeling connected to something larger than oneself. They used three key questions: 'how do you feel connected to the world around you, feel a part of something larger than yourself, and felt a larger sense of meaning or purpose in life?' Responses given were combined to give a measure of spirituality for the research.[17]

To measure religious commitment the group used participation (in attending worship services) and personal importance (how important religion is in their personal lives) in combination to measure religious influence. Their findings resulted in four groups:

- "Spiritual and religious: people who are both *more spiritual* and *more religious* than average;
- Spiritual but not religious: people who are *more spiritual* than average, but *less religious* than average;
- Not spiritual but religious: people who are *less spiritual* than average, but *more religious* than average;
- Neither spiritual nor religious: people who are both *less spiritual* and *less religious* than average."

Their findings also correlated age, education, politics, and other factors with levels of spirituality and religion. From a broad perspective, 'nonreligious' Americans are younger than religious ones. 62% are under the age of 50 and about 25% are under 30".[18]

Interestingly, the greatest source of inspiration was in listening to music. About 70% have

[16] Ibid., 14-15

[17] Robert P. Jones, Art Raney, and Daniel Cox. "Searching for Spirituality in the U.S.: A New Look at the Spiritual but not Religious." PRRI. 11.26.17 https://www.prri.org/research/religiosity-and-spirituality-in-america/

[18] Ibid.

been inspired or moved by music in the last week.[19]

Framing the Data

This data must be framed with a sense of missional potential. Local congregants often express frustration with the 'world' and younger generations who do not fit the mold of the church as we have known it. The church we have offered them is an expression of a particular period, and new models (wineskins) are necessary for this current period.[20] We have opportunity to focus our efforts on the movement Jesus began and on our parish (neighbors) as people loved by God. There is tremendous opportunity for missional engagement.

People: Increasingly Disengaged

There is a significant challenge of understanding people and social dynamics in our age**.** Some liken current society to an airport lounge where nothing is permanent and people are always on the way to another place. Zygmunt Bauman uses the metaphor of "tourism" to describe modern living, emphasizing mobility, rootlessness, and impermanence.[21] He describes the implications of this lifestyle which encourages 'grazing behavior' which explores variety while avoiding commitment to any one way of life or belief.[22]

[19] Ibid.
[20] In the gospels Jesus uses the analogy of wine and wineskins to describe the challenge of the new (kingdom, gospel) rupturing the old model.
[21] Michael Frost. *Incarnate: The Body of Christ in an Age of Disengagement.* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2014), Chapter 1, Google Play Books.

[22] Ibid., 12-14.

Freedom has become an individual priority in which other people who disagree or get in our way are easily objectified. The distance between people is only heightened with screen-to-screen communication and social media. These realities are prevalent in the church as modern people communicate in technology-based rather than personal ways.

A recent examination of the American church's levels of engagement and disengagement reveals the landscape. The reflection shows that only 26 % are engaged, 56% are disengaged, and 18% are actively disengaged. Those engaged are highly loyal to the mission of their local church. They are clear in their level of commitment and are likely to invite people to their church. The disengaged attend but are less likely to commit and invest themselves in the church's work. Social connection is as important as spiritual connection and, for some, even more so. The actively disengaged may attend a few times a year or may attend, although they are psychologically disconnected or actively unhappy with their church. They let their feelings be routinely known to those who will listen.[23]

Gallup research has revelated that about 40% of Americans claim regular attendance, but reliable counts are closer to 22-25%. 'In most churches in America, regular attenders are often between 20-50% of the congregation's overall membership.' However, only around 20% of the typical congregation both attends regularly and produces what might be described in sheep language as a full coat of wool, one that

[23] Albert L. Winseman. "Breakthrough Research on Congregational Engagement". Gallup. https://news.gallup.com/poll/5281/breakthrough-research-congregational-engagement.aspx (Accessed August 26, 2019.)

marks a person as a spiritually growing, engaged and committed follower of Jesus Christ."[24] Spiritual growth and engagement are closely tied.

These realities are readily apparent in our local contexts. The names, reasons, and circumstances are certainly varied, but most churches are experiencing these dynamics. Families routinely come and go from one church in town to another. People avoid healing conversations due to hurt, anger, frustration or disagreement. At times the reasons for church transition seem legitimate, but one wonders what possible solutions might have been available.

What is the Church?

Jesus created the church. Creation, definition, and identity belong to God, not us. He formed a community of disciples who were to go and make disciples of all nations.

The word most commonly translated as 'church' in the New Testament is the Greek word 'ekklesia.' People in the ancient world would quickly understand this as an 'assembly' (or gathering) of people for a purpose. When connected to early believers, the ekklesia meant the ‘called-out-ones’, which began as a gathering of people who witnessed Jesus risen from the dead and whose lives were transformed and committed to Him going forward. Jesus' command to take the gospel first to Jerusalem and then to move to Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth was something the apostles took seriously.

The idea of the ‘ekklesia’ and its transformation in the following centuries might

[24] Scott Thumma and Warren Bird. *The Other 80 Percent: Turning Your Church's Spectators into Active Participants. (*San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), Introduction, Google Play Books.

help us see where the church wandered off. As Kittel describes the transition of this word from the secular world to being used in the books of the New Testament to describe these believers, he says, 'In all these verses the local church is called *ekklēsía* with no question of precedence or of local emphasis. The singular and plural are interchangeable. Two or more churches do not make the church, nor are there many churches, but one church in many places, whether Jewish, Gentile, or mixed. The only descriptive term that is added is *toú theoú* (or *kýriou*), which clearly marks it off from a secular society (denoted in 2:47 by *laós*). In three instances, there is a purely secular use (19:32, 39, 40), which shows that what matters is not assembling as such but who assembles and why. In the case of the church, it is God (or the Lord) who assembles his people, so that the church is the *ekklēsía* of God consisting of all those who belong to him (cf. *hólē* in 5:11; 15:22). Applied to believers, the term is essentially a qualitative one, the assembly of those whom God himself gathers.'[25]

Andy Stanley describes how the 'ekklesia' began to be substituted in German by the word 'Kirch,' which meant 'the Lord's house.' In *Deep and Wide*, he describes this transformation:

> "Within a decade, the *ekklesia* ceased to be a movement. It was no longer an expanding group of people sharing a unique identity and purpose. It had become a location. The Romans called each of these gathering places a *basilica*, the Latin word used to denote a public building or official meeting place. Gothic (or Germanic) cultures, also influenced by Christianity, used the word *kirika*, which became *kirche* in modern German.9 The word meant "house of the lord," and was used to refer to any ritual gathering place, Christian or pagan."[26]

Engaging people in faith and the life of the church requires reimagining (and re-engaging) the movement that Jesus created.

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[25] Gerhand Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey Bromiley. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume. (*Grand Rapids, Eerdman's Publishing. 1985), 670.

[26] Andy Stanley. *Deep and Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), Introduction, Google Play Books.

To understand current contextual problems or consider possible solutions, we might engage the nature of the 'ekklesia' as designed and intended by God. God's missional nature is clearly expressed and embodied in the creation of the church. He created the ekklesia (church) as a movement of followers called to witness.

Consumerism is one of the great challenges of current context. The modern American church too often resembles the elegant cathedral of the local mall food court with its plethora of options suited to personal tastes. Parishoners are treated like customers with great emphasis on 'guest experience.' Whether in person or online, the church desires to provide a 'taste' of what coming to this particular church 'feels like.' The feeling is similar to the food court employees handing out toothpick samplers to entice passers-by.

In the modern American church marketplace, bringing the unchurched to faith in Christ is wed to attracting and retaining existing Christians. This balancing act is difficult to maintain with the ministry to insiders many times displacing the mission to outsiders. Historically, the church's institutional structure has taken many forms, currently emphasizing a western attractional embodiment. There may be periods when it is necessary to deconstruct the institution to regain the movement. There are also potential ways to give the movement a stronger voice and role in the current expressions of the church.

Recovering the Church Movement Sent by the Spirit

The gospel of John recounts the appearance of Jesus and his affirmation of their mission, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."[27] Jesus' gifting of the Spirit for mission reveals the necessary elements: people and the Holy Spirit to empower them. As time and history passed many other elements adhered to the church's identity. Locations, buildings, hierarchy, and doctrine all began to bind themselves to the expressions of the movement. Lesslie Newbigin describes his first years on the mission field in India in which most gatherings were rural, street based, with Hindus and Muslims listening in. He reflects,

> "So I got the sense of the church not as something drawn out of the world into a building, but as something sent out into the world. And the operative word in our text is the word "as" in the sentence "As the Father sent me, so I send you."[28]

The identity of the American church seems closer to the former (something drawn out of the world into a building) and is less like the latter. The ekklesia as an incarnational movement is necessary to foster a missionary encounter with culture.

The American church's difficulties are at least partially tied to cultural shift and missional drift. Rather than engage our culture with the gospel we attempt to fit the gospel into our culture.[29] Newbigin described our need for an Archimedian point at which we might see correctly and speak to the culture,

> "How can we, who are part of this culture, find a standpoint from which we can address a word, the word of the gospel, to our culture? Archimedes said: Give me a point outside of the earth and with a lever I will move the earth. Where is the Archimedean point from which we can challenge the culture of which we are ourselves a part?"[30]

An Archimedian point is required and available. With the shift of the "posts"

[27] John 19:23. NIV 2011.
[28] Lesslie Newbigin. *A Word in Season: Perspective on Christian World Missions.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), Chapter 6, Google Play Books.
[29] Ibid., Chapter 7.
[30] Ibid., Chapter 7.

(modern, Christian, Christendom) culture, the unraveling of various narratives, and the ravages of covid-19, the church appears poised at a crossroads in embodiment and practice. What may appear to be a disaster to some, might actually reveal what God is up to in the world around us.

Newbigin articulates the transition in viewpoint of the missionary with appropriate critical distance, who sees through a new pair of spectacles,

> "The question therefore is this: How can the European churches, whose life and thought is shaped so completely by this post-Enlightenment culture, become bearers of a mission to that culture?"[31]

We must note that our sense of loss related to the contemporary church is of a model for a particular period and context. The "missio dei" has never changed or wavered. God invites us to respond anew to His mission and reform its identity based on this truth.

Chapter 2 -- A Review of Literature in Church and Wesleyan Tradition

Introduction

[31] Ibid., Chapter 7.

The DNA of the Church (called out ones) is the Missio Dei of God animating, empowering, and sending it (people) into the world. Without the mission of God there is no church. People have constructed, organized, and implemented various structures over the centuries to fulfill and sustain the movement. In time, the contextual forms of the Church become elevated to an almost Biblical level of authority. Within the Church, conversations about change typically take on an air of defensiveness or self-preservation. The literature contends that the current structures of the Church (in America) are waning and that the Missio Dei (mission of God) sending the Church (movement) into the world should radically redefine (alter) any current or future structures of the Church. [32]

The development of a new paradigm for Wesleyan ecclesiology requires understanding the various expressions of the church over the centuries and recovering the roots of Wesley's theology and practice. A well-known Chinese proverb reads, 'If you want to know what water is don't ask the fish.'[33] Our western experience of Christianity is one of lifetime immersion which overwhelmingly shapes our current ecclesiological understanding.

Another common proverb is, "those who cannot remember the past are doomed to repeat it."[34] In the current context, one danger (among many) is attempting to forge new paths without a clue where one is on the map.

The COTN has encountered various threads and influences in recent years, revealing the lack of historical perspective and connection to our Wesleyan roots. Fundamentalism, the Great Reversal, and heavy reliance on the methods of the American

[32] "Radically redefine" may mean several things: Restructure, alter, or start over. The structure has taken many forms over the centuries. In some cases, it may be necessary to tear down and rebuild. The polity of the church should reflect the church as "movement" with a significant voice in direction and decision making.
[33] This proverb is quoted often by missiologist Lesslie Newbigin.
[34] Attributed by many to philosopher Georg Santayana in 1905.

Holiness Movement have obscured theological reflection built upon a genuine Wesleyan foundation.[35]

For some time now, Christianity has been declining in every Western context.[36] Where some would experience angst, others may see opportunity. Like driving a car, the goal of this chapter is to move forward with an eye on the rearview mirror to locate ourselves properly for the road ahead.

The COTN is one expression of the universal Church which is encountering a paradigm shift. Our ecclesiology has preceded our missiology far too often, which results in a disjointed understanding of identity. This literature review will first explore current research then turn to analysis and interpretation of the data moving toward the future.

The Early Church

The early Church began as a missionary movement in the world and under the reign of the Roman empire. This movement spread due to the deep conviction that God had come to earth in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and early disciples witnessed the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This group was called and empowered to become witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Luke notes that these disciples continued to look skyward rather than outward,

> They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."[37] (Acts 1:10-11, NIV 2011)

[35] The Great Reversal was noted in chapter 1. It was characterized by a shift from a holistic view of salvation to one which was primarily concerned with salvation from a spiritual perspective.
[36] Alan Hirsch. *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church*. (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 51.
[37] Acts 1:10-11, NIV 2011.

This text symbolizes one of the challenges of the Church over the centuries. The Church becomes preoccupied with looking in directions that are not vital to its mission.

The early Church singularly had God's mission taking it forward. In AD 100 there were approximately 25,000 Christians, and by AD 310 there may have been as many as 20,000,000. These Christians faced significant obstacles: their religion was illegal, they didn't have buildings, agreed-upon "scriptures other than the Old Testament, or formal leadership. It was challenging to be a Christian, and early Christians had to demonstrate commitment before joining the Church.[38]

These early believers faced numerous challenges from outside and within. The Roman empire and pagan religions were at odds with this newfound faith. From within, various views of Christ's incarnation and identity (heresies) arose to challenge the gospel's message. The work of the early church fathers in debate, council, and creed was necessary to the development of the Church. This illustrates a moment when the movement of Christianity needed structure (scaffolding) to further its mission. The problem arises when the structure hardens and becomes an obstacle (or bottleneck) to the movement.

Christendom

The current climate and context of Christianity in the West have led to an identity crisis. Christendom fueled a unique amalgamation of faith and culture which has now run out of gas. As Guder notes, "the gospel is always conveyed through the medium of

[38] Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 19.

culture."[39] Seismic cultural shifts over the previous decades have often been ignored or demonized rather than engaged by the Church.[40]

The practice of sending missionaries to foreign lands to share the gospel was appropriate and necessary in many instances. The glaring 'omission' lay in the detachment of mission from God's nature and a lack of understanding the Church's true nature as inherently missional. A church that is not missional is not a church.

Posts: Post-Christendom, Post-Modern, Post-Christian

The radical shifts in our context have revealed an ever-widening gap between the gospel and western culture. The assumptions and models of the Church are now contested. The world today is described by various descriptive 'post' (modern, Christian, Christendom) perspectives. People encountered today may be skeptical about faith but are more likely to engage with imaginative Christians. Guder describes this reality,

> "The obvious fact that what we once regarded as Christendom is now a post-Constantinian, post-Christendom, and even post-Christian mission field stands in bold contrast today with the apparent lethargy of established church traditions in addressing their new situation both creatively and faithfully." [41]

Pew Research Center's most recent sketch of the landscape shows that about three of every ten adults in America is a "none" or a person who claims no religious affiliation. People who self-identify as Christian make up 63% of the population down from 75% ten years ago (see figure 1). [42] The statistics related to church attendance and engagement are similarly in decline.

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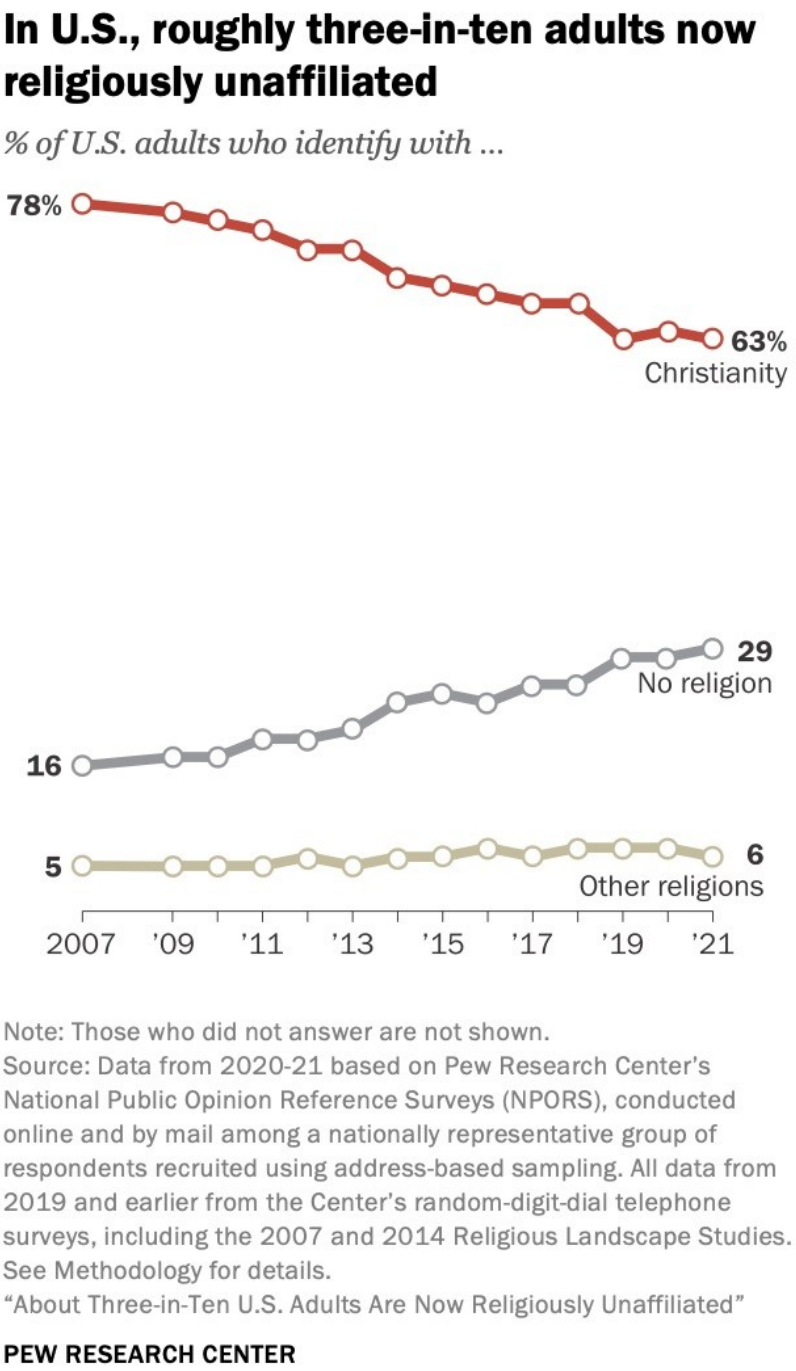
[39] Darrell L. Guder (Ed.). *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America.* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 18.

[40] Personal experience with legalism and spiritualization of many things. The author attended a youth revival in which "music backward masking" was explored and burning of tapes and cd's displayed religious commitment.

[41] Guder, *Missional Church*, 7.

[42] "About Three-in-Ten U.S. Adults Are Now Religiously Unaffiliated." Pew Research Center. https://www.pewforum.org/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/ (Accessed 1.18.22)

Figure 1



While much of the news is bleak, there is hope in our context. Kinnamon and Matlock explore characteristics of resilient disciples who describe their journey in 'exilic' terminology. Ten percent of young Christians (18-29) are resiliently faithful. These three elements characterize them:

- "I want to find a way to follow Jesus that connects with the world I live in.
- God is more at work outside the Church than inside, and I want to be a part of that.
- I want to be a Christian without separating myself from the world around me."[43]

In addition most of these young adults are committed to "help the church change its priorities to be what Jesus intended it to be (76%)."[44] Research suggests that missional leaders are not alone in the journey to bring formational change. The local Church should welcome these contributors and join in leadership for the road ahead.

Church in Christendom and Crisis

The Church in post World War II America appeared poised for unlimited growth. The boom in economy, babies, and suburbs fed church expressions and expansion. There was a 'build it and they will come' mindset assuming that most of the population was interested in finding a suitable church and the key was in being 'attractive' to newcomers. In time, the 'attractional' model of Church came to dominate the minds of church leaders and feed the growing consumer impulse. This attractional mindset is in direct contrast to the 'missional' model of Church rooted in the "missio dei."

The growth and optimism of the period led to the organization and structure of the Church in denominations. This model of church organization relied on a corporate-type system with departments assigned to various areas of oversight. In this organizational approach, the missional ethos is easily displaced becoming one 'arm' of the entity. The role of mission (missiology) became the institution's 'department of foreign affairs' addressing outreach to other parts of the world.[45]

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[43] David Kinnamon and Mark Matlock. *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon.* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019), Start Here (Introduction), Google Play Books.
[44] Ibid., Introduction.
[45] David J. Bosch. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* Second Edition. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), Chapter 12 (Mission Marginalized), Google Play Books.

Before, during, and immediately following the war, the cultural norm was general agreement in faith and values. Most would have agreed that these values applied to society whether the citizens were religious or not. The primary religion post-war was Judeo-Christian belief.[46] Many now describe this type of faith as a civil religion or nominal Christianity. Religion and public life were closely linked. A study conducted in 1946 identified 2 out of every three people attended church services once a month and 42% every week. Wuthnow notes that President Truman speaking in Ohio in 1946 declared, 'no problem on this earth' was tough enough to withstand 'the flame of a genuine renewal of religious faith.'

The decade of the 1960s was pivotal as large groups of people moved counter-culturally against the dominant narratives of society. The civil rights movement ran counter to the inherited divisions of race and discrimination. The perceived battle of democracy vs. communism was at its height in the 1960's in the Cuban missile crisis and the Vietnam War. The bloodshed over the ideology of protecting democracy brought massive turmoil as people pushed back against this seemingly endless conflict. The baby boomers that came of age in the 1960s revolutionized the relationship of culture, values, and personal choice. The hippie movement, sexual revolution, and other movements in the 1960s were expressions of the new mantra, which was 'question everything.' The decade of the 1960s led to multiple tectonic shifts in society, assumptions of authority, and rejection of dominant narratives.[47]

The Elusive / Radical / Enigmatic / Subversive Mr. Wesley

[46] Robert Wuthnow. *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since WWII*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 15.
[47] Hugh McLeod. *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*. (New York: Oxford, 2007).

Researching the Church, society and Wesley reveals unique points of connection or similarity along the way. At first glance, one might wonder how a mid-18th century evangelist would resonate in current context. What one discovers, however, is that there is much in common. John Wesley became the leader of a Christian movement at odds with the current institutional form of Church. The formal Church barely tolerated him preaching in the fields, organizing groups, and conducting ministry. Wesley desired to reform his Church, yet the Church stood either in sheer apathy or direct opposition. The moniker 'methodist' was not a compliment.

Wesley's biographers and interpreters agree on the central elements of his life, ministry, and theology. Many of his peers called him an 'enthusiast', 'radical', or 'elusive.'[48] Howard Snyder understands Wesley as a radical reformer correlated to the Anabaptist tradition. Another Wesleyan scholar, Frank Baker, describes Wesley's goal as not attempting to "formulate a new doctrine of the church but to remedy its decadence."[49] The sources of his ecclesiology were "the Catholic tradition mediated through Anglicanism and the Radical Protestant tradition mediated mainly through the Moravians."[50] He held a unique blend of high church Anglicanism practically embodied in groups that nurtured radical faith. Baker notes the development in Wesley's ecclesiology after Georgia and Aldersgate with experience added to the Anglican emphases on scripture, reason, and antiquity (tradition). [51] Albert Outler coined the phrase "Wesleyan quadrilateral" to describe these four sources of Wesley's theology. Snyder proposes adding a fifth element to include Wesley's emphasis on the created order.[52]

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[48] Howard Snyder. *The Radical Wesley: The Patterns and Practices of a Movement Maker*. (Franklin, TN: Seedbed Pub., 2014), Chapter 9.
[49] Ibid., Introduction.
[50] Ibid., 81.
[51] Ibid. 84.
[52] Ibid., 84-85.

Frank Baker has been described as a “meticulous antiquarian” hunting down details in meticulous fashion in studying Wesley.[53] Albert Outler has been characterized as a “swashbuckling, hang-glider researcher” continually scanning for new trends with a vast reservoir of knowledge.[54] Richard Heitzenrater is someone of the next generation who is a master of detail, sources, and history of Wesley’s work.

A common thread throughout the study of Wesley is in his commitment to the renewal of the Church. A well known Latin phrase, “*ecclesia semper reformanda,* simply means ‘a church [isl always in need of reform.’ In other words, renewal is a permanent task of the community of faith.”[55] As previously noted, Outler summarizes Wesley’s efforts to reform the Church by the performance of its mission. Significant tension existed between Wesley’s ministry and the Church of England. This tension could have erupted into a full-scale schism if not for his commitment to the Church in principle while subverting it in practice. Renewal efforts naturally create tension with the existing organization. Snyder describes the potential paths for these tensions,

> “Depending partly on the radicality of the charismatic group and its critique of the institutional Church and partly on the response or reaction from the institutional Church, the renewal group will either: (1) form a totally separate body or sect; (2) dry up and blow away; or (3) strike a deal with the institutional Church which allows it some autonomy in exchange for its recognition of the authority and validity of the institutional powers that be. Again, which of these options occurs depends not just on the spiritual temperature of the renewing body, but also on other factors, and on the response or reaction of the institutional Church to the would-be renewers.”[56]

Wesleyan ecclesiology embodies and informs the church's charismatic and subsequent structural forms necessary for the current context. Dr. Joseph Beaumont described Wesley’s unique relationship to the Church (of England): ‘Mr. Wesley, like a strong and

[53] William J. Abraham. “The End of Wesleyan Theology.” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, Vol. 40, Number 1, (2005), 7.
[54] Ibid., 7.
[55] Paul W. Chilcote (Ed.) *The Wesleyan Tradition: A Paradigm for Renewal*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press., 2002), 25.
[56] Ibid., 140-141.

skillful rower, looked one way, while every stroke of his oar took him in the opposite direction.'[57] Wesley existed in between these two tensions: " 'The one, I dare not separate from the Church, that I believe it would be a sin so to do; the other, that I believe it would be a sin not to vary from it in ... cases of necessity.'"[58] The many students of Wesley attempt to describe this tension with summary monikers such as "the Radical Wesley (Snyder), Reasonable Enthusiast (Rack), the Elusive Mr. Wesley (Heitzenrater), or Methodist (disapproving British onlookers), etc.

Richard Heitzenrater describes Wesley's work as helping "consolidate the work of the Methodists and Moravians within the structures provided by the Church of England."[59] This was undoubtedly Wesley's intention early on but does not consider the development of Wesley's ecclesiology toward the end of his ministry. Heitzenrater cautions the reader to understand that Wesley lived through most of the 17th century and went through a significant transformation as an individual and as leader of a movement.

The reality of the Church's resistance to significant reformation was surely evident to Wesley later in life. Kenneth Collins notes Wesley's reluctance to leave the Church of England, although he was practical enough to prepare for this possibility.[60] Wesley's Deed of Declaration (1784) sought to elevate the legal status of methodist societies and ensure their continuation after his death.[61] He ordained ministers in Scotland (1785) and then finally in England (1788). The English ordinations of Alexander Mather, Henry Moore, and Thomas Rankin signify the practical necessity of leadership for the methodist

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[57] Frank Baker. *John Wesley and the Church of England*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), 2.
[58] Ibid., 2.
[59] Jason Vickers. *Wesley: A Guide for the Perplexed*. (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 17.
[60] Jason Vickers and Randy Maddox. *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley.* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 57.
[61] Samuel J. Rogal. "Legalizing Methodism: John Wesley's Deed of Declaration and the Language of the Law." *Methodist History*, 44:2 (January 2006) http://archives.gcah.org/pdfpreview/bitstream/handle/10516/6651/MH-2006-January-Rogal.pdf?sequence=1

movement.[62] The mature Wesley was thoroughly practical in his actions and responded boldly to missional needs.

Randy Maddox describes the shift in Wesley's lifetime to a functional ecclesiology focused on gathering God's people for support and accountability. His informal definition of the Church was the 'spiritual community of God's people.' As this definition suggests, Wesley's mature ecclesiology shifted the focus from the church as an institution to the Church as a community. The value of such a shift continues to draw attention in present ecclesiological discussion." [63]

These authors present Wesley from a variety of perspectives. Some read his ecclesiology from the 'established church' perspective, demanding that we see the Wesley who remained in the Church of England. Others like Snyder focus on Wesley's radical nature and reluctant break with the Church by necessity. This author has personally experienced a paradigm shift in discovering Wesley's character as a 'movement maker' with massive ecclesiological implications. The promise of returning to a 'Jesus movement' in our communities holds tremendous promise.

Potential Paths for Wesleyan Missional Ecclesiology

Missio Dei

The movement of Christianity lies in the activity of God, who has demonstrated his missional nature in His desire to "restore and heal creation."[64] It begins in the realm of the trinitarian discourse rather than soteriology or ecclesiology.

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[62] Vickers and Maddox. *The Cambridge Companion*, 58. Multiple Wesleyan scholars note these ordinations but there is little description of how these functioned in English methodism. There is some debate among Wesleyan scholars about these ordinations given Wesley's lifetime reluctance to separate from the Church of England. The weight of the events of the Christmas Conference, Deed of Declaration, and English ordinations seem to clearly show the mature Wesley accepting the necessity of giving further legitimacy to the methodist movement. These show a practical move to establish methodism for the future.

[63] Randy L. Maddox. *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology. (* Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), Chapter 9, Google Play Books.

[64] Guder. *Missional Church*, 13-14.

> "The classical doctrine of the *missio* Dei as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit [is] expanded to include yet another "movement": Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the Church into the world."[65]

God imparts mission to and through the ekklesia ('called out ones') through the activity and power of the Spirit. Anywhere God is at work through gathering and sending people constitutes the Church.

Organization, structure, and leadership are undoubtedly helpful to the movement but only serve as scaffolding to empower the movement's work in the local context. The term 'scaffolding' denotes a temporary function with regular need for critique and reform. Scaffolding is used in new construction and the renewal of old structures. Employing the term here is an attempt to imagine a new way to understand our forms and treat them with necessary caution. Forms that are no longer effective often become obstacles (or bottlenecks) to God's mission. The Church is not the goal of the gospel but functions as its instrument and witness.[66]

Wine and Wineskins

A thorough Wesleyan ecclesiology distinguishes between the gospel, the Church, and culture. Jesus described a common understanding of his day when he said "No one puts new wine in old wineskins."[67] (Luke 5:7) Howard Snyder clarifies the separation between the two,

> "Jesus distinguishes here between something essential and primary (the wine) and something secondary but also necessary and useful (the wineskins). Wineskins would be superfluous without the wine."[68]

[65] Ibid., 14-15.
[66] Ibid., 14-15.
[67] Luke 5:7, NIV 2011.
[68] Howard Snyder. *Radical Renewal: The Problem of Wineskins Today.* (Wilmore, KY: First Fruits Press, 2015), 2.

The gospel is the vital, life-giving, essential element of the Church, and the wineskins are the "traditions, structures, and patterns of doing things that have grown up around the gospel."[69] Wesley certainly understood the challenges of flirting with new wineskins. In considering the possibility of church discipline, in 1755 he told Samuel Walker that he intended to stay with the Church of England but then said,

> "if the church interfered with itinerant preaching, extempore prayer, Methodist societies, or lay-preaching, he would have no alternative but to move out and accept the consequences."[70]

The existing tension between the methodist movement and the Church of England is evident in the literature. Synder, Baker and Monk all note how Wesley shifted in his view of the Church as functional rather than institutional. Wesley understood that his mission of holiness "took precedence over the laws, forms, and discipline of the church of England." [71]

Wesley endured significant criticism during his life and ministry. Near the end of his life Wesley responded to claims of his inconsistency when it came to the Church. He replies,

> "They cannot but think so, unless they observe my two principles: The one, that I dare not separate from the Church, that I believe it would be a sin so to do; the other, that I believe it would be a sin not to vary from it in the points above mentioned. I say, put these two principles together, First, I will not separate from the Church; yet, Secondly, in cases of necessity, I will vary from it, (both of which I have constantly and openly avowed for upwards of fifty years,) and inconsistency vanishes away. I have been true to my profession from 1730 to this day."[72]

[69] Ibid., 2.
[70] Vickers and Maddox. *The Cambridge Companion*, 64.
[71] Snyder, *Radical Wesley*, Chapter 6.
[72] Ibid., Chapter 6.

Wesley carefully retained this tension between movement and institution. When they were in conflict, the movement took precedence.

Contemporary missiologists examine these same tensions in a western context in which the Church is facing steep decline. What appears to be missing is the core missional identity embodied in the local Church with appropriate scaffolding for the current context. Many well-intentioned yet misguided efforts to renew or revitalize the Church are minor tweaks to a Christendom model.

Embracing Crisis (The Wineskin Crisis)

The western Church is faced with a wineskin crisis. This crisis has been masked by the temporary growth of a western model that relies on expansion and attraction. A corporate (top-down) mindset has taken the place of the local grassroots type movement. Pastors are often trained (past and present) to perpetuate this model rather than to become innovators in local communities.

At stake is the mission of God in the world and His Church as an extension of this mission. The Church continually embodies and examines its place in the world as a bearer of the gospel and the mission of God, which will encounter resistance. The strong resistance encountered by the early Church or the weak resistance of Christendom are simply varied modes of reaction by society. In fact, the Church is at its best when encountering resistance. David Bosch quotes Kraemer describing this challenge,

> "Strictly speaking, one ought to say that the Church is always in a state of crisis and that its greatest shortcoming is that it is only occasionally aware of it." This ought to be the case, Kraemer argued, because of "the abiding tension between (the church's) essential nature and its empirical condition" (:24f)."[73]

[73] Bosch, *Transforming*, Introduction.

Going further Kraemer describes the reality of failure and suffering required for the Church to continue to engage in its real nature and mission. Centuries of Christendom have allowed the Church to feel 'crisis-free' leading to a false sense of security and accomplishment. Any sense of "crisislessness" in the Church today is simply delusional.[74]

Current literature in missiology examines this crisis repeatedly but all share hope in the future of the Christian movement. Many (Hirsch, Roxburgh, Guder and others) articulate the severity of this crisis but also find that God is at work outside of the Church in Spirit-led movement. It is important to ask God-centered questions (theocentric) rather than church-centered questions (ecclesiocentric).

Community: Bands and Classes

The heartbeat of Wesley's movement was in the organization of bands and classes. The classes were larger units and bands were smaller more intimate groups within the classes. Class meetings were similar to house churches in various neighborhoods in which converts lived. They met weekly, reported on their spiritual progress, shared needs, and regularly prayed together. The class meeting produced conversions, disciples, and local revivals that broke forth from sharing the Spirit in community. The literature that explores Wesley's life and thought consistently notes the importance of the band and class system.

There is synergism that exists in healthy churches between the work of God and the outflow of the Spirit in various ways through the body. The heartbeat of the organism (body of Christ) is embodied in gathering, worship of God, and the power of witness. Howard Snyder describes the nature of Wesleyan witness which "springs not only from

[74] Ibid., Introduction.

Jesus' specific commission (Mt. 28:19-20; Acts 1:8) but also from the impulse of Pentecost and the dynamic of Christian community life."

A Wesleyan Synthesis

One of the primary goals of this paper is to attempt to achieve a Wesleyan synthesis (via media) between movement and institution, which prioritizes the current work of God in our time. The unique situation Wesley encountered in England led to radical innovation outside of the traditional norms of the day. Wesley's ministry was an annoyance to the established Church, yet he was never disciplined or expelled from the Church of England. Methodist societies were never officially recognized by the Church. Snyder describes Wesley's sense of balance,

> "In maintaining both the charismatic and the institutional dimensions of the Church, with the primary accent on the charismatic, the Wesleyan synthesis did not flee from history into pure existentialism but kept the present tied to the past. Methodism sought to be neither above history nor shackled by tradition. This was the basis for Wesley's seeing Methodism as *ecclesiola in ecclesia*—the charismatic community (not entirely unstructured) within the institutional Church (not entirely devoid of grace)."[75]

Holistic

The literature reveals Wesleyan theology's holistic nature, which begins in the heart of the creative God who loves humanity and attempts to woo creation back in loving ways throughout the Biblical narrative. From the first tree in the garden of Eden (Genesis) to the tree for the healing of the nations (Rev. 21), God's mission is evident ultimately in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. God's intention is not to destroy creation but to redeem it.

[75] Ibid., 151-152.

The holistic nature of theology includes a thoroughly holistic anthropology. As noted by Bryan Stone, the kingdom of God is "fundamentally holistic. Jesus simply does not, in practice, carve human beings up into dimensions of "body" and "soul."[76] The character of a Wesleyan movement begins in prevenient grace, culminates in glorification, and compassionately embraces all elements of life in between.

The incarnation reframes everything we know about the divine / human relationship. God's purpose is not to provide an escape from the world for Christians but to invite our participation in the redemption of creation. We participate as "brothers and sisters together in the holistic restoration of human dignity, purpose, and meaning."[77] Salvation is for this life, this body, this context and this world. The Church should embody and pursue restoration in the image of God.

Authentic spirituality is not lived in isolation or retreat but in being fully engaged with the world. Wesleyan thought refutes all forms of dualism which might lead to practices of compartmentalization. Spiritual life is not isolated to church gatherings but is active whether we work, shop, celebrate, or mourn. Wesleyans understand that the grace of God is always active and at work before, during, and after all they do.

Commitment

All theology is contextual. The recent history of European (N. Atlantic) theology has been detached (at least partially) from the local Church's work in theory and practice. This reality is evident when considering the marginalized who encounter the text in poverty rather than power. As Jesus was committed to the poor, powerless, and sick in a

[76] Bryan P. Stone. *Compassionate Ministry: Theological Foundations*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Pub., 1996), 77.
[77] Stone, *Compassionate Ministry*, 83.

specific context so must we be committed to the local expressions of the body of Christ. When the Church embodies its theology and mission, there is cause for celebration. When the Church fails to live out its ethos and embody the character of Christ, necessary work in theology and praxis is required. Mildred Wynkoop described the Church of the Nazarene's 'credibility gap' existing between witness and practice. The church continually re-examines itself in identity and witness.[78]

In considering Wesley, it is vital to realize that his belief and praxis rested in a firm commitment to the gospel (wine). The literature on Wesley's life and ministry is filled with his complete devotion to God, people, and parish. Without commitment, theology becomes a detached 'ivory tower' type enterprise.

Imagination (Agility)

Wesleyan ecclesiology is committed to the wine and is open to a variety of wineskins (forms). The literature is replete with emphasis on the gospel and the nature of Wesley's movement with appropriate scaffolding (structures) for the work.[79] In the COTNs most comprehensive systematic theology Dunning summarizes what the literature reveals,

> "The functional nature of the Church takes priority over the form of the Church and dictates the institutional characteristics. In the Early Church, practices were adopted that furthered the mission, and those that did not were abandoned. "Form was important only as it served function."[80]

While some leaders might feel the burden of attempting to save the current form of institution, others will find this liberating. The creativity of God unleashed will form new

[78] Mildred Bangs Wynkoop. *A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism*, Second Edition. (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2015).
[79] I use the term "scaffolding" because it denotes the temporary nature of structure especially when it comes to various iterations of the church.
[80] H. Ray Dunning. *Grace, Faith and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology*. (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1988), 536.

expressions of the body of Christ. The literature consisitently reveals Wesley's innovative nature and creativity in spreading the gospel. Wesley demonstrated creativity and agility in preaching, teaching, and organization of bands, classes and society. While committed to the Church of England, he engaged in the ministry practice completely outside of its structure. It is important that Wesleyan theology remains open to the creativity of God and the imaginative question, 'what could be?'

Definition of Key Terms:

Spirituality in Current Context:

Defining "spirituality" has become a contested enterprise. A universal theme in the literature is in the shift from the locus of spirituality from the institution to the individual. The origins of this movement can be traced to the protestant reformation as well as to the enlightenment period. Also a sociologist, Robert Wuthnow describes the shift in terms of the way people engage the "sacred." Rather than shifts in society or morality, he explores how spirituality was once deeply connected to "inhabiting sacred places" and has shifted to a spirituality of "seeking."[81] People are now more likely to "negotiate through competing glimpses of the sacred, seeking partial knowledge and practical wisdom."[82] A spirituality of dwelling is focused on habitation and one of seeking in negotiation. Robert P. Jones describes spirituality as "feeling connected to something larger than oneself for his research."[83]

[81] Robert Wuthnow. *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950's.* (Berkeley: University of California Press. 1998), 3.
[82] Ibid., 3.
[83] Jones, Raney and Cox. "Searching for Spirituality in the U.S.: A New Look."

Culture:

Defined by Newbigin as "the sum total of ways of living built up by a human community and transmitted from one generation to another."[84]

Hierarchism and Jurisdictionism:

"Hierarchism and jurisdictionism are instances of structure-centrism, which takes hold when the ecclesial structures cease to serve the mission of the church and become an ends in themselves Then the church becomes subject to its own structures, which reproduce and sustain themselves instead of serving the people of God."[85]

Institutionalism:

Avery Dulles describes the nature of church organization in contrast to institutionalism. He says, "By institutionalism we mean a system in which the institutional element is treated as primary. From the point of view of this author, institutionalism is a deformation of the true nature of the Church—a deformation that has unfortunately affected the Church at certain periods of its history, and one that remains in every age a real danger to the institutional Church. A Christian believer may energetically oppose institutionalism and still be very much committed to the Church as institution."[86]

Synergy:

Alan Hirsch describes the working of dynamic systems. He argues that we must break the habit of linear thinking in order to understand synergy. He says, " In a system, all the

[84] Guder, *Missional Church*, 9.
[85] Cyril, Hovorun. *Scaffolds of the Church: Towards Poststructural Ecclesiology*. (Cambridge: James Clark & Co., 2017), 190-191.
[86] Avery Dulles. *Models of the Church*. (New York: Doubleday, 2002), Chapter 2.

disparate elements are dynamically and irrevocably interrelated and interdependent. Everything is happening at once. In systems we learn to see things in terms of their wholeness, to sense the synergy that derives from interconnectness, and not to see simply each element as an isolated individual part.**"**[87]

Scaffolding (vs. Structure):

The idea of scaffolding is introduced here as a more helpful term rather than "structure." Scaffolding is used in building a new structure or the remodeling of an older one. It is temporary and allows one to create something new or refurbish the old. In the field of education, scaffolding is used in Vygostky's Zone of Proximal Development. This technique assists the learner to achieve something that is outside of their current knowledge or ability. Scaffolding communicates that the current project is a "work in progress" and needs development.

It is evident throughout the literature that people become tied to fixed systems and view them as permanent rather than temporary or for a period of time. It would appear to be advantageous to speak of models of the Church as "temporary" rather than "fixed."

Movement:

The ekklesia ("called out ones") was an assembly or gathering for a purpose in the Greek world. This term described the gathering of the first followers of Jesus. They were a group of people whose religion was illegal, had no buildings, professional clergy, etc. They were in every possible way a movement of Christians taking the gospel to the world

[87] Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 287-289.

around them. Over the centuries the movement has been organized and structured in various ways.

Christendom:

Hugh McLeod's definition serves as helpful. "Christendom may be described as a society were there are close ties between leaders of the church and secular elites; where the laws purport to be based on Christian principles; where, apart from certain clearly defined outsider communities, everyone is assumed to be Christian; and where Christianity provides a common language, shared alike by the devout and by the religiously lukewarm. In the 1940s and 1950s aspects of Christendom survived, though with varying degrees of vigour, in all parts of the Western world. But for more than two centuries there had been a process of erosion, as Christian doctrine and moral teachings faced significant challenge, as a variety of religious options became available, and new secular ideologies (sometimes with state backing) tried to take the place of Christianity and the Church."[88]

Learning Organization vs. Performance Organization:

David Hurst makes a persuasive argument in identifying the move from being a learning organization to a performance organization. He describes the transitions from being hunters to herders and describes the following shifts.[89]

- Mission Becomes Strategy – Success breeds repetition.
- Roles Become Tasks – Passion shifts to job descriptions and performance.

[88] Hugh McLeod. *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s.(*Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2007), 18.
[89] David K. Hurst. *Crisis and Renewal: Meeting the Challenge of Organizational Change*. (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1995), 32-52.

- Teams Become Structure – Production requires predictability and hierarchy.
- Networks Become Organization – Thick information is replaced by thin (systems). Organization and environment are separated.
- Recognition Becomes Compensation – The informal personal rewards are replaced by formal objective compensation systems.

See diagrams on following page.

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Figure 2–1 A Learning Organization

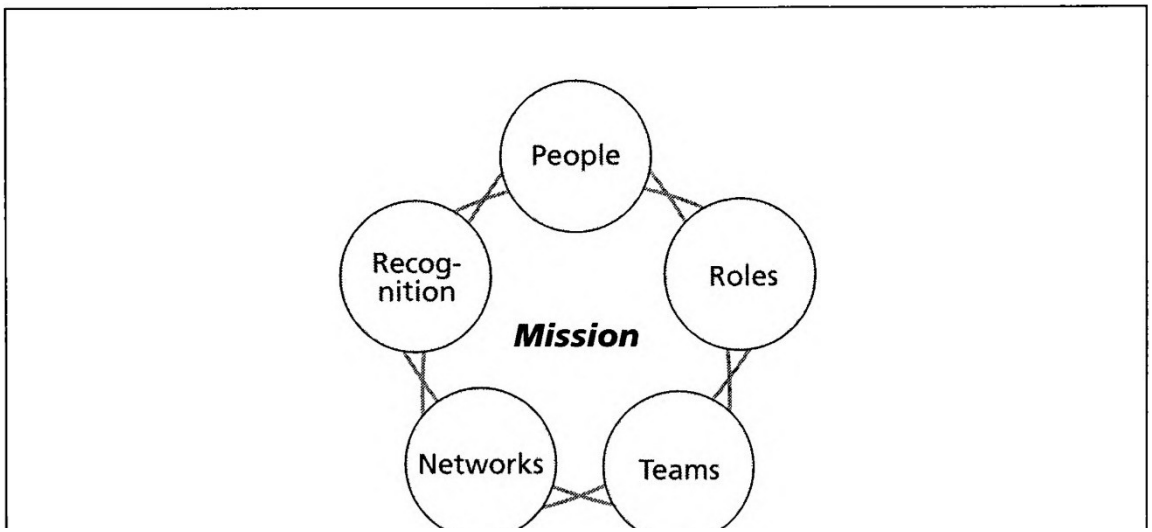
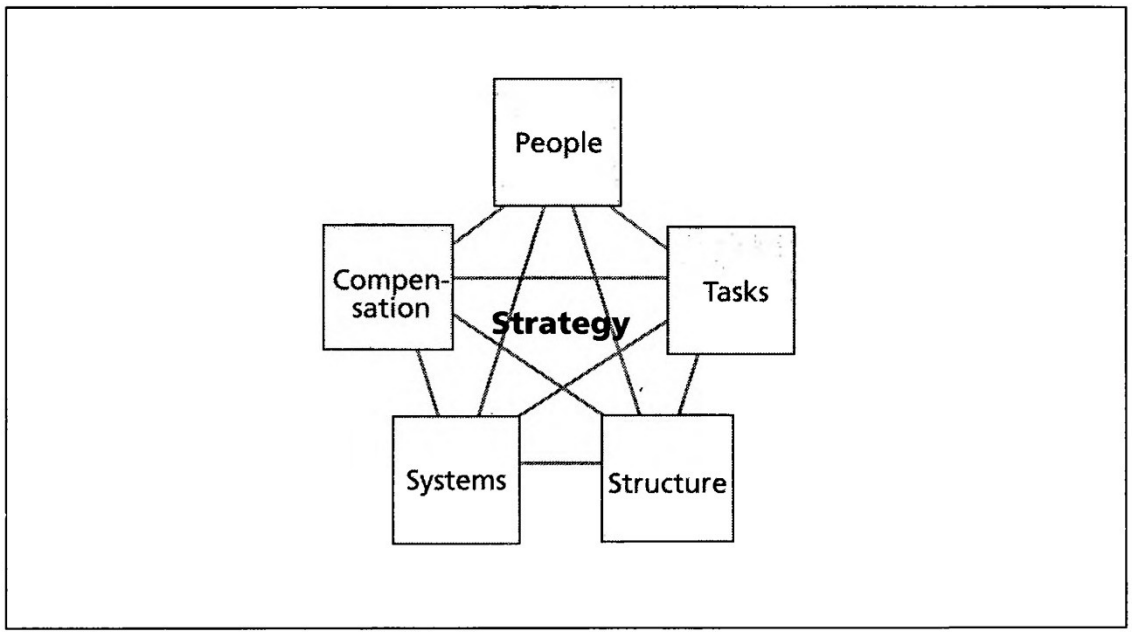


Figure 2–2 A Performance Organization



Wesley said, “A more ambiguous word than this, the *Church,* is scarce to be found in the English language.”[90] The challenge in understanding and articulating the theological and practical nature of the church remains.

H. Ray Dunning describes the task,

> “The chief difficulty in formulating a theological doctrine of the Church is the intricate commingling of historical, sociological, and institutional factors with the theological. It is all but impossible to speak of the church without conjuring up elements that are accidental to the essence of "church."[91]

Any attempts to reclaim or recover the essence of the church are entangled with these factors. This chapter aims to speak of the church as a movement with awareness of diverse understandings of the church over the centuries. In particular, how this movement is recovered and articulated from a Wesleyan perspective. While not exhaustive, the purpose of this chapter is to explore a Wesleyan ecclesiological perspective on the nature of church as movement.

The Goodness of Creation

The beginning of the story of humanity as well as the church is located in the creative activity of God. God’s creative intention and purpose is evident in its inherent “goodness.” Genesis 1:31 declares,

> “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.”[92]

The original state of the inherent goodness of creation is a revelation of divine perspective and is vital to all aspects of theology. Prevenient grace is evident in creation

[90] John Wesley, Sermon 74, “Of the Church,” paragraph 1, in *The Sermons of John Wesley*, Wesley Center online, http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-74-of-the-church/

[91] H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology*. (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1988), 506.

[92] NIV 2011.

albeit distorted by the effects of sin in the world. The image of God in humanity is both lost in one sense although retained in another. Sin describes humanity as separated from God yet capable of being reshaped into the image of God through the extension of grace, salvation and sanctification. The Holy Spirit works in creation and ipeople drawing them to knowledge of God. The good creation announces the reality of God's love for His creatures.

As Israel was created and called as a people of God, the church is a creation of the Holy Spirit in synergy with humankind in His image. The church is the incarnation of the Holy Spirit in the world, taking on of flesh for the purpose of mission in specific concrete settings. It is a good creation of God yet sometimes drifts from the path that God intended. The nature of our missional God is expressed in His activity to redeem and restore creation and He sends the church for that purpose.

The following chapters articulate the need to recover the church as a "movement" and ministry in a particular place or "parish." Eugene Peterson speaks of God's creation and significance of "place",

> "Everything that the Creator God does in forming us humans is done in place. It follows from this that since we are his creatures and can hardly escape the conditions of our making, for us everything that has to do with God is also in place. All living is local: this land, this neighborhood, these trees and streets and houses, this work, these people."[93]

The goodness of creation and connection to local places gives opportunity for the church to engage in its parish. Creation, prevenient grace, and the church are all expressions of God's love and intention to restore humanity in the image of God.

[93] Eugene H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*. (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 2005), Chapter 1, Google Play Books.

Wesleyan theology and praxis is wholistically concerned about the restoration of humankind and the restoration of the world.

Election for Mission

God moves from the creation of the world to that of a people who are in a relationship with Him and elected for witness. The concept of election has often been characterized as chosenness (privilege) rather than responsibility.[94] In contrast, the promise given to Abraham is the first "great commission" given in scripture. Abraham was not only chosen for salvation but to go and to fulfill God's mission by being a blessing to the nations. The story of Abraham blends the dynamics of election, ethics, and purpose as he lived in obedient witness to God. We are ambassadors who represent God to those around us. The post-creation realities of the fall, the flood, and the tower of Babel necessitate the call, election and obedience of Abraham. Abraham's willingness to go and be a blessing to the nations while overcoming obstacles along the way is a powerful image for us. The idea of "divine election" has often been hijacked in the service of individualism and specific versions of eschatology. The election of a people is for purpose not privilege.[95]

> The Apostle Paul describes election in the context of the church:
>
> "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."[96]

God has chosen (all) to become conformed to the image of Christ and to be the firstborn among many.

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[94] Dunning, Grace Faith and Holiness, 508.

[95] Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission:* (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 2010), Chapter 4, Google Play Books.

[96] Romans 8:28-29, NIV 2011.

The movement of the narrative of scripture is from the original creation to new creation consummated in the declaration of Revelation 21:5,

"I am making everything new!"[97]

This election culminates in the redemption and reshaping of creation in the image of God.

Missio Dei

In the early 1900s a shift began to emerge through Karl Barth and other theologians who began to articulate mission as an attribute of God not an activity of the church. David Bosch summarizes this massive transition,

> "Indeed, Barth may be called the first clear exponent of a new theological paradigm which broke radically with an Enlightenment approach to theology (cf Küng 1987:229). His influence on missionary thinking reached a peak at the Willingen Conference of the IMC (1952). It was here that the idea (not the exact term) *missio Dei* first surfaced clearly. Mission was understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It was thus put in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology. The classical doctrine on the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another "movement": Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.[98]

Christopher J. H. Wright tells us, "It is not so much the case that God has a mission for his church in the world, as that God has a church for his mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission – God's mission."[99] Wright's thesis is that God is the source of our mission as the one who sends us and the content of our mission as we live in faithful witness.[100] The mission of God is the impetus for the creation and purpose of the church. The identity of the church must experience transformation to embody the witness of scripture to the purposes of God.

[97] Revelation 21:5, NIV 2011.
[98] Bosch, *Transforming*, Chapter 12.
[99] Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, Chapter 1.
[100] Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, Chapter 1.

The Holy Spirit - Prevenient Grace

This expression of mission is in step with the Wesleyan commitment to the prevenient grace of God. This commitment is optimistic about the residual good in the world and the hope for creation made new. While many faith communities speak of "getting into heaven" or "escaping the world", those with a Wesleyan perspective understand that God is using His people to be a part of the redemption of creation. There is a strong telos (purpose) for the people of God to be intimately engaged with the world.

The work of the Holy Spirit is another way of understanding prevenient grace. Diane Leclerc describes the synonymous nature of these two,

> "God's prevenient work is synonymous with the Spirit's activity. Technically for Wesley, the way of salvation begins with God's free gift of prevenient grace, given from the moment we are born. Prevenient grace is the presence and work of the Holy Spirit."[101]

The Holy Spirit creates the church, empowers it, animates it, and propels it toward fulfilling the missio dei of God. The Spirit and the church act synergistically in movement and mission.[102] Without the Spirit, there is no church.

Jesus' description of the work of the Spirit to Nicodemus illustrates the new paradigm of the work of God through the Spirit,

> The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."[103] (John 3:14, NIV 2011)

[101] Diane Leclerc and Mark A. Maddix, *Essential Church: A Wesleyan Ecclesiology*. (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2014), Chapter 5, Google Play Books.
[102] Ibid., Chapter 5.
[103] John 3:8, NIV 2011.

Christology → Missiology -> Ecclesiology

God's revelation or self-disclosure to humankind began in creation and in the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the election of Israel for God's missional purposes. Ultimately this revelation is completed in the person and work of Christ which finally reveals God fully in the incarnation. The life, ministry, death and resurrection of Christ validates God's self-revelation in to love to humanity. The task of theology begins and ends in the life, death and resurrection of Christ and without those elements there is no longer a need for theology.

Aldersgate transformed Wesley's head as well as his heart. In addition to personal assurance, Wesley began to emphasize spirituality beyond the traditional measures of the ecclesiastical norm. Soteriology became central in praxis and the lens for further theological reflection. Albert Lawson describes a shift in Wesley's thinking from rigid churchmanship to a flexible stance that responded to changing contexts.[104]

In this sense, we must place Christology as the foundational catalyst for missiology and ecclesiology. Mark Mann describes the need for this distinction:

> "If Christology is in some sense the true foundation of all Christian faith and theology, so also should Christology be the foundation for ecclesiology. Indeed, this is exactly what we find in Scripture, which is perfectly clear in giving priority to Christology in defining the fundamental nature of the church."[105]

According to this truth, there is an urgent need to reorient our theological perspective. Many in the western world have understood mission to be a function of the church (Christology →Ecclesiology-> Missiology). This understanding removes the initiative from God as missional and places it as a function of the church.

[104] Melvin E. Dieter and Daniel N. Berg, *The Church: Wesleyan Theological Perspectives Vol. 4*. (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1984), Part II, Google Play Books.
[105] Leclerc and Maddix. *Essential Church.* Chapter 4.

Hirsch and Frost describe the implications of this shift which should create a "continuous cycle of renewal for the church. They describe how purpose precedes modes: "It is Christ who determines our purpose and mission in the world (discipleship), and then it is our mission that must drive our search for modes of being-in-the-world."[106]

This reordering shifts the focus from the church "having a mission" to the "mission" (God's nature) having a church. This might appear to be a subtle shift yet speaks volumes in our understanding of the nature of God and ecclesiology. The church often finds itself in a place of ecclesiocentrism which places the church at the center, rather than Christ.

The Life Cycle (Nature) of Movements

Hirsch and Frost trace the nature of movements and attempt to guide the reader to a clear understanding of the "movement" of Jesus in the New Testament.

> "It is perfectly true to say that all social groupings that have impact on either a local, national, or international level always begin with a form that sociologists call a movement. That is, there are some common characteristics that mark off the early phase of dynamic social movements that are distinct from the social structures of the later institutions that arise from them."[107]

The difficulty arises when the movement takes on organizational and institutional forms while the passion of the "movement" declines. The following charts illustrate this tension and where the authors argue is the potential for sustaining the movement.

[106] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come* 2nd Ed., (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), Chapter 1, Google Play Books.
[107] Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping*, Chapter 12.

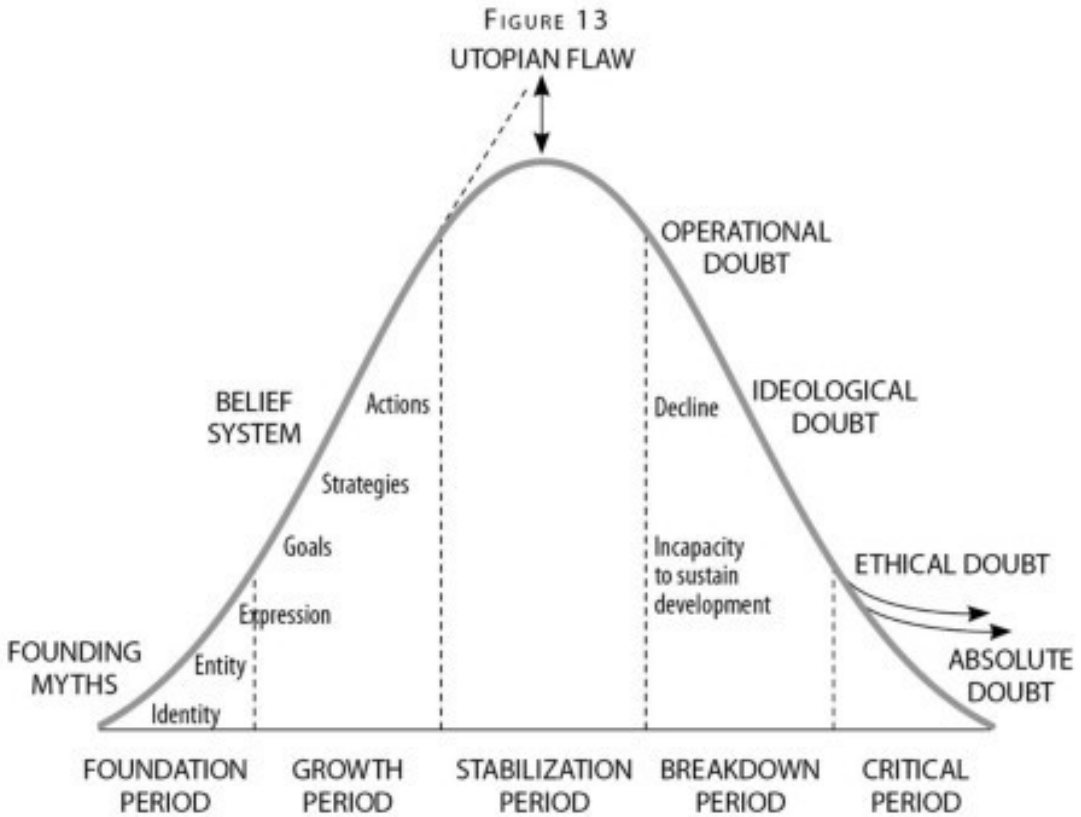
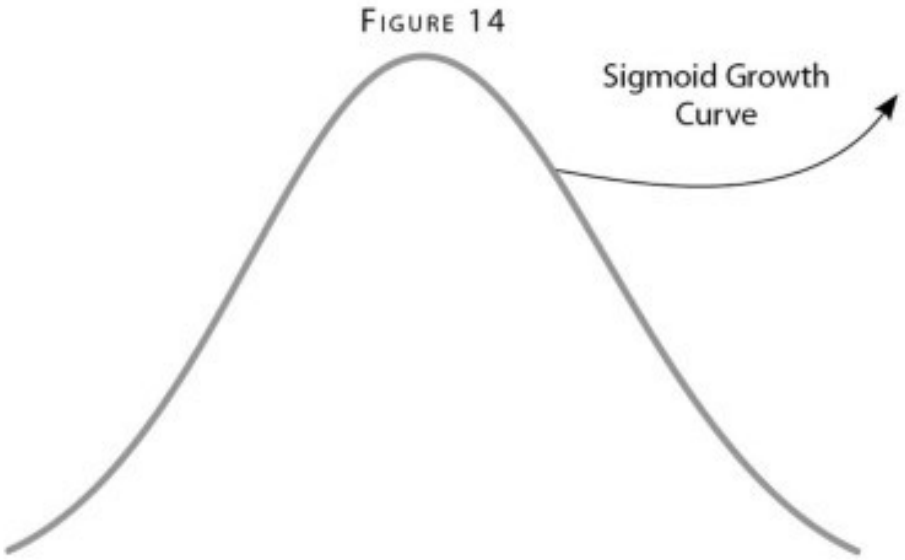


FIGURE 13
UTOPIAN FLAW
OPERATIONAL DOUBT
BELIEF SYSTEM
Actions
Strategies
Goals
Expression
Entity
Identity
FOUNDING MYTHS
Decline
IDEOLOGICAL DOUBT
Incapacity to sustain development
ETHICAL DOUBT
ABSOLUTE DOUBT
FOUNDATION PERIOD
GROWTH PERIOD
STABILIZATION PERIOD
BREAKDOWN PERIOD
CRITICAL PERIOD
Based on "Management Studies" by Robert Hoover, David Rumkorff, John Sherwood, Bruce Roger, et al.

[108]



Movements are characterized by intense passion, fluidity, nontraditional leadership, and typically exist at the margins and among common folk. They usually begin with a strong sense of mission, renewal and quickly captivate followers. They operate outside of the existing order and many times experience friction from the

[108] Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping,* Chapter 12.

established organization. The authors argue that churches should attempt to achieve "sigmoid growth" to continue to leverage the power of the movement as a vital part of the church going forward.[109]

Local Congregations in America Post WWII: Church as "Dwelling" or "Inhabiting Sacred Spaces"

Europeans settled America and created spaces for God in their new land, imbuing sacred spaces with significant power. In that context, community life often revolved around the church, and people expressed spirituality through the local church body. The local church in colonial America was viewed as a "sacred fortress" and the young nation as a sacred space with spirituality and identity "forged together."[110] Democracy and Judeo-Christian values were to be spread to the world from this fortress with communism (and possibly other religions) buffeted away.

The dynamic growth of the church in America post WWII naturally led to organization and structure. Post World War II, America thrived with the development of families, communities and churches. Os Guinness describes three pillars of stability in 1950s America: small-town life, congregations, and Americanism. All three of these created their own "sacred space."[111] Spirituality became tightly identified with location "in which one's selfhood was defined."[112] Interestingly Herbert described 1950s Americans' religiousness as a way of belonging rather than a way of following Christ or being shaped into the image of God. Faithfully attending church often defined Christianity rather than conformity to the character of Christ.

[109] Frost and Hirsch. *The Shaping*, Chapter 12.
[110] Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, 39.
[111] Ibid., 27.
[112] Ibid., 39.

The idea of home is prominent when describing the local congregation. It is connected to the idea of belonging and that God provides people with sacred space where they can dwell with Him and each other. Some become enamored with traveling to other sacred places and spaces to enhance their spiritual lives. Architect Thomas Bender writes,

> "What is significant about sacred places turns out *not* to be the places themselves." The power of sacred places, he argues, is their capacity to marshal an individual's inner resources and to strengthen that person's convictions.[113]

Spirituality, for many, becomes a quest to find or create a sense of sacred space.[114] Rather than embracing the identified communal sacred space, one can sacralize places throughout their world as they live life. The sense of space is still important in spirituality even though its meaning has been redefined and relocated. The significant shift came in the 1960s with a newfound sense of freedom to choose if, when, where, and why one should engage in spirituality. Spirituality came to mean something broad and open contrasted with religion becoming tied to structures and institutions.

Wuthnow's overall thesis in *After Heaven* is significant to the paradigm shifts in understanding spirituality and Western ecclesiology. He begins the discussion by declaring,

> "I am interested in the more subtle reordering that has taken place in how Americans understand the sacred itself. In brief, I argue that a traditional spirituality of inhabiting sacred places has given way to a new spirituality of seeking —that people have been losing faith in a metaphysic
> that can make them feel at home in the universe and that they increasingly negotiate among competing glimpses of the sacred, seeking partial knowledge and practical wisdom."[115]

[113] Ibid., 50.
[114] Ibid., 51.
[115] Ibid., 3.

This is ultimately the question faced in the current landscape of western spirituality and religious expressions. The rise of extreme individualism, consumerism, and detachment from traditional institutions certainly resonates with this negotiation spirituality.

Detaching from the Concrete of Christendom

Christendom is a way of describing the context of the church's dominant role in society from the conversion of Constantine to the current time. This period is filled with many expressions of the church in both positive and negative forms. The lingering effects of the narrative of Christendom is encountered in worldview, a posture toward culture, and a particular view of mission. The privileged place of the church in western culture has distorted its missional identity and practice. It has a very "fixed, very concrete, notion of the church—one normally associated with (distinctly designed) buildings, liturgies, denominational templates, and clergy. Its missional mode is primarily attractional / extractional rather than sending or incarnational." [116]

Christianity has assumed a place of priority at the authoritative faith of the culture. The post-WWII growth of the church led to expansion, structure, and hierarchy tied to a very specific model of church. The leaders of this expression of church are often focused on insiders (preaching to the choir) because those on the outside are no longer listening (if they ever were). Christendom has often led to a church that is focused on maintenance over mission.[117]

[116] Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping,* Chapter 1.
[117] Ibid., Ch. 1.

This perspective highlights the challenges faced in the current context of church in North America. The church is often in 'maintenance mode' and almost imperceptible in movement. Many await the culture to come to the church when God is moving around us in new and unique ways. This condition must be acknowledged and named to begin speaking of the church as "movement."

Institutionalization

In the post-WWII period religious leaders had "succeeded in rendering spirituality virtually equivalent to participating in a local congregation."[118] Compared to less than fifty percent in the 1900s, now over seventy-five percent of people claimed membership in a local body.[119] The optimism and enthusiasm toward the possibilities ahead were seemingly limitless.

The church perceived the need to connect and organize, leading to regional zones, district offices, and global headquarters. In the Nazarene tradition, the creation of districts, superintendents, global offices, etc. came as a result of expansive growth and desire to send missionaries all over the world. Regional colleges were formed with a desire to educate the young with a Christian worldview as well as train ministers to serve the church. These elements were deemed necessary for the continued growth of the church.

This process of institutionalization follows a western view of hierarchy and "top-down leadership" which has permeated the church. Frost and Hirsch describe the disconnect,

[118] Ibid., Ch. 1.
[119] Ibid., 30.

> "Third, the traditional church (Christendom) is hierarchical, deeply indebted to what we see as an overly religious, bureaucratic, top-down model of leadership, as opposed to one that is more structured around grassroots agendas. While some denominations are ideologically committed to a very top-down hierarchical model that includes archbishops, bishops, priests, and parish councils, others (who call themselves low church) are equally indebted to top-down approaches via regional superintendents, senior pastors, associate pastors, youth pastors, and deacons. From Pentecostals to the Orthodox Church, from Baptists to Episcopalians and Presbyterians, the hierarchical model seems to be universal. For how much longer can the church ignore Paul's radical dissolution of the traditional distinctions between priests and laity, between officials and ordinary members, between holy men and common people?"[120]

Many will appeal to their chosen structure as Biblically mandated especially when the system is under threat or lacks support. The evidence of structure in the early church is minimal and refers mainly to people in active ministry and has no organizational chart. It began as a movement of Christians who faced persecution, ridicule, and operated subversively in the shadow of empire.

As part of this development, the construction of buildings at specific locations became the norm in the life of a church in America. Many groups quickly outgrew their original meeting place and were too large for a home, leading to acquiring land and constructing a building. The wealth of Americans and the strength of commitment to the local church made these goals attainable. Robert Wuthnow describes this as a "spirituality of habitation of sacred spaces." The sacred space set aside at a particular location became a strong part of the spirituality of the American Christian. The locus of the movement became tied to attending rituals in the sacred space.

Transitions and Reforms

[120] Frost and Hirsch. *The Shaping*, Chapter 2.

The new paradigm of the work of the Spirit was unfamiliar and awkward for the first Christians who were familiar with various religious expressions. They now had to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit who came, filled, gave boldness, and cut people "to the heart."[121] The church is regularly confronted with the question, "How do we keep in step with the spirit?"[122] The growth of the church during the Post WWII period led to the creation of structure and hierarchy which inevitably led the organization to ask church-centered questions rather than God-centered questions.[123] In fact, many would argue that the church-centered questions became the primary questions. Amid the present "malaise" or "unraveling" of our experience of "church" there is an opportunity to discern what God might be up to in the world around us. Alan Roxburgh describes the posture we should take,

> "This space of unraveling is a space of hope. We are witnessing the Spirit preparing us for a new chapter in the story of God's mission. Our churches are at the end of a way of being God's people and at the beginning of something significantly different. It involves our awakening to an invitation that is not about fixing the church but a journey of exploration."[124]

The perceived dislocation felt in the church is palpable and unsettling. While the current form of church may appear to be dying, there remains the potential to recapture the movement of the church in synergy with the Holy Spirit's work around us in the world. Roxburgh, however, warns us, "More than adjustment, major change is required."[125] There will be some who want to "tinker" with the church's existing form and structure, hoping it will be enough to shift the church back into a mode of sustainment or growth. It is important to name that tendency and call it into serious question. The desire to hold on

[121] Acts 2:37, NIV 2011
[122] Galatians 5:25 "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.", NIV 2011.
[123] Roxburgh, *Joining God*, Introduction.
[124] Ibid., Chapter 1.
[125] Ibid., Chapter 1.

to church's current forms and expressions may inhibit our genuine discernment of the Spirit's work.

Another Biblical image is that of new wine requiring new wineskins. Roxburgh illustrates the metaphor describing the challenge: "our imaginations as Christians got stuck in particular ways of being God's people. We have poured our energy into trying to repair the old wineskins, while the Spirit was pointing us in a different direction."[126]

A Wesleyan ecclesiology should take precedence over various forms whether medieval, Anglican, American Holiness, or post-WWII expressions. Near the conclusion of the chapter on the church, H. Ray Dunning describes this reality,

> "The functional nature of the church takes priority over the form of the church and dictates the institutional characteristics. In the Early Church, practices were adopted that furthered the mission, and those that did not were abandoned. "Form was important only as it served function." A case in point appears to be the practice of communal ownership. The same principle should be applied to all church organization today. There is no revealed church order, whether congregational, episcopal, or presbyterian. The principle of pragmatism may be appropriately applied in this area. Whatever system of organization best works to achieve the goals of the church is in divine order, so long as it is consistent with those goals."[127]

While difficult, this task is not impossible. How is the Holy Spirit working today in the world around us? What will faithful witness look like in a post-modern, post-Christian world? These are serious questions facing the church.

Wesleyan Ecclesiology: A Work in Progress

'Methodist' was once descriptive of the passionate practice undertaken by John Wesley and his fellow enthusiasts. It was only later (and reluctantly) used to describe a church on a different continent. In the early days of the movement, these Methodists had

[126] Ibid., Chapter 1.
[127] Dunning, *Grace Faith and Holiness*, 536.

a very tenuous connection to the church of England. As Outler notes they had no "peculiar doctrine of the church", yet did have a "peculiar problem in and with the church of England."[128] The church refused to sponsor or sanction these enthusiasts, regularly showing disapproval toward their grassroots efforts. Wesley famously described the 'world as his parish' due to the nature of his ministry crossing traditional geographical parish boundaries.

Wesley's ecclesiology was forged in a combination of his Anglican rearing combined with real-world experience upon return from Georgia. The Moravians influenced Wesley in numerous ways most prominently in their focus upon the Protestant emphasis of justification by faith. The Anglican emphasis of "holy living" was now combined with a renewed passion for preaching of salvation by faith alone. It was this passion of preaching justification which 'became so insistent that many clergy began to bar him from their pulpits.'[129] Church historian Scott Kisker sums up Wesley's context,

> "When you preach that the only real Christians are those who have experienced the new birth, which involves a direct supernatural witness of God's Spirit with your Spirit (and the priest of your parish might not testify to it), your preaching tends to be divisive to parish life. Plus, there were times (at least in field preaching) where physical manifestations occurred. That also, in a staid 18th century parish, can get you cancelled. Half the congregation thought the other half were "enthusiasts" and that half thought the other half were still heathens. He could preach once. Then the pulpit was closed."[130]

The call of God on Wesley's life combined with a recalcitrant church forced him to share the gospel in whatever means possible.

The hope of these methodists was not to 'overthrow the establishment' but to reform the church of England by "performing the church's essential mission" composed of

[128] Albert Outler, "Do Methodists Have a Doctrine of the Church?" in *The Doctrine of the Church*. Edited by Dow Kirkpatrick, 11-28. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), 14.
[129] Vickers and Maddox, *The Cambridge Companion*, 85.
[130] Email conversation with Scott Kisker, professor of Church History at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio,. January, 2022.

mission, witness, and nurture.[131] This summation of Wesley's efforts leads to a fundamental paradigm shift (or Archimedian point) in this paper. *Wesley's efforts were to reform the institution by fulfilling the church's mission.* The gospel alone dictated the preaching, organization and action of the Wesleyan movement with the hope that the church would see the work of God and make the necessary shifts in mission and polity to match the work of God. This work has the potential to continually form (inform, reform) the church's structure for missional effectiveness.

Wesleyan Ecclesiology: The Church as Event

In one sense, Wesley spoke of the church as a gathering "marked by the proper preaching of the word of God and where the sacraments are duly administered." He also defined it as people who are part of the body of Christ characterized as a living organism. Church can be defined as anywhere two are three are gathered in the name of Christ. Kenneth J. Collins reflecting on Wesley's writings says,

> "Accordingly, at times, "the church" is taken to mean a building, a congregation, or a "body of people united together in the service of God."[3] In many of his writings, Wesley prefers this last sense and such a body can be as small as two or three believers gathering together in the name of Christ or as large as a catholic conception that embraces "all the persons upon the face of the earth who answer the character here given."[132]

Albert Outler describes this tension as a "blend of Anglican and Anabaptist ecclesiologies."[133] Ultimately, Wesley understood that the church must fulfill the mission

[131] Outler, "Do Methodists Have a Doctrine of the Church?", 14.

[132] Kenneth J. Collins, *Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press. 2007), Chapter 7.

[133] Ibid., *Chapter 7.*

of God. Failure to do so required reform of the functional nature of the church regardless of current institutional elements.[134]

As noted in chapter one, the ekklesia is the assembly or "called-out ones" who are now filled with the Holy Spirit and called to the mission of God. The Greek term was originally used to describe a political assembly called together for a specific purpose.[135] The concept of the church as "event" attempts to capture this essence of this essential New Testament concept. Dunning quotes Robert Adolfs who says, **"**Any conceptual system ... which is static in character is essentially inadequate. The Church is to be envisaged first and foremost as *event* and not as an in essence already complete, realized entity which has, so to speak, appropriated all its assets.*"*[136] The church exists as an event continually filled by the power of the spirit and renewed in every generation. It is not complete but remains a "continuing task" into the future.[137]

The church is dynamic with the Holy Spirit's guidance for God's missio dei in the world. Any form of the church which loses this dynamic character of Spirit-led movement becomes problematic. Deidre Brower Latz describes the dynamic nature of the Wesleyan movement,

> "Wesleyan thinking was, for the greater part of her history, aware of a dynamic possibility of progression in understanding, unafraid to ask and allow questions, engaged in fresh thinking and enabling new practices to evolve - yet embracing them as Wesleyan. The safeguards were in place – conforming to scripture and the historical creedal faith of the church, keeping tradition as a significant factor – and yet the inclusive and optimistic nature of the Wesleyan movement enabled a wide and diverse range of views to be held that were nonetheless recognisable as Wesleyan. A further aspect of Wesleyan ecclesiology is thus the church as an organic, evolving movement."[138]

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[134] Ibid., Chapter 7.
[135] Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness*, 515.
[136] Dunning, *Grace, Faith and Holiness,* 515-516.
[137] Ibid., 515-516.
[138] Deidre Brower Latz, "What is the Church? Toward a Wesleyan Ecclesiology", *Didache*, 10. https://didache.nazarene.org/index.php/volume-6-2/6-gtiie-brower-latz/file (Accessed 10.8.21)

The importance of the dynamic nature of the Wesleyan movement cannot be overstated. The institution's character and function follow the dynamic nature of the church as movement with necessary safeguards to avoid becoming a “static” organization.

In a recent work, Eric Serverson’s chapter in *Essential Church* is dedicated to this theme of the “church as event.” He declares boldly,

> “Moving quickly to the heart of my thesis, I wish to propose that the “kingdom of God” is an *event* rather than an institution. The goal of ecclesiology should be to attend to the kind of events that bear the markings of this elusive kingdom. As such, the church is the “body of Christ” not by birthright but because it is the site of such events.”[139]

At times Wesley revealed the friction between the mission of the church and the nature of the institution. As the church became restrictive to Wesley’s evangelism he noted in a letter,

> “What is the end of all ecclesiastical order? Is it not to bring souls from the power of Satan to God, and to build them up in His fear and love. Order, then, is so far valuable as it answers these ends; and if it answers them not, it is worth nothing.”[140]

Wesley respected the institution but understood it was the means and not an end in itself. The end is the mission of God, resulting in the salvation of souls as the highest priority.[141] Wesley considered himself a churchman in the church of England until his death yet continued to keep soteriology primary over institutional ideals. The revolutionary war in the colonies necessitated the establishment of the Methodist church in America for pragmatic reasons.

[139] Leclerc and Maddix, *Essential Church*, Chapter 2.
[140] John Telford (Ed.), *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley.* (London: Epworth Press, 1931, VII), 76.
[141] Dieter and Berg, *The Church: Wesleyan Theological Perspectives,* Part II: Salvation and the Church.

Wesley viewed the church as a living organism created by the Holy Spirit for mission in the world. Outler summing up Wesley says, "Significantly, and at every point, Wesley defined the church as *act,* as mission, as the enterprise of saving and maturing souls in the Christian life."[142]

Outler goes on to note the significance of mission over polity:

> "In all this material the only distinctively Wesleyan accent is the insistence that the church is best defined *in action,* in her witness and mission, rather than by her form of polity."[143]

The form or institution of the church is necessary only as long is it bends to the will of God and the mission of the church. Wesley was able to strike a unique balance in holding the church as event (or act) while having great respect and hope for the institution to be transformed. In his ecclesiology, Wesley was an innovator. Howard Synder describes Wesley's view of the church: "The key words are "as possible." Hold to the old. But if the old hinders the gospel, then changes and innovations must be made. Wesley's ecclesiology was a working synthesis of old and new, tradition and innovation."[144]

Martin Smith reflects on Wesley's place in the Christian tradition from a Lutheran perspective. Reflecting on Wesley's place in church history, he says, "He was the first in the whole course of church history who realized that the task of Christendom in the modern world is to be defined as mission." [145] He understood mission from his study of Acts and the model of Paul taking the gospel to the Gentiles. The New Testament was an account of the missional nature of God expressed in Christ.

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[142] Albert Outler, "Do Methodists Have a Doctrine of the Church", 19.
[143] Albert Outler (Ed.) *John Wesley*. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964), 307.
[144] Snyder, *The Radical Wesley,* Introduction.
[145] Kenneth E. Rowe (Ed.), *The Place of Wesley in the Christian Tradition: Essays delivered at Drew University in celebration of the commencement of the publication of the Oxford Edition of the Works of John Wesley*. (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1976), 88-89.

Wesley held a unique place as a churchman and innovator. His loyalty to the church of England never waned yet he would not allow the "institutional sway" slow down his commitment to spread the gospel. He understood the nature of God as missional and strived to express that nature in all endeavors.

The Christmas Conference, Deed of Declaration, and Ordinations

The transformation of a young Wesley's ecclesiology to the establishment of the Methodist Church in America is significant. At one time, he lauded his staunch commitment to the church of England and described himself as a "bigot to it."[146] At Oxford and in Georgia, Wesley's ecclesiology was initially formed by a "static view of the ancient church."[147] Later, his reading of Beveridge and study of Acts revealed a dynamic early (primitive) church defined by mission.[148] His experience in Georgia and subsequent Aldersgate moment shifted his preoccupation from ecclesiology to soteriology. [149]

The Christmas conference of 1784 reveals a mature Wesley adapting to the needs of Methodists in America no longer under England's rule. At issue was methodism's ability to function as a church in America,

> "Before the Christmas Conference, the American preachers did not constitute "the due administration" because they lacked ordination. It was for this reason that Wesley ordained several people for ministry in America. He justifies this irregularity on practical grounds. "Judging this to be a case of real necessity. . . . These are the steps which, not of choice, but necessity, I have slowly and deliberately taken."[150]

[146] William Payne. "Discerning John Wesley's Missional Ecclesiology." *Wesleyan Theological Journal* Vol. 49, 1. (2014), 24.
[147] Luke L. Keefer, Jr. "John Wesley: Disciple of Early Christianity." *Wesleyan Theological Journal* Vol. 19., 1. (1984), 26.
[148] Ibid, 26.
[149] Ibid. 25.
[150] Ibid., 43-44.

The shift in Wesley's ecclesiology was to emphasize mission faithfulness over traditional practice. Methodists had followed Wesley's lead in attempting to be a "leavening movement within the church of England" while relying on the church for the sacraments.[151] The mature Wesley held his personal commitment in tension with the needs of Methodists in America. These groups faced a new reality in an independent nation and as an orphaned church."[152] He held a very high view of ordination and the sacraments which kept him from separating methodists for years. The necessity of the mission now prevailed as he authorized American ordinations.[153] A faithful Wesleyan ecclesiology prioritizes soteriology and missiology over other concerns. The institution exists to facilitate the mission of God and pragmatic innovation is always necessary.

In the Deed of Declaration (1784), Wesley provided for the future of methodists beyond his lifetime. It provided a structure which could function if the methodists did separate from the national church giving them legal footing. He also ordained ministers in Scotland and finally three ministers in England before his death. The ordinations of Alexander Mather, Henry Moore, and Thomas Rankin symbolize a mature Wesley focused on the future of the movement. Kenneth Collins summarizes the significance of this:

> "Indeed, by the end of his career, Wesley had actually ordained more than twenty-five ministers for work in Scotland, England, America, and even for such places as Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and the West Indies. That Wesley was not censured for such action by his own church indicates something of the lax and indulgent standards of the time. If he had been called to task, Wesley would likely have replied that the work of the gospel necessitated such actions, that it was far better to send in laborers to the field than to watch the harvest rot on the ground."[154]

[151] Russell E. Richey, *Early American Methodism* (Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Press, 1991), 68-69.
[152] Frederick A. Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism: A History of the United Methodists and Their Relations.* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), 94
[153] Ibid., 94.

[154] Vickers and Maddox. *The Cambridge Companion*, 57-58.

The mature Wesley provided for the future of the methodist movement.

Wesley – The Loyal Subversive

The paradox is obvious at the outset. Wesley was loyal to the church of England yet chose to place mission over institution in praxis. The burden God had placed upon him was greater than any adherence to patterns of church government. People live and die every day. It mattered to Wesley that these people heard Christ rightly preached.

Historian Mark Noll describes several revolutionaries from this period. Spener, Francke, Whitefield and the Wesleys were all committed to the traditional church and freely experimented with new innovations that could undermine or supersede the established church. Noll describes the Wesleys in particular,

> "In Britain, the Wesleys and Whitefield likewise were entirely content with their Anglican ordinations. But in various ways their innovations also weakened ties to the traditional church, even as they exploited new conditions in eighteenth-century society. The early methodists soon became masters of procedures dictated more by the needs of their age than by the heritage of the church."[155]

These reformers' goal was to transform inherited elements of Christianity to the new realities of social and institutional life in Europe. The role of authoritative scripture and the personal experience of God were the highest priorities among these movements.[156]

Study of Wesley inevitably leads to a unique perspective on his ministry and relationship to the church. His loyalty to the church of England along with his subversion of the system leads this author to describe him as a 'loyal subversive.' One could argue

[155] Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity* 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), Chapter 10.
[156] Noll, *Turning Points*, Chapter 10.

that ‘revolutionary’ or ‘radical’ are better terms. Both ‘revolutionary’ and ‘subversive’ can take on the meaning of overthrowing a government or system which is certainly going too far in this context. In using the descriptive term ‘loyal subversive,’ the intention is to highlight Wesley’s love for the Church of England yet his unwavering duty to the mission of God even when falling outside of the traditional sanction of the church.

Wesley’s ecclesiology and praxis formed a tightrope between the movement and institution. He viewed the Church of England as the church proper from a traditional perspective. In one sense his ecclesiology never changed. In contrast, the movement took on new forms and eventually had to take the form of a church in America. Clarence Bence sums up this reality,

> “For almost half a century Wesley was able to maintain a creative tension between obedience to his church and his inward sense of the will of God for the Methodist societies……Rather than withdraw from his commitment to evangelism and spiritual nurture, Wesley pressed on with an ever-expanding movement, arguing, “We cannot with good conscience neglect the present opportunity of saving souls while we live, for fear of consequences which may possibly or probably happen after we are dead.”[157]

To speak of Wesley’s ecclesiology is to describe this tension between the two poles of the movement of Methodism and the structure of the Church of England. Early Methodists understood themselves as an “ecclesiola in ecclesia – a movement within the Church of England called to reform the larger church.”[158] Noting Wesley’s lifelong commitment to the church leads many to leave his ecclesiology unchanged. While this position can be argued technically, it appears disingenuous in a practical sense and diminishes the movement.

[157] Dieter and Berg, *The Church: Wesleyan Theological Perspectives*, Part II.
[158] LeClerc and Maddix, *Essential Church*, Chapter 4.

Deirdre Brower Latz's describes the challenges of articulating a Wesleyan ecclesiology. There is a "ruthless self-examination required in this endeavor." She goes on to say,

> The entire movement to which we are heirs was based upon an initial radical internal reformation, (re) invigoration and loyal challenge of and to an institution which had shifted from a revolutionary movement herself to one tied to polity and practice that had much to do with the established order, and the maintaining of a relatively normative/comfortable way of Christian life and understanding. Wesley himself was heavily influenced by pragmatic considerations in the light of his cultural context and both Wesley and his heirs were unashamedly willing to offer a healthy critique of the status quo, and in that Spirit we will explore the question before us."[159]

The shift which has occurred in many contexts since the time of Christ is one from a revolutionary movement to one of "established order" and a "normative / comfortable" way of Christian life. The context of the loyal subversive is one of straddling the fence between two worlds: the dynamic local movement of Christians in a specific place (parish) and the institution which functions as a loving, slow-moving entity. The dynamic between the institution and movement will create friction. The loyal subversive is burdened with a particular parish and context while fanning the flames of the movement of Jesus. Those running the institution desire to spread the movement of Jesus but are equally concerned about maintaining (survival) the organization. These competing issues will also surface in the local church, which requires vigilance in stoking the fires of the movement.

The gatherings of the ekklesia are formed by committment and attentiveness to the dynamic nature of the Spirit's movement. As Christ subverted the narratives of the world so we will be called to subvert contemporary modes of achievement, success, and perceived growth. As evidenced in the selflessness of the good samartian, the radical

[159] Latz, "What is the Church?", 1-2.

love of the sermon on the mount, and ultimately in the cross of christ, many of the Spirit's movements will run counter to things which appear to make sense in an earthly way.

As Christians gather and open their hearts in the liturgy and sacraments, there is the continual awareness of the God who speaks, moves, and acts in His timing. These rituals are a means of grace as conduits for the 'event' of the church happening as God moves among the people and propels them forward in mission. They remain opportunities for God to move dynamically, not guarantees of that movement.

Church is not a "Place Where" but a "People Who"

A common thread in missional ecclesiology is found in contextualization. We interpret scripture immersed in the same fluid with context, culture, and experience. We attempt to answer the question "what does faithful witness look like at this place, time, and context?"

The creation, calling and gifting of the church is bound to the nature of God as mission. An unintended consequence of the Protestant Reformation was the way that church was spoken of as a "place where certain things happen."[160] While this was never formalized into belief or creed it nonetheless became a real-world scenario as locations were secured for meeting and identity tied to place was cemented. David Bosch describes the shift in mindset in the twentieth century,

> "this self-perception gave way to a new understanding of the church as *a body of people sent on a mission.* Unlike the previous notion of the church as an entity located in a facility or in an institutional organization and its activities, the church is being reconceived as a community, a gathered people, brought together by a common calling and vocation to be a *sent people."*[161]

[160] Guder, *Missional Church*, 119.
[161] Ibid., 120-121.

Reclaiming the foundational meaning of the ekklesia (assembly, “called out ones”) which was a movement of the risen Christ rightfully detaches us from location and reidentifies us as a people who embody and practice faith. We gather and scatter, we come together and then are a sent people, we are ambassadors with an urgent message. “Mission is founded on the mission of God in the world, rather than the church’s effort to extend itself.”[162] The church is a “people who” embody the character and Spirit of the risen Christ rather than a “place where” certain things happen.

The combination of reflection on Wesley’s perspective blended with our current context would seem to breed a simple conclusion. The identity of the church which is tied to location or “a place where things happen” is problematic. A proper Wesleyan way forward is to examine what ways God is moving the church outward in mission. The mission of the church is the priority of all its expressions.

[162] Ibid., 122-123.

Chapter 4 – Incarnational Presence in Place

Theology of Place

Our place is a layered, textured reality which we are immersed in yet rarely see. Creation, nature, people, culture, family, jobs, and many other factors are part of it. Place is thick with meaning and resides "between body and landscape."[163] Place is defined through the interaction of humankind, socially and collectively, in specific locations. Place is lived experience contrasted with space which is an abstract concept.[164] An example is cyberspace which has no texture or place.

The post-modern era is replete with acceleration which diminishes place as something we are trying to get through with ever-increasing speed. "The sense of being

[163] Craig Bartholemew. *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011) Introduction, Google Play Books.
[164] Bartholemew, *Where Mortals Dwell,* Introduction.

lost, displaced, and homeless is pervasive in contemporary culture."[165] The pursuit of supposed 'progress' is a mirage that appears to promise much (everything) yet delivers little (or nothing). Many have consented to inhabit a society of strangers who wander, rootless, looking for the next thing that might stimulate our senses while avoiding anything resembling commitment or permanence. This reality is just as prevalent among Christians and churches who practice a syncretistic consumer-type faith.

Scripture locates people in specific places in which the mighty acts of God were disclosed. Egypt, Sinai, Jericho, Babylon, Nazareth and Antioch represent "storied place" due to the interaction of God with His people in particular locations.[166] Brueggemann goes on to say that, "The central problem is not emancipation but *rootage,* not meaning but *belonging,* not separation from community but *location within* it, not isolation from others but *placement* deliberately between the generations of promise and fulfillment."[167] The desire of the church to engage with neighbors in specific places holds the promise of being located firmly in context.

All theology is contextual. The dominant norms of modernity have been called into serious question in recent years.[168] What is needed is contextual theology, a theology of place where ministry resonates in particular engagements with a specific people. Frost and Hirsch describe contextual theology:

> "In other words, such a church makes its mission its priority and perpetually asks itself, "What has God called us to be and do in our current cultural context?" The issue of cultural context is essential because the missional church shapes itself to fit that context in order to transform it for the sake of the kingdom of God."[169]

[165] Walter Brueggemann *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* 2nd ed.. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 1.
[166] Ibid., 198.
[167] Ibid., 198.
[168] Norms such as the Historical-Critical Method of Scriptural Interpretation, European / N. Atlantic Theology, and Mission as a Foreign Enterprise for example.
[169] Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping*, Chapter 1.

God created the church and His nature and purpose are mission. The church is an expression of the kingdom of God always moving at the urging of its creator. As a movement, creativity and flexibility in contextualization should be the norm. In some contexts the church may seem very familiar and in others seem strange and surprising."[170] Virtually everything about Wesley's ministry was astonishing to those who were a part of the established Church of England. The classes and bands created ties in specific places with willing people.

Incarnation

Jesus of Nazareth is a specific description of a man (messiah) and the town he was from. The place of Nazareth is important because the fully divine, fully human Son of God experienced humanity in a particular place with location, reputation, and reality of life there. Nazareth was a town considered to be on the wrong side of the tracks.At the very least, it was a fairy small agricultural village that probably escaped the radar of the Jewish people or their elites.

As the incarnation happened in a specific place and time, so can any expression of God through His people (the ekklesia) can only occur in place. The gospel of John declares, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."[171]

[170] Ibid., Chapter 2.
[171] John 1:14, NIV 2011.

John's gospel declares that the Father is made fully known through the Son and anyone who has seen Jesus has seen the Father.[i]

One enemy of incarnation is dualism. Dualism take several forms: earthly/ heavenly, mind/body, spiritual/physical, salvation/wholistic restoration, etc. The dualism that threatens incarnation is in the idea of the flesh (or body) instead of spirit. The incarnation of Christ could not occur if the body (or flesh) were evil. The "goodness of creation" is vital here. Hjalmarson speaks of the dynamics of theology of place,

> "Kindly acquaintance with neighbours," and "sweet [habits] of the blood" require embodiment, and casual repetition. These interactions create what Robert Putnam has described as "social capital." But they also indicate that place is something more than given: it is socially mediated. In other words, place is also political. Place is both given, in the physical surroundings we encounter, and contested as a social construct. It is both real and concrete, subject to our senses, and a symbol for something more. As Brueggemann notes above, Israel's destiny was bound up with the land, and all experience is mediated by place"[172]

Place is socially mediated not only through the physical but also in social construct through existing relationships.

We affirm the reality of sin and its effects but understand evil as a perversion of the good creation. Flesh (Greek "sarx") has a wide range of meaning from ethically neutral to describing complete opposition to God. Many times the apostle Paul uses the word "body" (Greek "soma") as indicative of the good creation and "flesh" (sarx) as the good creation bent toward sin. Our affirmation of the goodness of creation and the reality of sin allows for the redemption (restoration) of the image of God as a possibility for humanity and communities.

Wesleyan Theology of Place

[172] Leonard Hjalmarson. *No Home Like Place: A Christian Theology of Place.* (Portland: Urban Loft Publishers, 2015) Chapter 1.

Once again, it is vital for Wesleyans to return to the "goodness" of creation (the world). Our place is a gift of God and we can not live without a concrete place and specific people. Any goodness attributed to the church is derived from the Creator and its purposeful existence firmly set the world. Hank and Henry Spaulding highlight this reality,

> "In other words, the church is only good because it is in the world. The world is good because God creates it. The church's mission, however, in the world is to be in appropriate relationship to one another and thus model that for the rest of the world. The church is the place where others are loved and related to correctly."[173]

The church embodies God's prevenient grace (goodness) as its people express love for Him and neighbor firmly entrenched in a particular place.

The church is to continually embody the reshaping of humanity in the image of God. This reality is described in the New Testament in several ways. One is found in James 1:18, "*He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created."*[174] The church bears the image of God and signifies the beginning of harvest with more to come.[175] The scriptural images of preparing the soil, scattering seed, attending to growth and fields ready to harvest immediately come to mind. As firstfruits, the church should demonstrate how God is at work in the world and this occurs in specific places. In an increasingly disconnected, excarnated world, the opportunity for a Wesleyan perspective holds transformative potential.

While Wesley did not explicitly describe a theology of place, the implications of his theology are readily apparent in the outworking of love of God and neighbor in local contexts. David McEwen's exploration of Wesley as a pastoral theologian gives helpful perspective. The role of the pastoral theologian is to "discern the voice of the Spirit in the

[173] LeClerc and Maddix. *Essential Church*, Chapter 3.
[174] James 1:18, NIV 2011.
[175] Fred B. Craddock and Eugene M. Boring, *The People's New Testament Commentary*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), Chapter on the Letter of James.

midst of the means and people he uses."[176] The key question is whether love is being encouraged or impaired in local relationships. McEwen continues, "the Spirit begins with the current reality of our people in our time or setting" challenging our current understanding in order that greater depth and faithfulness may be fostered. The Spirit works through the local context (environment) constantly under examination by the Spirit and scripture. Upon examination and reflection, there may be changes envisioned and then tested in the local community. If "the relationship with God and neighbour deepened as a result, then in time this became the new environment until a further challenge arose."[177] Wesley's theology and praxis was thoroughly local.

The role of the Spirit is vitally connected to place, people, and their current reality. The Spirit works through the "means" of time, setting, and place and there is no opportunity for the Spirit to work in the hypothetical. The potential for the Spirit's work in our current reality (environment) unfortunately becomes diminished when we look elsewhere for the work of God.

Procrastination is one of the snares that seduces us toward waiting for the hypothetical 'perfect moment' to serve or be a vehicle for the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, this is an abandonment of the "good creation" and places the responsibility on human effort rather than God's work and timing. God has given us this place, this time, and these neighbors as the means of the Spirit's work. One might argue that the majority of Wesley's ministry was one of inconvenience and struggle as he sought to spread the gospel outside the typical methods of the church of England. Wesley's calling placed him in communities with people rather than in comfort or cathedrals.

[176] David B. McEwen. *Wesley as a Pastoral Theologian: Theological Methodology in John Wesley's Doctrine of Christian Perfection*. (Colorado Springs: Pasternoster, 2009), 220.
[177] Ibid., 220.

This reality speaks to the notion of church as a local movement or embodiment of the Spirit's work in the world. Our efforts to organize and administer "church" on larger levels serve specific functions yet it is only in particular local contexts that the holistic nature of the Spirit's work is realized. The dynamic nature of God's work through various "means" is a living system rather than something mechanical. McEwen goes on to say,

> "This energised, dynamic interlinking and interweaving of the means and our own lives points to Wesley's understanding of pastoral theology being akin to an immersion experience in which the means and the persons are simultaneously 'bathed' in the Spirit."[178]

This dynamic, living organism can be fully realized at the intersection of the Spirit and life. Immersion and incarnation begin in persons and communities.

The Wesleyan quadrilateral is a well-known conceptual framework of Wesley's sources of theology as scripture, tradition, reason and experience. McEwen suggests that rather than "tradition", a better descriptive term is "ethos." While "tradition" can be interpreted in a variety of ways, it many times conjures up a past, or static idea of previous experience. "Ethos" denotes the characteristic spirit of a community expressed in its beliefs, values, and praxis.[179] Wesley viewed the living organism (methodist movement) as vital to the ethos of the church in addition to the church of England and ancient church fathers.[180] The 'ethos' of a movement (or community) is primarily experienced in a local context with fully present people. The present is as important as the past in this idea of the ethos of a people. 'Ethos' is more conducive to a dynamic Wesleyan theology of movement and place.

[178] McEwen. *Wesley as Pastoral*, 217.

[179]

[180] McEwen, *Wesley as Pastoral*, 214-215.

The role of the Spirit as a living voice in a community of persons cannot be overstated here. Wesley's personal experience at Aldersgate was, in one sense an "answer" of the Spirit to his quest for the type assurance described by the Moravians. In a personal sense, it brought witness and assurance of the active role of the Spirit in his life. His heart being "strangely warmed" was a combination of this seeking and the Spirit's coming, witness and affirmation. Wesley's description of "feeling" his heart warmed locates the work of God's love in a specific person in a context. David McEwen this dynamic, "such love by its very nature must be experienced, it must be 'felt.' "For Wesley, this was the key role of the Holy Spirit and his writings are filled with references to the witness of the Spirit and his work in people and communities."[181]

Experience is a vital piece of the Wesleyan framework as we encounter the Spirit's work in ourselves, our communities, and in others walking the same path. The Wesleyan movement as living organism would not exist without personal experience. The theoretical must become personal and the abstract must become concrete in lived experience. We underestimate the radical and risky nature of Wesley's enterprise in contrast to the established church of the day. The Methodist societies, classes, and bands……

> "……became a living laboratory to propose, test, evaluate, and restate doctrinal and practical understandings and applications. In this setting, pastoral wisdom and practical experience were paramount, not academic analysis of the biblical text or systematic theology. Guidance in matters relating to Christian experience depended heavily on the work and ministry of the Spirit. He worked through the lives of his people, Methodist sermons, hymns, prayers, conferences, books, tracts, letters, and conversations. Wesley's own direct pastoral ministry was carried out in person as well as by letter and then recorded in his diaries, journals and extensive correspondence."[182]

[181] McEwen, *Wesley as Pastoral*, 219.
[182] McEwen, *Wesley as Pastoral*, 218.

Wesley's focus was primarily about the Spirit's moving in these local groups. These elements were the soil of the movement planted firmly in the local class, band or society.

Means of Grace: Instituted and Prudential

Prevenient grace compels Wesleyans to view the world (places, people) knowing that God created purposefully with His spirit continually at work. There has been little work in the Wesleyan tradition in the area of theology of "place," which offers opportunity on the road ahead.

Perhaps one place to begin is in Wesley's articulation of the "instituted" means of grace and the "prudential" means of grace which is essentially another way of articulating prevenient grace. Wesley described the those means of grace inaugurated by Christ as the instituted means which we follow in adherence to Christ's direct command. The "prudential" means are everyday activities which may be filled with God's direction and moving and have the potential to extend grace in all directions for the person filled with the spirit.[183] Heitzenrater describes these means of grace and the power of God at work in them constituting "the very essence of his movement."[184]

In his description of the prudential means of grace, Wesley accounted for the ways God is working in lives, relationships, and neighborhoods in prevenient grace, which allows God to work in the mundane, ordinariness of everyday life. Bryan P. Stone describes the freedom of God's grace in continually "liberating options."[185] God is present and active in all of our experience whether filled with joy or pain, justice or injustice.

[183] Richard P. Heitzenrater. *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* 2nd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2013), Chapter 5, Google Play Books.
[184] Ibid., Epilogue.
[185] Stone, *Compassionate Ministry*, 42.

Stone continues, “grace is, as John Wesley described it, prevenient-it is always present and active, it runs ahead of us, it stays with the conversation, it restores and redeems.”[186]

The methodist classes, bands and societies were designed to be local, personal and continually aware of the grace of God at work. The personal care and nurture of souls was a constant source of emphasis for Wesley and his followers. The sermon “On Visiting the Sick” emphasizes the reality that the sick are all who suffer regardless of the person’s physical, mental, or spiritual condition. Wesley proclaims, “The word which we render visit, in its literal acceptation, means to look upon. And this, you well know, cannot be done unless you are present with them.”[187]

In this sermon, Wesley described the proper perspective of the means of grace as mutually beneficial,

> “…this would not excuse *you*: his going would not fulfil *your* duty. Neither would it excuse *you,* unless you saw them with your own eyes. If you do not, you lose a means of grace; you lose an excellent means of increasing your thankfulness to God, who saves you from this pain and sickness, and continues your health strength; as well as of increasing your sympathy with the afflicted…..”[188]

The significance of Wesley’s perspective resides in the grounding of ministry in the local and personal, not based on need (real or perceived). Wesley understood that God’s prevenient grace was constantly at work and that opportunities for engagement with people was a “means of grace” in itself. Any moment, person, or relationship provided the conduit for the work of God among those fully present and attentive.

These elements of Wesley’s means of grace constituting the very “essence” of the movement links movement and place together closely. In one sense, there is no

[186] Ibid., 42.
[187] John Wesley, “On Visiting the Sick.” *The Sermons of John Wesley*. http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-98-on-visiting-the-sick/ (Accessed 2.16.22)
[188] John Wesley, “On Visiting the Sick”.

possibility of a movement if it does not begin in specific places with named people. It is also vital to see God's gracious opportunities with a transformed worldview.

Joerg Rieger describes this synergy of the work of the Spirit between persons and God. A work of mercy is "no longer a one-way street" leading from the Christian to the person in need. There is a return channel of grace that is transformative for the people who receive it. This is in direct opposition to the (toxic) charity perspective, which seeks to do good yet is not aware of the dynamic of giving and receiving in mercy."[189] Wesleyan theology is more conducive to acts of mercy 'with' those in need rather than those 'for' those in need.

Rieger notes how Wesley's theology ties the move of God to specific locations.

> "Wesleyan theology must deal with two poles: God and the poor. This point reminds us that God's presence in Christ is always tied to specific locations. The encounter with those in need sheds light on our understanding of God. If works of mercy are real means of grace, a neat separation of God's presence from God's identity is no longer possible. That is to say, works of mercy (the encounters with the needy) are channels of God's grace that help us better understand who God is." [190]

There is no such thing as a disembodied, dislocated Wesleyan theology. The implications for Wesleyan soteriology are significant. Many traditions emphasize salvation in a transactional sense and miss the nature of the new relationship created by God's work in the new birth. Salvation is reduced to an affirmation of eternal destiny and ignores the local, personal, and corporate nature of the redemption of creation.

A Holistic Theology

[189] Joerg Rieger. "Between God and the Poor: Rethinking the Means of Grace in the Wesleyan Tradition" in Heitzenrater, Richard P. *The Poor and the People Called Methodists. (*Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2002), 87.
[190] Ibid., 96.

The various emphases of Wesley's theology lead to a holistic view of God and man which refutes all dualisms. Salvation in the New Testament is described in various tenses: past, present, and future. The Apostle Paul describes the message of the cross among those currently walking in faith describing it as "foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."[191]

Wesley saw the dangers of a salvation which relied only on past experience or future preoccupation. God desires our heart's growth in perfect love yet also cares holistically about our outward speech, action, and tempers. Wesley affirmed the present nature of salvation,

> "By salvation I mean, not barely (according to the vulgar notion) deliverance from hell, or going to heaven, but a present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its primitive health, its original purity; a recovery of the divine nature; the renewal of our souls after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness, in justice, mercy, and truth. This implies all holy and heavenly tempers, and *by consequence* all holiness of conversation."[192]

Wesley understood salvation is a progression from being "barely human" to "truly human, to finally "fully human."[193] He held a unique view of the synergy between God's work and our work in the life of salvation. Grace is a free gift yet humans are co-operant in the enterprise of working out our salvation. Randy Maddox describes this Wesleyan dynamic, "as he repeatedly insisted, we must hold in tension the two biblical teachings: "Without me you can do nothing," and "I can do all things through Christ strengthening me."[194]

This tension illuminates the nature of Wesleyan holistic theology. God is ever at work in prevenient grace and humankind always has the opportunity to respond to this

[191] 1 Corinthians 1:18, NIV 2011.
[192] John Wesley. "A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion" in *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley in Ten Volumes, Volume 8*. (New York: J & J Harper, 1827), 219.
[193] Randy L. Maddox. *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*. (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), Chapter 6.
[194] Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, Chapter 3.

grace and extend love in all directions. Rather than limiting action to only what God does or only what humans can do, this perspective opens the possibility of loving God with all our whole hearts and loving our neighbors as well. Humankind works in the restoration of creation because we know that God is working before, during, and after our work. Our work is a means of grace, a conduit by which the Holy Spirit can come near to others. Human effort is enlivened due to the awareness that God is up to something in any good that exists in the world.

Wesleyans care and act in all sort of ways about hunger, thirst, wages, sickness, hurt, mental illness, oppression because these are common elements of life as a human race created in the image of God, yet affected by the realities of sin. Dualistic interpretations of reality must be vigilantly rooted out and exposed to maintain a holistic commitment. A Wesleyan understanding of salvation must replace the prevalent escapist notions which pervade the local church. Prevenient grace should empower a generous orthodoxy welcoming diverse perspectives from various traditions, sciences, cultures, and expressions of humanity. A holistic gospel engaging western culture offers the best opportunity for witness.

The "New" Parish

Wesley famously declared "the world is my parish." This statement was a response to the parishes of the English world and Wesley's commitment to preaching any place, at any time, and to any available people. In the English world of Wesley's day the parish was a geographical area subsumed under the leadership of the local Church of England. A person living in this place was automatically part of the parish in that area.

Some ecclesial leaders were irked with Wesley's preaching in their territory (parish) even though it happened in fields and non-traditional settings.

As noted previously, Wesley viewed his ministry as a renewal movement and not a replacement for the Church of England. He encouraged all methodists to regularly attend the local church (of England) and take part in the sacraments. His apparent strategy was to preach the gospel and ignite the power of the Spirit in people who would, in turn, ignite the reform within the church of England.

The idea of "parish" had specific connotations in mid-1700 England. The word requires clarification in our modern age. Our contemporary realities of commutes, technology, systems, and relationships require clarification. Tim Soerns advocates a helpful definition,

> "This crucial third way is located in our neighborhoods, but for our purposes as followers of Jesus, I will advocate for the better word *parish*. In the book *The New Parish*, we define this ancient word with some fresh language that has served us well. For our purposes let's define the *parish* as a "geographic area that's large enough to live life together (live, work, play, etc.) and small enough to be known as a character within it."2 In an urban context this generally equates to a neighborhood, in more suburban areas it might be the entire suburb, and in rural areas it might encompass a much larger geographic area with some common centers like a few pubs, the granary, or local schools."[195]

The connotations of "parish" as a geographic area of a size that one can be known within it is helpful. Wesley's innovative nature translates well in a modern (post-modern) world. The blending of movement and parish lead to Soeren's key that , "movements happen when people who thought they were alone discover they are not."[196] Creating local community is vital for all expressions of the church now and in the future.

[195] Tim Soerns. *Everywhere You Look: Discovering the Church Right Where You Are.* (Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press. 2020), Chapter 5.
[196] Tim Soerns. *Everywhere You Look*, Chapter 1.

Chapter 5 -- Hope

Identity

The Church of the Nazarene has suffered from a "lack of an adequate ecclesiology."[197] Our western ecclesial identity is bound with the consumerism, individualism, and syncretism prevalent in society. The remnants of the church growth movement and the effects of institutionalization overshadow our ecclesiology. Michael Goheen describes the core of ecclesiological identity,

> "Ecclesiology is first of all about the church's identity—who we are and who we serve. And if the biblical story is not the place where our identity is forged, then by default this place will be somewhere else, almost certainly in our cultural story and social location. That will mean we are no longer the people we are called to be and will be serving the wrong master. So the choice for the church in every age will always be, Will our identity be shaped by Scripture or by our culture—by the biblical story or the cultural story?"[198]

Ecclesiology is formed from proper Christology and then in the identity and vocation of the church as created and sent by God. We must recover the proper Christology and missiology which informs our ecclesiology. At the heart of ecclesiology is the gospel, the

[197] Leclerc and Maddix, *Essential Church*. Chapter 1.
[198] Michael Goheen. *The Church and Its Vocation*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic. 2018), Introduction.

missional vocation of God's people and the church's life engaged in a missionary encounter with culture.[199]

It is important to note that these elements require an active engagement with God, the gospel, and culture. These elements existed in the first century as they do in the twenty-first century. The various models (or modes) of the church in the previous centuries serve as both witness and warning to ecclesiologies which deviate from an unencumbered christology.[200] In exploring ecclesiology, it is vital to recover the simple Christology of the Jesus movement. Alan Hirsch describes the power of a return to simple ecclesiology. This move to simplicity allows, 'the gospel once again becomes a possession of the people and not purely of religious institutions that unwittingly make it hard for people to grasp and apply.'[201] Local communities empowered with "easily transferable ideas" can create significant movements. The early church's "clinging to Jesus, uncluttered message of Jesus as Lord and Savior are what catalyzed the missional potencies inherent in the people of God."[202] The church has opportunity to engage regularly in critical reflection to simplify and clarify doctrine and praxis.

Our ecclesiology has become rooted in the human activity of believers rather than being grounded in God's initiative. Mark Mann describes the challenge of Nazarene "believers' ecclesiology" and its implications,

> "Indeed, this is the core problem with a believers' church, at least as expressed in traditional Nazarene ecclesiology: it ultimately envisions the church as a *human* community forged through the mutual agreement of individual *believers*. In other words, it gives priority to human decision and behavior when defining the church and makes secondary the divine nature of the church and the deep sense in which the church (and individual believers) truly belongs to God. This is the importance of rooting ecclesiology in Christology: it is to recognize that the church ultimately is

[199] Ibid., Introduction.
[200] Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating Apostolic Movements* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press. 2016), Chapter 4.
[201] Ibid., Chapter 1.
[202] Ibid., Chapter 1.

> not ours or even us but God's and God in Christ working in and through us. In other words, to reenvision ecclesiology in terms of Christology—that is, the church first and foremost *is* the body of Christ—is to ground our understanding of the church in who Christ is and what Christ is doing, not in who we are or what we are doing."[203]

Reform and renewal movements throughout the history of Christianity have sought to return the church to the foundational elements of Jesus' movement. In the current context the various 'posts' (modern, Christian, Christendom) bring the church into a cultural engagement with people who are open to the movement yet resist institutions.

From Center to Margin

The early church lived on the margins of the ancient world until the advent of Christendom. The first followers of Jesus had a challenging task ahead under the realities of the Roman empire. These followers were called "Christians" (little christs), "cannibals" (eating flesh and drinking blood), and risked their lives refusing to worship the emperor.

Christendom was formational in many ways from Constantine (early 4th century) to the twentieth century. Murray describes it as many things, including: 'a geographical region, a historical era, a civilization shaped by the story of faith, a political arrangement, and an ideology.'[204] In our current context we must embrace our position at the margins rather than the center of society. While many bemoan a sense of loss related to the myth

[203] Leclerc and Maddix. *Essential Church,* Chapter 4.

[204] Stuart Murray. "Post-Christendom, Post-Constantinian, Post-Christian…Does the Label Matter?" *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church,* 9:3, *(Sept. 9, 2009):* 195-208, DOI: 10.1080/14742250903161482

of a ‘Christian nation’ or perceived ‘glory days' of a remembered past, we can choose to embrace our current context with opportunity for witness.

The end of the narrative of Christendom leaves us with a feeling of dislocation and uncertainty within our world. It is important to realize that we are once again at a place of calling to engage with God, gospel and culture amid the rubble of Christendom. British missiologist Stuart Murray describes these shifts as indicative of marginalization, loss of perceived power, and moving from institution to movement.[205]

It is important to examine the source of our sense of grief or loss in Western faith and society. Do we mourn the loss of the model in which much of church identity has been located? Is it possible to birth a new model of church that is more effective in bringing a gospel encounter to western culture?

In the western context, we now find ourselves much like the early church at the margins of society. The church is in unfamiliar territory with a renewed sense of the mission of God as our focus. The Catholic theologian Hans Kung said it well,

> “A church which pitches its tents without constantly looking out for new horizons, which does not continually strike camp, is being untrue to its calling. . . . [We must] play down our longing for certainty, accept what is risky, live by improvisation and experiment.”[206]

This final chapter proposes to present characteristics of healthy, robust followers of Jesus in the Wesleyan movement located in parish communities.

A Way Forward: Via Media as a Bridge to Missionary Encounter

There are several tensions to navigate in this quest toward recovering church as movement in the local parish. Established churches often see their mission embodied in

[205] Murray, “Post-Christendom…”, 195-208.
[206] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, Conclusion.

particular patterns and expressions in their community. A young church (church plant) has much freedom yet will face challenges as it ages and takes on fixed characteristics. What is needed is a 'via media' in many arenas of life enhancing our missionary encounter with culture.

This is one of the strengths of Wesleyan theology. The idea of the "middle way" probably originated in Aristotle's "golden mean" which attempted to strike the right balance between extremes. Rupertus Meldenius coined the phrase that Wesley later used in striking this balance,

> "In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity."[207]

The Wesleyan perspective offers the opportunity for prevenient grace to work in a more open, less dogmatic posture for Christians. Carl Leth described a via media ethos,

> "In addition to serving as a theological method, the via media can also be understood as expressing a temperament or spirit. Averse to extremes, and preferring balance, the via media identifies an approach to Christian theology and life that values the center over the margins, consensual agreement over polarizing apologetics."[208]

The witness of the church is derailed in polarization. The myth of the Christian nation, a longing to return to the past, and the supposed 'Christian political party' are examples of highly polarizing non-central issues to the church of Jesus. A return to proper Christology (Christology -> missiology -> ecclesiology) affords us the proper grounding for a missionary encounter with culture.

The 'nones' will have significant questions about faith and the church, which must be engaged with the proper mindset. The 'big tent' reality of Wesleyan theology should give room to respond in various ways.

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[207] Al Truesdale (Ed.). *Global Wesleyan Dictionary of Theology*. (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2013), 557.
[208] Truesdale, 557.

A Way Forward: Via Media Political Discourse

The polarization of the previous two presidential elections leaves many non-Christians perplexed about so-called 'Christian' candidates and platforms. The conversations about conservative and liberal agendas only divide people and lead people to question the integrity of supposed 'Christian' politics.

The years 1970-2021 have been filled with various voices: the religious right movement, family values, and pro-life (over abortion) especially among Christians. Many who have worn the label 'Christian' have held the pro-life stance as the primary reason they voted for the conservative political candidate. The author has personally heard and witnessed this stated value being among the top criteria for voting in the church.

While moral decisions should factor into our politics and voting, we can no longer afford to ignore the other ethical dilemmas which abound in the world and matter to nones. In addition, the reality of a candidate like Donald Trump pandering to conservatives (Christians) only serves to widen the gap between nones and the church in recent history. The result is a massive credibility gap which exacerbates the chasm between sharing Christ and the culture of polarizing politics.

In one text from the third century, a Christian describes Jesus' followers as those who,

> "dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. ... They have a common table, but not a common bed. ... They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men, and are persecuted by all. They ... are reviled, and bless; they are insulted, and repay the insult with honor."[209]

[209] Tish Harrison Warren. "The Early Church Saw Itself as a Political Body. We Can too." *Christianity Today*, (October 2020). https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/october-web-only/election-politics-president-trump-early-church-model.html (Accessed 11.17.2021)

A ‘via media’ political posture offers the church a place by which it can speak prophetically into the world and its culture rather than attempting to align itself with a particular side which becomes problematic. The church embodies a different narrative which surpasses the basic expectations of the law, politics and society. It strives to live out the radical calling of Jesus among those in the world.

A Way Forward: Humanizing Others

This ‘via media’ perspective offers an opportunity to humanize others rather than dehumanizing our perceived opponents. Wesleyan theology is rooted in the goodness of creation and prevenient grace which should lead toward humanizing others as people created in the image of God. Avoiding the extremes of non-essentials reminds us that our encounters with others have the potential to be ‘holy ground.’[210]

Bryan P. Stone articulates the power of the Spirit at work in humanizing others and becoming more fully human.

> “Christian ministry begins with our own positive response to this summons to become more fully human and with our own participation in the humanizing process identified by Jesus. From there, authentic Christian ministry goes on to extend this summons and this path to other human beings, both personally and corporately. In other words, Christian ministry has the audacity to claim that its character and praxis is an extension of God's character and praxis. And it is precisely our faith in Jesus as the Christ that allows us to be so presumptuous. Christian ministry is always more than sheer activity; it is faithed activity. It is born out of a confidence in the God of compassion discovered in Jesus of Nazareth and it is shaped and structured by a loyalty to that same God. This ministerial praxis is a humanizing praxis precisely because it originates in and is aimed at the restoration or re-creation of true humanity.”[211]

This audacity gives us the opportunity to share in Christ’s character and extend extravagant grace into the lives of others. Wesleyan theology continually resists the

[210] Exodus 3:5, Joshua 5:15, NIV 2011.
[211] Stone, *Compassionate Ministry*, 84-85.

impulse to reduce and 'otherize' those who disagree with our viewpoints. The church impairs its witness in compromising the treatment of others. We have the opportunity to speak well of those around us created in the image of God.

A Way Forward: Traditioned Innovation

L. Gregory Jones coined the term 'traditioned innovation' to describe the need to honor the past while also asking key questions about the future.[212] The goal is to search for elements of identity in the history of the organization while also asking questions about current and future identity in shifting contexts. Jones summarizes traditioned innovation as,

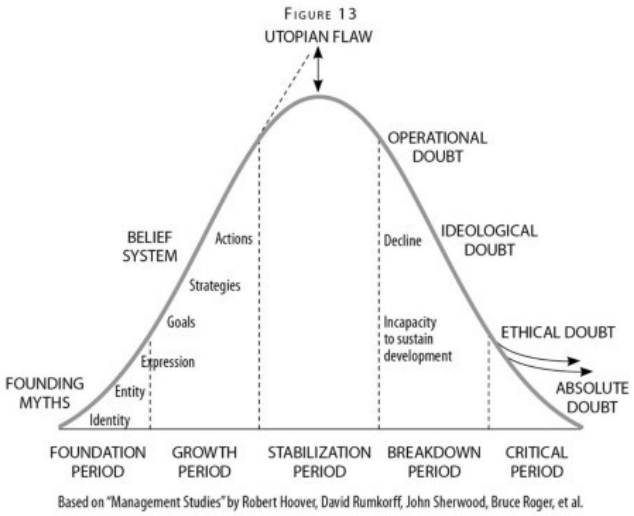
> "……. a way of thinking and living that holds the past and future together in creative tension, a habit of being that depends on wise judgment, requiring both a deep fidelity to the patterns of the past that have borne us to the present and a radical openness to the changes that will carry us forward. Our feet are firmly on the ground with our hands open to the future."[213]

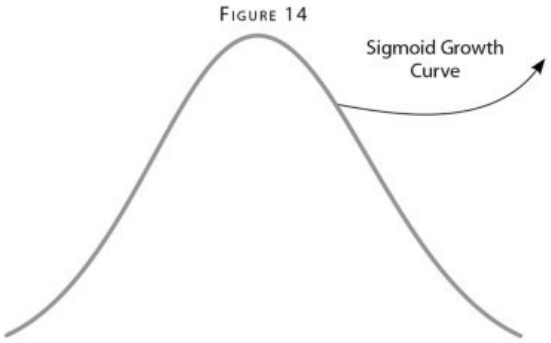
This type of innovation resists the 'change everything' mindset and challenges the 'nothing should change' attitude. This type of reflection represents God, the original innovator who continues to be the creator and extends prevenient grace to all. Any faithful innovation responds to God, who continues to work in our world. His working may elude us at times and lie outside of our typical experience, waiting to be discovered. God is always 'preceding' us as well as 'succeeding us' in a future shaped by His hand.[214]

As previously discussed, the Wesleyan movement was completely innovative outside the traditional workings of the Anglican church. Field preaching, classes, bands and other forms of ministry were vital in establishing and extending the movement.

[212] L. Gregory Jones, *Christian Social Innovation*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016), Chapter 2.
[213] Ibid., 53-54.
[214] Ibid., 56-57.

Institutions will not win "nones." The reality of postmodern (post-Christian) thought distrusts grand narratives and the institutions that claim legitimacy from them. The missional nature of the church provides limitless possibilities for structure and organization. As discussed earlier, the life cycle of institutions is illustrated by Hirsch and Frost as follows:





The authors continue: 'The goal of churches should be to achieve what strategists call 'sigmoid growth,' which is the capacity to remain in a state of movement-like growth."[215] The great historical movements began with a sense of mission which became the impetus for the renewal of the institutional church.[216]

This has transformational potential for the church. Howard Snyder describes the needed balance between institution and movement,

> "If this line of reasoning makes sense, it logically points toward a theory of church life and renewal that *combines* insights from the institutional and charismatic views. This then points toward a mediating model of the church that seeks not merely to steer a middle course between the two views but to incorporate the truth of both (a very Wesleyan move)."[217]

[215] Frost and Hirsch. *The Shaping,* Chapter 12.
[216] Frost and Hirsch. *The Shaping,* Chapter 12.
[217] Howard Snyder. "The Church is Both Institutional and Charismatic." *Seedbed Online Resources* (June 29, 2017). https://www.seedbed.com/the-church-is-both-institutional-and-charismatic/ (Accessed 11.17.21)

Snyder also makes a helpful distinction between the Biblical model of church and the institutional church. In consideration of the church as a "community of God's people" and the church's institutional elements, he argues that a practical option is to view all structures as 'parachurch structures which exist alongside of and parallel to the community of God's people, but are not themselves the church.'[218] These structures are useful to the degree they 'aid the church in its mission, but are human inventions, culturally determined.'[219] The institutions are wineskins that are culturally constructed and serve the mission of God's people for a specific time and place. Snyder summarizes the difference between the church and parachurch structures in the following table.[220]

The Church	**Parachurch Structures**
1. God's creation	1. Human creation
2. Spiritual fact	2. Sociological fact
3. Cross-culturally valid	3. Culturally bound
4. Biblically understood and evaluated	4. Sociologically understood and evaluated
5. Validity determined by spiritual qualities and fidelity to Scripture	5. Validity determined by function in relation to the mission of the church
6. God's agent of evangelism and reconciliation	6. Human agents for evangelism and service
7. Essential	7. Expendable
8. Eternal	8. Temporal and temporary.
9. Given by divine revelation	9. Shaped by human tradition
10. Purpose: to glorify God	10. Purpose: to serve the church

The structure of the COTN is operated through the body of the elected church in district assemblies and general assemblies. With district assemblies every year and general assemblies every four years there are channels through which recommendations and decisions can be made. An issue may be delegated to a committee which studies the

[218] Howard Snyder. *Radical Renewal*, 228-229.
[219] Ibid., 228.
[220] Ibid., 231.

issue for four years and then brings it back to the general assembly. The deficit in this model is that it typically can take four to twelve years to make a significant change in the church's polity.

The “movement” (charismatic) nature of the church could be incorporated into the church's structure in an ongoing fashion. An example is found in a letter sent to the general church of the Nazarene in the spring of 2021 and was followed up with an in-person meeting on April 8, 2021. It was authored by a group of pastors who are committed to the institution yet questioned the effectiveness of the institutional mission.[221]

Conversation Between Pastors and the General Church

The church of the Nazarene has a subgroup of pastors (large church) which meets regularly for fellowship, sharing of ministry methods, and leadership growth.[222] A group of these pastors shared some questions and concerns about the local church's relationship to the general church and were invited to come to Kansas City for a meeting. For clarity, they drafted a letter (Appendix 1) that summarized the main elements of the group’s perspective.

The first area of focus is in the “feeling that the system has been inverted.” The perceived problem is the lack of focus in helping the local church in America achieve its mission. The perceived feeling is that the local church is a vehicle for “propping up the denomination.” This feeling is familiar among those willing to speak openly about their concerns for the church.

The church movement in every generation has created necessary organization (or structure) to support current and future efforts. This is a strength of human nature in

[221] See Appendix 1 for the full text of the letter. Used with permission of the signers.
[222] This group is known by the acronym C.O.K.E. or K-Church which is short for churches of a thousand people or more.

appropriate contexts. As the movement shifts in new directions, however, there is a tendency toward conflict with the structure which has become fixed and elevated beyond its life cycle.[223] Those embedded in structural positions tend to preserve or maintain the system many times beyond its current usefulness.

A poignant question is asked in the letter, "does our funding system promote or impede local church growth?"[224] Pastors and churches are directed to give between 12-18% of their income to the work of the global church in the areas of evangelism, pensions, universities and the regional district.[225] In 2005 this budget system was changed to a "tithe concept" with taking a percentage of current giving. It is perplexing that the term "tithing concept" is used to describe a system that is not a tithe (which is literally a 'tenth'). This funding system is based on a model of church which has been waning in effectiveness for some time (see Appendixes). It impedes the local church by elevating the institution and many times puts a strain on the local parish.

Another key area of focus was in the perceived "missional drift" of the denomination. The group names problematic elements:

> "we are celebrating mediocre steps of impact, spotlighting theological awareness far over missional impact, promoting inadequate leaders, and that most of this stems from a failure to develop and train pastors."[226]

The COTN has a great deal of connection which is a strength. It is important to note that the group affirms the reality that the church leaders are 'better together' while striving to talk about difficult issues. They note the 'failure to develop and train pastors' reveals a disconnect in clergy preparation based on a specific ecclesiology.

[223] Life Cycle – Sense 3 – "a series of stages through which something (such as an individual, culture, or manufactured product) passes during its lifetime." https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/life%20cycle. Accessed 1.13.22.
[224] See Appendix 1.
[225] Church of the Nazarene General Board, "Funding the Mission: General Questions." https://fundingthemission.org/sites/default/files/121009FAQsENGLISH.pdf (accessed 2.7.22)
[226] See Appendix 1.

The meeting convened as a result of this letter was cordial and mutually beneficial. The group was able to share viewpoints, concerns and served as a conversation starter. Those in leadership positions certainly feel the weight of these realities. Local and denominational leaders all want the church to thrive. The downside is that the institutional church lacks agility in shifting models. As decline continues (see Appendix 3) in this region (USA) it is vital that we examine the narratives underlying our theology and praxis.

Training and Development of Pastors

The insight from this letter about the church's failure to "develop and train pastors" is significant. The local pastor in the COTN is trained in Biblical exegesis, theology, church history, and other practical areas of leading and administration targeted toward a particular church model. This model has been based on a common understanding and expression of in the late 20th century. Emphasis is placed on preaching, discipleship, and evangelism with appropriate administration. One significant deficit is in a disconnect between 'default' and 'missional' leadership.

The Tension Between "Default" and "Missional" Leadership

The word 'default' is defined as 'a selection made usually automatically or without active consideration due to lack of a viable alternative**.'**[227] It usually involves a practical alternative to change, a stable environment, or a safe option over a risky one. Default in the context of mission often leads to operation minus imagination. Alan Hirsch describes the challenges of a default posture:

[227] Definition 5 of 'default'. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/default. Accessed 3.11.2022

> "Ministers report that their various attempts to revitalize the churches they lead very seldom yield the desired results. A lot of energy (and money) is put into the change programs, with all the usual communication exercises, consultations, workshops, and so on. At first, things seem to change, and then once pressure for change is alleviated, the system simply snaps back to its previous default template and configuration. So instead of managing new organizations, these leaders end up managing the unwanted side effects of their change efforts. The reason for this is actually quite simple, though it is often overlooked: unless the paradigm and the system that maintains it at the heart of the culture are changed, there can be no lasting change."[228]

The default is the minimum requirement for operating the organization and elevates the status quo. Christendom lurks in the background as a template for how the church should function when all else fails. The temptation to provide 'tweaks' to the Christendom model is alluring. Missiologists challenge us to "rethink about the actual mode of the church's engagement – the way it perceives and shapes itself around its core task."[229] Reverting to Christendom's underlying assumptions leads to a static understanding of the church. This once again brings us to the issue of asking proper questions. 'Default' questions are often ecclesiocentric and genuine 'missional' questions are Christocentric.[230]

While creativity and new works are appreciated, there is a default expectation to at the very least 'keep the church going' in a positive direction according to the given structure. These expectations are based upon a particular model of church existing in late 20th century America. The pastor is expected to report statistics punctually, come to district (regional) events, and ensure that the church pays "budgets" which currently amount to 14% (or higher) of the church's income.

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[228] Alan Hirsch. *The Forgotten Ways*, Chapter 2.

[229] Ibid., Chapter 2.

[230] See Alan Roxburgh, *Joining God, Remaking the Church.,* Chapter 2. Roxburgh demonstrates how many of our best efforts to be 'missional' or use missional language end up only returning to church-centered questions. These often result in more efforts to 'fix-the-church' rather than seek the heart of God in our parish.

The expectations are, at minimum (or default), to be called to ministry assignments, preach, teach, and lead in ways that foster growth of the local church in its context. As new converts come to the Lord, they should be discipled and become engaged local church members. The reality of transfer growth is not highlighted in education yet quickly becomes a reality in a consumer church marketplace. The underlying assumptions inherent in this local expression of church are numerous:

- It is important to have relevant worship and preaching.
- The church should be attractive to guests.
- The church should show increase in attendance and giving.
- The pastor and church should strive to be "team players" in support of the district and global church.
- The pastor and church should be creative in ministry but not 'rock the boat' on a local, district, or general level.

According to this blueprint, the natural product of these efforts is to lead the local church effectively and find solutions when problems arise. If problems occur, it is possibly time for a pastoral transition or significant shift to regain effectiveness.

One of the primary issues in pastoral training and praxis is this unstated tension between the 'default' operation of the church in opposition to the 'missional identity' of the church. This reality is pervasive in the local context.

One significant drawback of this approach is that it is ecclesiocentric rather than Christocentric. The question 'how do we operate the church' should become, 'how can we engage in a missionary encounter between the gospel and western culture?'[231] The church is often the focus of our attention and energy rather than God, who created it. The difficulty in asking God-centered questions rather than church-centered questions looms large. This is a significant task for the movement of Jesus ahead.

[231] Roxburgh, *Joining God*, Introduction.

The Ecclesiological Reality

The ecclesiological reality in the COTN appears to be very similar to the path other denominations took in the latter half of the 20th century. Denominations in America since WWII intentionally adopted a corporate denomination style in organizational establishment, growth, and perpetuation.[232] Religion became one more option in the spiritual "marketplace" with protestant churches attempting to improve their processes and market the organization. As Alan Roxburgh notes, "over time the religious marketplace became a crowded one, competition grew and success became elusive, which accelerated the transformation of the corporate denomination."[233] Wesleyan ecclesiology has the potential to form new modes of praxis for the church. Ecclesiology begins and ends with the movement and embodiment of Christ's mission.

A Way Forward: Adaptive Leadership

Frost and Hirsch describe the difference between operational leadership and adaptive leadership. They articulate the challenge ahead,

> "A note of warning for those leading in established churches. What Western Christianity desperately needs at the moment is adaptive leadership: people who can help us transition to a different, more agile, mode of church. Such leaders don't necessarily have to be highly creative innovators themselves, but they must be people who can move the church into adaptive modes—people who can disturb the stifling equilibrium and create the conditions for change and innovation. By and large, many leaders in church organizations, particularly those with strong caring and teaching gifts, can exhibit a tendency to avoid conflict and too easily soothe tensions. Left unchecked, this can be lethal, because it caters to equilibrium and therefore ultimately to death."[234]

[232] "Corporate' means in a business sense. A top-down, hierarchical style of church organization similar to other business type models.
[233] Roxburgh, *Joining God*, Chapter 1.
[234] Frost and Hirsch. *The Forgotten Ways*. 348-349.

There is great potential in cultivating adaptive leadership alongside the models necessary to embody God's mission in the world.

Wesleyan ecclesiology values the local movement of the body of Christ in particular expressions of the church. The further the church moves away from the local expression, the less agile it becomes. The movement of God in the local church could be given greater prominence in denominational structure. As noted in chapter three, H. Ray Dunning said, "the functional nature of the church takes priority over the form of the church and dictates the institutional characteristics. In the Early Church, practices were adopted that furthered the mission, and those that did not were abandoned. "Form was important only as it served function."[235] A faithful Wesleyan ecclesiology embraces effective incarnations of the church in varying contexts.

Our finest theologians have articulated the nature of Wesleyan ecclesiology as movement. Deirdre Brower-Latz reminds us that "a further aspect of Wesleyan ecclesiology is thus the church as an organic, evolving movement." Incorporation of 'traditioned innovation' could be catalytic in the church of the Nazarene. Intentional practices of listening and incorporating elements of the movement of the church in local communities and denominational ethos have the opportunity to be transformative.

[235] Dunning, *Grace, Faith and Holiness*, 536.

A Way Forward: A Living Faith

Moving beyond 'traditioned innovation', Jones describes the dynamic nature of faith in innovation. He describes the role of faith: 'To say that faith animates social innovation (or anything else) suggests something richer and more challenging: faith is not just one more thing—faith is the thing. In this way, faith inspires, directs, and works in and through our lives.'[236] If faith is genuinely the catalyst for our lives and context then we should be some of the most innovative people on the planet. The mission of God could be filled with creativity, challenge, and new ways of engaging people due to the faith we claim to embody.

Jones illustrates the importance of blessing, hope, forgiveness, friendship, imagination, and improvisation. He comes back to these themes toward the end and declares that 'we must live at the intersection of these things'.[237] Jones has authored another work that deals with forgiveness. Jones' deep engagement in these areas related to faith are encouraging for the church.

Positioning Ourselves Among the Nones

[236] L. Gregory Jones, *Christian Social Innovation*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016), Introduction.
[237] L. Gregory Jones, *Christian Social*, Concluding Postscript.

What is the key to understanding the "nones" and building relational bridges into their lives? It is essential to listen and understand the reality and perceptions related to faith and the church. This pew research study sheds light on the issues,

> "Six-in-ten religiously unaffiliated Americans – adults who describe their religious identity as atheist, agnostic or "nothing in particular" – say the questioning of religious teachings is a very important reason for their lack of affiliation. The second-most-common reason is opposition to the positions taken by churches on social and political issues, cited by 49% of respondents (the survey asked about each of the six options separately). Smaller, but still substantial, shares say they dislike religious organizations (41%), don't believe in God (37%), consider religion irrelevant to them (36%) or dislike religious leaders (34%)."[238]

The data highlights the disconnect between the perception of the local church, suspicion of religious organizations (leaders), and political stances. Reshaping the church as movement promises to create a new ethos of the church as a living organism in the community.

Some might view an effort to focus on the church as movement as inauthentic. This tendency reveals a misunderstanding of the nature of the church and dependence on particular contextual expressions. An authentic movement will more likely convince the religiously unaffiliated of Jesus in their local context. Generation Z is described as the "loneliest generation" of Americans and that "lack of connection can't be met by a brand, a corporation or an institution."[239] It can be met by people embracing others with welcome, love, and empathy.[240]

[238] "Why America's 'Nones" Don't Identity With a Religion." Pew Research. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/08/08/why-americas-nones-dont-identify-with-a-religion/ (Accessed 11.21.2021)
[239] Tyler Huckabee. "How Gen Z Will Shape the Church*." Relevant Magazine.* https://relevantmagazine.com/magazine/how-gen-z-will-shape-the-church/ (Accessed 2.10.22)
[240] Ibid.

The parish nature of the church tethers the church in caring for its neighbors and being fully present with them . In Faith for Exiles, Kinnamon and Matlock examine resilient disciples in current N. American context. For this study, each young adult had to agree with one of the following statements:

- "I want to find a way to follow Jesus that connects with the world I live in.
- God is more at work outside the church than inside, and I want to be a part of that.
- I want to be a Christian without separating myself from the world around me."[241]

These statements signify the reality of the change from an ecclesiocentric model to a Christocentric model. The church's missional identity leads to investing itself in local incarnational ministry.

The current generation desires to make a difference in the world and expects the same from the the companies, brands, and groups they do business with. These groups are expected to take a stand on social issues, care about the environment and the world at large.[242] It seems clear that the younger generation expects creation care with integrity whether inside or outside the church.

Chapter 6 -- Summary and Further Work

Introduction

Some might describe the church in the west as currently at a crossroads. The reality is more like viewing a new frontier with a need to forge a new path into the

[241] Kinnamon and Matlock, *Faith for Exiles*, 30-31.
[242] Tyler Huckabee. "How Gen Z Will Shape the Church."

wilderness of modern culture. Society has been shifting away from Judeo-Christian faith for some time. This new context requires engagement with a transformed approach and worldview. "Malaise" is a descriptor coined by Charles Taylor to describe our age. Our world has become disenchanted with science and technology now giving answers once relegated to God.

The concept of spirituality has become a contested issue, ultimately now residing with the individual rather than the church. The majority of people in our context now have no religious affiliation. This affords the church great opportunity to shift toward a missional posture. Lesslie Newbigin's insightful perspective is helpful describing the church "not as something drawn out of the world into a building, but something sent out into the world."[243]

John Wesley

Wesley was a radical Christian and missionary. His calling, combined with the church's reluctance, compelled him to preach, relate and organize for the sake of people. The goal of Methodist societies was not to overthrow the Anglican church but to reform it by fulfilling the church's mission.

Wesley has been called 'radical,' 'elusive' and 'enthusiast.' His sole mission was to fulfill the gospel's demands with or without the church of England's help. With pulpits closed due to his enthusiasm, he preached in fields and organized bands and classes. He was 'loyally subversive' to the institutional church, with them reluctantly tolerating his ministry. If the gospel and the church conflicted, the gospel won. His goal was to

[243] Lesslie Newbigin, *A Word in Season: Perspective on Christian World Missions*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), Chapter 6.

perform the church's essential mission. Close examination of Wesley's ministry leads to an inescapable missionary encounter with the surrounding culture.

Paradigm Shifts: The Church as Movement

The single greatest insight this author has found in the recent study of Wesley is how thoroughly his ministry was a movement. Wesleyan scholars describe the church (or the kingdom of God) as an act, mission, event, or evolving organic movement. The mature Wesley pragmatically planned for the future of Methodists in America, Scotland and England.

The tension inherent in the history of the Jesus movement and the church as an institution will continue. Every generation must come to terms with the gospel's claims and the current model of the church. Inevitably some will remain and advocate for the current model, some will attempt reform, and others will forge a new path. These voices should be essential in ongoing ecclesiological conversations.

There will always be a need for organization and scaffolding (structure) for the current context. Wesleyan scholars have clearly articulated the church's dynamic quality with virtually limitless options for organization or structure. What is clear is that the mission must always be primary. The church's identity should remain tied to the movement with the scaffolding necessary for accomplishing the mission without lapsing into a rigid institution. As Snyder suggested, any structure associated with the church could be called 'parachurch' by definition.

Paradigm Shifts: Christology → Missiology → Ecclesiology

One of the great challenges ahead is to examine our theological roots and resulting praxis. Many in the western world have understood mission to be a function of the church (Christology →Ecclesiology-> Missiology). This removes the initiative from God as missional and places it as a function of the church. This perspective results in the mission becoming optional as one church function among many.

There is great difficulty in reimagining the mission of God for the future without viewing it through the lens of current structure and praxis. The church was (and is) created by Christ with His missional nature empowering it. The church belongs to God and every generation is called to faithfully embody the church in local context.

Paradigm Shifts: Theology of Place

As Jesus was incarnated in a specific place and time, so must any expression of God through His people (the ekklesia) be embodied. James, the brother of Jesus, describes the church as a 'kind of firstfruits of all he created.'[244] The preparation, planting, watering, and reaping cycle is only possible in a specific context. The church is deeply rooted in the world and serves as an embodiment of the gospel in its community.

Wesley's description of the instituted and prudential means of grace gives us a window into the power of local experience. The "prudential means" creates a holistic synergy by extending grace to those in need and the reciprocal extension of grace received by the giver. Wesley understood that God's prevenient grace was constantly at work and that opportunities for engagement with people were a "means of grace" in

[244] See Chapter 4 of this paper and James 1:18.

itself. Any moment, person, or relationship provides the conduit for the work of God in grace.

The 'new parish' is a geographic locale large enough to live life together but small enough to be known as a neighbor within it.

Paradigm Shifts: Wine and Wineskins

The twin reformation attempts of Martin Luther and John Wesley shared similar fates. Their goal was to bring reformation to the church yet they faced significant resistance. Their messages were considered radical for the time and were ultimately ignored or rejected by ecclesial leaders. Neither wanted to break away from the church and create something new but ultimately had little choice. Frank Baker describes Wesley's defense of Luther and the matter of separation,

> "….maintaining that they had been 'violently thrust out of' the Church of Rome because they would not subscribe to 'all the errors of that church'. They did not *separate, for* separation is a voluntary removal, whereas the Reformation was 'not a matter of choice but of necessity'."[245]

Luther's proposed his 95 theses for academic debate which led to immediate and widespread impact. Wesley acted to fulfill the church's mission hoping that it would lead to the reformation of the institutional church.[246]

Howard Snyder explores this shift thoroughly. He summarizes the reformer's plight: "we try to contain the new wine of the gospel in old wineskins-outmoded

[245] Frank Baker, *John Wesley and the Church*, 132.

[246] Outler, "Do Methodists Have a Doctrine of the Church?", 14.
Full text of paragraph follows:
"Once he was involved in it, the revival dominated the rest of Wesley's life—his preaching, theologizing, writing, publishing, his private and social affairs. He was convinced that the Methodist societies were the chief human agencies of the revival—and that this was their importance and justification. They were also his hope of reforming the Church of England—not by overthrowing the establishment or even capturing it—but by their actual performance of the church's essential mission, where this was going generally by default. Whatever else Methodism ever was or has since become, its first and most decisive identification was as an enterprise of Christian mission, witness, and nurture."

traditions, obsolete philosophies, creaking institutions, old habits."[247] As Jesus' teaching burst the wineskin of Judaism, the old wineskin will eventually burst with the fermentation of new wine. The structures (wineskins) of the church are not scriptural or sacred. They are the result of well-intentioned organizations that served the church for a specific time. The church continues to try to establish practices that would promote renewal. But most of them fall short either by trading the gospel for relevance or trying to hold on to the current structure and aim for a mild 'refit.'[248] Many efforts toward renewal attempt to wed Biblical emphases (discipleship, for example) with existing institutional systems. These suggestions are usually not radical enough when dealing with the problem.

This returns us to the oft repeated question of missiologists in relation to the gospel and culture. Will the church continue to ask church-centered questions rather than God-centered questions?[249]

A Local Example

A local example might be helpful. Ohio currently has five Nazarene districts.. There are approximately 60-80 churches on each district, with each having a superintendent, staff, facilities, etc., requiring support from those local churches at a rate of approximately 4-5%. Appendix 3 contains research denoting the decline of churches on two regions in the U.S.A. in recent years.

The author's current home district (Southwest Ohio) was created from a Western Ohio district divided in 1960 to create two new districts. This district encompasses the

[247] Snyder, *Radical Renewal: The Problem of Wineskins*, 5.
[248] Ibid., 17.
[249] Alan Roxburgh, for example.

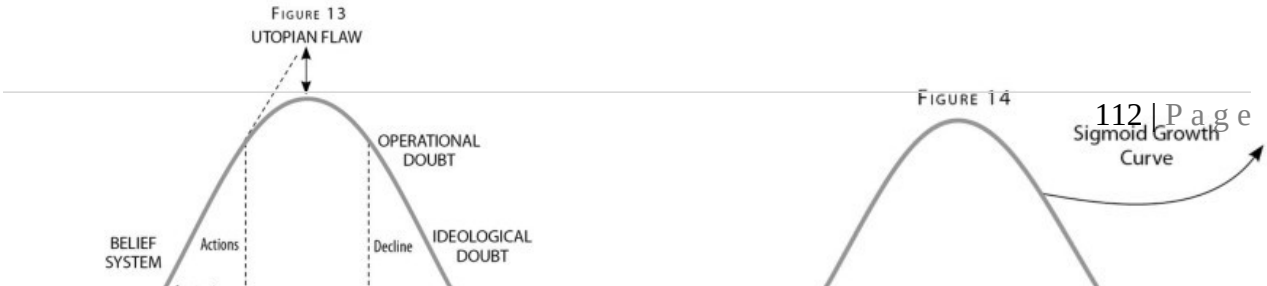
southwest corner of the state including Dayton, Cincinnati and some areas east toward the middle of the state. The creation of these two districts (SWO and NWO) was undoubtedly a time of growth in the church with many new churches planted. This was certainly deemed necessary and justified at that time. In 2004 this district had over 75 churches and now it reports 61 organized churches, 17 PACs (parent affiliated congregations) and 5 unorganized groups.

It seems that a proper question might be, 'what is God up to in our current context and how can we shape a new structure to fit God's movement?' The lens of the past and current iteration of the church dominates the landscape. More often questions are framed with the feel of saving churches, districts, and campgrounds rather than questions related to the mission of God.

A Way Forward

Posing difficult questions requires nerve and commitment. What if the work of God in Ohio was prominent, and the church created two or three districts to reduce overhead (cost) and allow churches to have more resources for local missional impact? What if our view of leadership shifted from relying on a 'sole elected leader' to a new model of leadership which relied on capable leaders in smaller areas? In Appendix 1, strong pastors articulate concerns that resonate with local realities in multiple contexts. Critical reflection is always taking place.

A Way Forward: The Life Cycle (Nature) of Movements



Revisiting the nature (life cycle) of movements shared by Frost and Hirsch may help reimagine the church.[250] They argue that churches should strive to achieve 'sigmoid growth' which remains in a " movement-like growth state."[251] Comparing two approaches to renewal reveals similar findings. For example, both find that renewal movements experience tension or opposition from the "established order."[252] They also find that the movement is led by nontraditional leaders who often are charismatic. Many institutions find themselves on the decline side of the cycle resisting the movement ethos due to chaos and unpredictability. Many movements do not survive this tension with the institution and end up jettisoned from the mother ship.

The authors make a vital point here about why it is so important to embrace the movement. Frost and Hirsch describe the kind of attitude needed by leaders at the highest levels,

> "…… it requires a definite commitment to permission-giving at high levels of organizational leadership to ensure that they are not. The institutionalization of the church has robbed us of that dynamic that is needed to push beyond established boundaries to claim new missional ground in the name of the

[250] Frost and Hirsch. *The Shaping,* 291-293.
[251] Ibid., 293.
[252] Ibid., 296-297.

> kingdom of God. In order to remain truly missional, we need to be very aware of the dangers of institutionalization."[253]

Healthy leadership requires integrity, transparency, and a self-awareness which disarms a defensive posture. It is possible to welcome all sorts of voices in the organization giving permission to challenge the norm and imagine the new. Conversations are often quickly terminated by quoting regulations, rehearsing previous failed attempts, and conserving the status quo.

A Way Forward: Learning and Performance

There are helpful elements offered in the work of David Hurst on organizational change. He describes organizations as residing somewhere on a continuum between an informal learning organization and a formal performance organization.

> The most extreme statement of this view is to say that young businesses begin their lives as informal, *learning* organizations, but if successful, they become formal, *performance* organizations. It is thus helpful to think of learning and performance as two ends of a continuum, with the young organizations starting off on the left-hand side and moving toward the right as they age.[254]

There are significant shifts in the way the elements of the organization appear as time progresses. The typical shifts are: Mission becomes strategy, roles become tasks, teams become structure, networks become systems, and recognition becomes compensation. [255] The learning organization is agile and the performance organization becomes more controlled as it achieves success. Hurst finds evidence that "crisis plays

[253] Ibid., 296-298.
[254] David K. Hurst. *Crisis and Renewal*, 33.
[255] David Hurst. *Crisis and Renewal,* 32-52.

an important role in organizational innovation."[256] Crisis naturally leads to confusion and ultimately gives potential for envisioning the future. [257]

Crisis is natural to any organization. David Bosch described our struggle to acknowledge crisis, "Let us also know that to encounter crisis is to encounter the possibility of truly being the *church."*[258] May we trade our comfort for engagement with the gospel. May we encounter neighbors created in the image of God. May we imagine new ways of being Christian and being the church in 2022 and beyond. May we ask dangerous God-centered questions which shake the status quo. May we perform the church's essential mission.

The Local Context

In local context, the Vandalia church is examining its role in the community of North Dayton. The incarnational presence of the church has been tied to the attractional model for some time. It is important to expose the 'build it and they will come' mindset and intentionally shift toward incarnational movement.

One of the primary tasks ahead is in the spiritual formation of the congregation. As with many churches, much of our energy has been focused on bringing people to us in worship, discipleship, and evangelism. Preaching offers initial formational steps toward the church as movement. Spiritual formation in discipleship groups offers further engagement in understanding the mission of God.

[256] Ibid., 119.
[257] Ibid. 144-145.
[258] Bosch, *Transforming Mission,* Introduction.

Formational discipleship will include key elements gleaned from this research on Wesley's ministry, theology of place, and ecclesiology as movement. The way forward is in formation of the local church into an intentional "gathered and scattered" community. In many contexts the default is to be more of a 'gathered' community with less focus on the 'scattered' (sent) nature of the church. One goal would be to achieve a synergy between these elements achieving a hybrid type of model.

Creativity, imagination, and implementation will be vital in our way forward. The church will experiment with new modes of church embodiment in future months. Current planning includes house gatherings and community based groups exploring spirituality, world religions, being 'spiritual but not religious,' with the stated goal of building relationships. The church is also partnering with the Vandalia-Butler Chamber of Commerce, the city of Vandalia, and the local mobile food pantry with our community garden.

The people of the church respond well to missional leadership. Conversations related to the identity and mission of the church are enthusiastic and encouraging. We thank God for his work around us in our neighborhoods.

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Appendix 1: Letter to Guide April 8th meeting of COKE pastors with Nazarene general church representatives.

"Dr. Reeder:
Thank you for the invitation out to the Global Ministry Center. We're looking forward to what we believe will be healthy and constructive conversations that will benefit the future of our denomination. We're passionate about who we are as a people and want to come alongside in any way we can to shape a better future.
In the interest of having the most profitable conversation possible, here are the key points and concerns that we would like to focus on during our 5me together. A small group met over Zoom to capture the key ideas that have been voiced in our gatherings over the years, and to clarify the most helpful focus for our conversa5on in Kansas City.

Focus 1: A Feeling that the System Has Been Inverted
We are unsure what the overall denomination is doing to help the local church in North America achieve its mission. Without clarity on how the denomination is creating disciples, developing and launching leaders, and the contribution of those at the denomination level, it feels like the local churches are propping up the denomination. We are told at the district level that districts don't plant churches, churches plant churches. This makes us wonder at the need for the number of districts and district leaders that we currently have. We are encouraged to raise up missional minded people who will go into the world and serve. And when we do, they are required to raise their own financial support to go. This seems counterintuitive when we are thought to be sending missionaries through our World Evangelism Fund.

Focus 2: The Lack of Clarity on How the Denomination Operates
We have become aware that there were layoffs due to COVID at headquarters. However, we have felt no impact from this at the local church level. This seems like a problem. We are unsure about what the denomination adds as a whole to the local mission when most churches go to North Point, Life Church, or even ARC to add value. Why are we not able to deliver high-quality resources when our resources are being pooled together? 2 key examples: Wynne Lankford worked for 3 years with headquarters to create the shared resource site, and it seems to have gone nowhere. Also, we have a Regional Church Planting Coordinator at the denomination level, but a quick visit to the website leads to an inactive link for those interested in church planting. Why is this a paid staff position if no one is connecting with interested church planters who lack an awareness of how our districts work?

Focus 3: The Missional Drift of the Denomination
We recognize that we are not the only group who feels the mission has drifted. We also recognize that there are groups who feel the mission has drifted in ways that we don't. We understand the tension this creates for those in leadership, and we are

empathetic to that. Our concern is that we are celebrating mediocre steps of impact, spotlighting theological awareness far over missional impact, promoting inadequate leaders, and that most of this stems from a failure to develop and train pastors. We are cognizant that there is a lack of confidence in our universities to train and develop future pastors. Far too many are unequipped for ministry and unable to lead. If this is not our focus as a denomination, then we are unsure what our focus is or should be. At the end of the day, we believe that we are better together, but we're not quite sure how. We want to define how. We receive the message "pay your budgets in full and give extra offerings," but we're unsure of the return on investment for the local church to increase its capacity. The Global Pandemic has forced us to become clear on a lot of things and it has given us an opportunity to make necessary changes. We want to be team players. We're not concerned about "what it's in it for us," but we also want to be good stewards of the resources that are given through our churches.
At best, there is a lack of transparency when it comes to funding the mission and a failure to tell the story of our combined impact in a meaningful way. We subscribe to Nazarene News and, if these are the best stories our denomination has to tell, this only adds to our concern.

To be as specific as possible, these are the questions that require attention:
1. Why are we funding academic institutions that we don't trust for clergy development?
2. What is the organizational structure of the denomination and how is it supporting the growth and health of the Church in North America? (It is surprising that for as long as we've been in the denomination we've never seen an org chart. Is there one?)
3. Does our funding system promote or impede local church growth?
4. Why are our most successful churches getting their resources outside the denomination?

We would like to see missional progress, or clarity on the steps that will be taken where there isn't any. We hope this will not be an isolated conversation. We don't want this meeting to be the end of our work together.

Jim Collins says that the signs that a company is headed for mission failure is you can 1) fail up, and 2) A celebration of mediocrity. We see these signs and want to do whatever we can to ensure the best days for our denomination are ahead of us. John Bowling said, "You don't have to be sick to get better." We want to believe the best and work together so we can build together.

We're excited to spend time together. We trust you and will do whatever we can to help.

Brett Rickey, Daryl Blank, Wynne Lankford, Kevin Jack[259]

[259] See Appendix 1. This letter was an effort from a subgroup of the COKE conferences with several pastors across several regions. The author was given permission by all four pastors to include this letter.

Appendix 2: Annual pastor's report form in the Church of the Nazarene.

DISTRICT _____

Church _____ Church No. _____

Federal Employee ID No. _____

Pastor _____

Church Mailing Address Church Location Address

Pastor's Street Address

E-mail Address _____

ANNUAL REPORT OF PASTOR to the DISTRICT ASSEMBLY

INFORMATION

Purpose

This is the report of the local church to the District Assembly and covers the activities of the church and its auxiliary organizations. Your faithful response makes possible the study of the fruits of ministries occurring in Nazarene churches. Data gathered on the Annual Report of the Pastor is important to some agency of the church and is significant to the statisctical history of the Church of the Nazarene.

Explanation and Instruction

The Pastor is responsible to supervise the preparation of the statistical reports from all departments of the local church. After entering the data in the Annual Pastors Report (APR) application, digitally sign and print. You should keep a copy of this report. It may be used as a guide for making next year's report and as an historical record.

Only the numbered items will appear on the statistical charts printed in the District Assembly Journal, however, the unnumbered items are essential in giving a clear and accurate picture of the church and its needs. This report covers activities of the local church during the "statistical year" as determined for your district. "The exact date of the beginning and close of the statistical year...shall be set by the District Advisory Board."

Care should be taken to assure that the statistics reported to auxiliary conventions by the respective leaders in the local church are the same as included in the Pastor's Report to the District Assembly.

Read the explanation of items carefully. Completeness and accuracy are necessary. Check through the report step by step before entering the data in the APR application.

GENERAL INFORMATION AND RESEARCH

Which cultural group is predominantly served in your congregation? (Hispanic, African American, Korean, Native American, White, non-Spanish, etc.) _____

Does your church qualify as a new church sponsor this year (see worksheet)? ( ) Yes ( ) No

Local Church Activities and Programs

Number revival campaigns (in your church) _____

In how many of them did you use a tenured/commissioned/ registered evangelist? _____

Number of sites where worship services are regularly held? _____

How many people were converted this year? _____

Number received Christian baptism (not infants) _____

Number infants dedicated _____

Number infants baptized _____

Number Communion services held _____

Number local ministers licensed _____

Did you provide evangelism training this year? ( ) Yes ( ) No

Do you have a visitor follow-up system? ( ) Yes ( ) No

Number of persons receiving Continuing Lay Training (CLT) credits _____

Number of CLT credits earned by the church _____

Holiness Today Goal _____ ; Number of subscribers _____

Was the pastor/church planning session conducted this year? (*Manual* 121) ( ) Yes ( ) No

Have your treasurers' books been audited this year? ( ) Yes ( ) No

Dollar value of assets received by Church through bequests, trusts, etc. _____

Was portion of Manual read or distributed as required? (413.12) ( ) Yes ( ) No

Pastoral Care and Activities

Date your pastorate began at this church (mo/day/yr) _____

Number of Paid Staff:	Lay	Clergy
Co-Pastors		
Full-time associates:		
Part-time associates:		
Other full-time staff:		
Other staff:		

(Full-time is defined as "full-livelihood for 30 or more hours a week, 30 or more weeks a year as primary occupation"). *Manual* paragraph 433.3.

Annual Fair Rental Value of church-owned parsonage(s) $ _____

Does your church match, as an employer-provided salary addition, the pastor's voluntary salary reduction contributions to the Nazarene 403(b) Retirement Savings Plan? ( ) Yes ( ) No

If yes, what percent of salary? _____%

Does your church make a contribution, as an employer-provided salary addition, to the pastor's Nazarene 403(b) Retirement Savings Plan account? ( ) Yes ( ) No

If you are not contributing to the Nazarene 403(b) Plan, are you contributing to another retirement plan? ( ) Yes ( ) No

Number of full-time salaried employees whose health and hospitalization insurance is paid by the church (including pastor and staff) _____

Total amount of health/hospitalization insurance paid last year for all full-time salaried employees (including pastor and staff) $ _____

Number of personal pastoral contacts made this year _____

Spiritual

What is your present Christian experience?

Signed _____ Date _____
Pastor

(Section continued from page 4)

NAZARENE COMPASSIONATE MINISTRIES (NCM)

Does this church engage in compassionate ministry within your community? ( ) Yes ( ) No What type of ministry is offered?

NMI

NMI Members (excluding associate members) (29) _____

NMI Associate Members (29a) _____

(For classifications, see Manual, Sect 511 Article IV.)

CHURCH PROPERTY

The values given to "Church Buildings" and "Parsonages" should include grounds, buildings, and equipment. Where the church and parsonage are combined in one building, make a fair division of the value for each. Where possible, get an official appraisal. Include all properties owned by the church.

Value Church buildings and property (30) _____

Value Parsonages (31) _____

Indebtedness on these properties (32) _____

Give accurate amount of indebtedness on all "Church and parsonage property" combined.

Data as of: 12/7/2007

Church _____ Church No. _____ Church Year _____

Pastor _____

MEMBERSHIP & PROPERTY

LOCAL CHURCH

Church Members Reported Last Year (1)_____
(This number must be the same as that reported in Column 10 last year and published in the District Journal. If there was an error last year, make the proper adjustment under gains or losses rather than change this item.)

Received:

By profession of faith:
Non-adult children of members _____
Other _____
Total (2)_____
(New members joining the church for the first time or joining without letters of any kind.)

From other denominations (3)_____
(Members received by letter in some form. If they join without such letter, report them in item 2.)

By transfer to your church (4)_____
(Members received by letter of transfer from another Nazarene church.)

Total Gains: (Sum of 2, 3, and 4.) (5)_____

Lost:

By death (6)_____

By removal _____; commendation _____; or release_____ (7)_____
("Removal" means the official board action to remove the name from the roll. "Commendation" means the granting of an official letter of commendation to another denomination. "Release" means removal of the name from the membership roll at their request, not for the transfer to another denomination. *Manual* Pars. 111.1, 112.2, 112.3.)

By transfer to other Nazarene churches (8)_____
(Members to whom a transfer to another Nazarene church has been issued.)

Total Losses: (Sum of 6, 7, and 8.) (9)_____

Members at End of Year (Add 1 and 5, then subtract 9.) (10)_____

Inactive members (*Manual* 109-9.4.) (10a)_____
(Number of persons in Item 10 who are inactive members.)

Associate Members (11)_____
(Only if your district has an approved plan - *Manual* 108.)

Average Attendance at Weekly Worship Services:

Attendance: Primary Worship (12)_____

Average Attendance of other Worship Services (13)_____

SUNDAY SCHOOL MINISTRIES

A. REGULAR SUNDAY SCHOOL SESSION

The Sunday School responsibility list (enrollment) refers to the classes which study the Bible any time during the week using the approved curriculum for at least 1/2 hour each week in a specified place. (*Manual*, Sect. 512, Article I.) List by age-groups or grades, whether the school is fully departmentalized or not.

CHILDREN'S MINISTRIES

Total of the following responsibility list (enrollment) for children's ministries should equal Line 14. Count pupils only. Do not include officers and teachers (See line 24)

Early Childhood:

Crib _____; 1-year-olds _____; 2-year-olds _____;

3-year-olds _____; 4-year-olds _____; 5-6 year-olds _____

Elementary:

(Grades 1-2)_____; (Grades 3-4)_____; (Grades 5-6)_____.

Total Children's Sunday School Responsibility List (enrollment) (14)_____

Average Weekly Children's Regular Sunday School Attendance (15)_____
Include officers and teachers.

Cradle Roll List (16)_____
Transferred from Cradle Roll to Early Childhood

Caravan Enrollment (17)_____

Vacation Bible School Enrollment

(Pupils_____, Officers and Teachers_____) (18)_____

Number attending Boys and Girls Camp _____

Do you provide Children's Church? ( ) Yes ( ) No Ages Included _____

Do you operate a childcare? ( ) Yes ( ) No Ages Included _____
Enrollment_____

Do you operate a school Primary-Secondary? ( ) Yes ( ) No

Highest grade_____ Enrollment_____

YOUTH MINISTRIES
SUNDAY SCHOOL

Total of the following responsibility list (enrollment) for Youth Sunday School should equal Line 19.

Jr. High (12-14)_____; Sr. High (15-18)_____;
Campus/Career Youth (19-23)_____

Total on Youth Sunday School Responsibility List (enrollment) (19)_____
Count pupils only. Do not include officers and teachers. (See line 24)

Average Weekly Youth Regular Sunday School Attendance (20)_____
Include officers and teachers.

NYI

Nazarene Youth International Members * (21)_____
* Includes the total of Line 19, officers of NYI, teachers, and any midweek participant of your programs (all persons ages 12 and older who have joined NYI.)

Special youth hour attendance _____

Number attending NYI District Camps _____

Number of campus/career youth attending Nazarene college/university _____

Number of campus/career youth attending non-Nazarene college/university _____

Number of campus/career youth not attending college/university _____

Number of NYI members joining church _____

ADULT MINISTRIES

Total of the following responsibility list (enrollment) for Adult Ministries should equal Line 22.

Ages 24-34_____; Ages 35-54_____; Ages 55-69_____; Ages 70+_____

Total Adult Sunday School Responsibility List (enrollment) (22)_____
Count pupils only. Do not include officers and teachers. (See line 24)

Average Weekly Adult Regular Sunday School Attendance (23)_____
Include officers and teachers.

REGULAR SUNDAY SCHOOL SESSION SUMMARY

These columns are summary columns for Sunday School responsibility list (enrollment) and average weekly regular attendance.

Officers_____; Teachers, include all age groups (Children_____;
Youth _____; Adult_____) (24)_____
Be sure to include officers and teachers in ALL age divisions.

Total on Sunday School Responsibility List (enrollment) (25)_____
(The sum of 14, 16, 19, 22, & 24.)

Total Average Weekly Regular Sunday School Attendance (26)_____
(The sum of 15, 20, & 23.)

Sunday School members joining church _____

B. EXTENDED MINISTRIES (OUTREACH)

Extended ministries are those groups of people which meet each week for at least 1/2 hour to study the Bible but do not study the approved Sunday School curriculum.

Extended Ministries Responsibility List (enrollment) (27)_____

Extended Ministries Average Weekly Attendance (28)_____
Do not count any student or worker more than once each week. If counted in regular Sunday School attendance, do not count again in extended ministries. (*Manual*, Par. 512, Article III, Sec. 2.)

Does this church have an organized small-group ministry other than Sunday School classes? ( ) Yes ( ) No

If so, approximately how many people are involved in these groups weekly? _____

How many small groups meet weekly? _____

Sunday School Ministries Total (add lines 26 & 28)_____

(Continued on Page 1)

Data as of: 12/7/2007

Church _____ Church No. _____ Church Year _____

Pastor _____

FINANCIAL CHART

Read Instructions carefully before filling out report. Do not report fractions of dollars.

		TOTAL	a Church	b Sun. Sch.	c NYI	d NMI
AMOUNT RAISED FOR ALL PURPOSES	(A)					
Paid on:			**Local Interests**			
Buildings and Capital Expenditures/Equipment	(1a)					
Pastors' Actual Cash Housing	(1b)					
Health and Hospitalization Exclusion Allowance	(1c)					
Indebtedness on Property	(2)					
Pastors' Cash Salary	(3a)					
Pastors' Employee Benefits (Includes: Ins., S.S., and 403(b) Plan, etc.)	(3b)					
Associate Pastors' Cash Salaries	(4a)					
Associate Pastors' Employee Benefits (Includes: Ins., S.S., and 403(b) Plan, etc.)	(4b)					
Local Church Expense/Reimbursements	(5a)					
Local Church Expense	(5b)					
Local Departmental Expense	(6)					
Other Benevolences (Local)	(7)					
Total Paid Local Interests	**(8)**		**a1**	**b1**	**c1**	**d1**
Paid on:			**District Interests**			
District Ministries Fund	(9)					
District Projects/New Church Starts	(10)					
District Center	(11)					
District Departmental Expense	(12)					
Other Benevolences (District)	(13)					
Total Paid District Interests	**(14)**		**a2**	**b2**	**c2**	**d2**
Paid on:			**Educational Interests**			
Region College/University Ed. Fund _____ Other _____	(15)					
Nazarene Bible College	(16)					
Nazarene Theological Seminary	(17)					
Total Paid Educational Interests	**(18)**		**a3**	**b3**	**c3**	**d3**
Paid on:			**General Interests**			
World Evangelism Fund	(19)					
Approved Specials (Not in World Evangelism Fund)	(20a)					
Point to Point Cash Gifts	(20b)					
Point to Point Non-Cash Gifts	(20c)					
Pensions and Benefits Fund	(21)					
Other Benevolences (General)	(22)					
Total Paid General Interests	**(23)**		**a4**	**b4**	**c4**	**d4**
GRAND TOTAL (Add 8, 14, 18, and 23.)	**(24)**		(25)	(26)	(27)	(28)

COMPUTE 10 percent Giving:

(W) Enter Total Paid for all Purposes (Item 24) $ _____

(X) Sum of items 10, 16, 17, 19, 20a, 20b and 20c $ _____

(Y) Subtract (X) from (W). (This is the Net Base for 10% giving.) $ _____

(Z) 10% of Net Base Figure (Y) $ _____

You are a 10 percent church if (X) is equal to or greater than the net base figure (Z).

Are you a 10 percent church? ( ) Yes ( ) No

To receive the Stewardship Honor Roll certificate your church must qualify for 10 percent giving in accordance with this formula and must pay all apportionments in full.

Will all apportionments be paid in full at the time of the assembly? ( ) Yes ( ) No

If not, list what percentage of all apportionments will be paid _____

Data as of: 12/7/2007

Appendix 3: Statistical Information on Two U.S. Regions in the Church of the Nazarene

Clergy Aging, Numerical and Financial Summary 2008-2020:
The Church of the Nazarene in the Southwest
Ron Benefiel and Greg Crow
September 2020

I Introduction

The primary purpose of this summary analysis is to assess and learn from the probable effects of denominational statistical trends as they are interrelated with the effects of the coronavirus pandemic and the current financial downturn on the life and mission of the Church of the Nazarene for churches on the Southwest Educational Zone. The data presented was provided by the Research Office in the Global Ministry Center.

II Aging Trends for the Pastoral Cohort

The pastoral cohort for the Church of the Nazarene in US/Canada is aging. This is mirrored by declines on the Southwest Educational Zone.

Age of Senior Pastors in US/Canada (Percentage)

	2000	2008	2011	2014	2017	2020*
Under 30	2.6	2.1	1.8	2.5	2.3	1.4
30-39	17.7	12.7	11.8	11.9	12.0	11.1
40-49	36.2	27.0	22.9	21.4	20.7	21.4
50-59	29.0	34.2	36.1	34.1	31.0	28.3
60-69	13.1	19.6	22.0	23.8	25.7	27.1
70+	1.4	4.3	5.4	6.4	8.4	10.6

Age of Senior Pastors in Southwest Educational Zone (Percentage)

	2000	2008	2011	2014	2017	2020
Under 30	1.9	1.9	0.9	1.4	1.1	---
30-39	15.5	10.4	10.0	11.1	10.3	9.0
40-49	37.1	29.1	22.9	20.4	19.4	19.9
50-59	31.8	35.1	38.3	37.1	33.8	31.6
60-69	12.2	19.5	22.7	23.3	28.2	29.4
70+	1.5	3.9	5.2	6.8	7.2	9.9

*Data for 2020 is preliminary and has not yet been finalized by the GMC.

Analysis:

1) Comparing data for 2000 to that of 2020, there is a marked decrease of younger senior pastors and a corresponding marked increase of those who are older. In the

US/Canada data, those under the age of 40 declined from 20.3% of the senior pastoral cohort to 12.5%. This represents a 38% decline of younger pastors in the total sample. (Southwest decrease is almost 50%). Likewise, those over the age of 60 increased from 14.5% to 37.7%. An increase of nearly 160%. On the Southwest Region, there are now more pastors over the age of 70 than under the age of 40.

2) Much of the increase of older pastors is undoubtedly related to the numerical strength of baby boomers. Twenty years ago, the boomers were in their forties and early fifties which correlates with the number of pastors in those age categories. As boomers have aged into their sixties and early seventies, there has been a corresponding increase of pastors over 60. The increased numbers for the aging boomer cohort is also a likely indication of the aging of laity for many congregations.
3) The millennials are also a large population cohort. So, we would expect the number of senior pastors to be higher for their age group than for other generational cohorts (similar to the Boomer numbers). Apparently, this is not occurring. This may be due to a higher number of younger pastors serving in staff positions or to some who are planting churches that are not yet fully organized. It may also be a reflection of lower levels of religiosity for millennials (i.e. increase in "nones") as well as being indicative of lower levels of denominational identity and loyalty.
4) With nearly 40% of senior pastors being over the age of 60, there will likely be an unusually large number of senior pastors retiring in the next decade. (Although an increasing number are serving into their seventies.) This raises some questions for future consideration. For example, how will this affect the pool of potential candidates for churches in pastoral transition? To the degree that older pastors/leaders are replaced by those who are younger, there could be a loss of institutional memory. At the same time, younger leaders who move into positions of leadership may bring new ideas of how to develop approaches to ministry that resonate with the changing cultural context. This could result in a tradeoff between institutional identity/loyalty on the one hand and innovation on the other.

III Numerical Trends for Congregations

The Church of the Nazarene in the US and Canada has been declining numerically over the past decade. This is also true for churches on the PLNU region. Data from 2008 were selected as the base line for percentage comparison to show change relative to the numerical strength prior to the 2008 recession.

	2008	2011	2014	2017	2020 * (% -- 08)
US/Canada Average Morning Worship (In Thousands)					
US/Canada	519	507	481	456	425 (-18%)
Southwest	70	72	68	60	55 (-21%)
Median Congregational Worship Attendance					
US/Canada	60	59	56	52	49 (-18%)
Southwest	67	69	64	57	55 (-18%)
US/Canada Children's Discipleship Ministries (In Thousands)					
US/Canada	102	102	98	94	81 (-21%)
Southwest	13.9	14.5	13.9	13.3	10.5 (-24%)
US/Canada Youth Discipleship Ministries (In Thousands)					
US/Canada	58	65	60	55	49 (-19%)
Southwest	8.7	10.9	9.2	7.9	6.5 (-25%)
US/Canada -- Primary Language English Congregations					
US/Canada	4351	4295	4251	4217	4174 (-4%)
Southwest	421	414	409	406	402 (-4.5%)
US/Canada – Primary Language Spanish Congregations					
US/Canada	444	468	534	623	638 (+44%)
Southwest	121	134	169	183	178 (+47%)
US/Canada – Other (Primary Language) Congregations					
US/Canada	235	239	251	280	296 (+26%)
Southwest	62	67	75	78	82 (+32%)

*Data for 2020 is preliminary and has not yet been finalized by the GMC.

Analysis:

1) Morning Worship Attendance is likely the best single indicator of numerical strength. Most mainline denominations have been showing declines since the 1960's while evangelical denominations have generally been in decline for about the past 20 years. The decline for the Church of the Nazarene in US/Canada began in 2005 when the average morning worship peaked above 528 thousand. The decline since has generally ranged between 5-10 thousand per year from 2008 to 20016 and between 10-15 thousand per year for the last four years. The median morning worship attendance peaked in 2002 at 65 and has also declined at

an average rate of about 1 per year for the past 18 years. The rate of decline in morning worship attendance does not appear to be slowing.

2) Declines in Median Worship Attendance with half of all congregations averaging less than 50 raises questions regarding viability for many congregations.
3) The decrease in the number of children and youth may indicate that there is also a generational replacement issue to consider. As older generational cohorts diminish, they may not be readily replaced by those who are younger.
4) The percent decline in morning worship attendance both for US/Canada and the Southwest would likely be greater if it were not for the notable increase of Spanish language and other immigrant congregations. The number of Spanish language congregations has sharply increased from 271 in 2000 to 638 in 2020. (From 85 to 178 in the Southwest). Other immigrant congregations are showing strong increases as well. This is a growing edge for the church with strong possibilities for the future. (However, there appears to be a recent slowing of the increase at least for Spanish language congregations.) The large number of new Spanish language congregations also contributes to the decrease in median congregational worship attendance.

IV Financial Trends in Local Congregations (In Millions)

Local church giving for US/Canada declined sharply for about three years following the 2008 recession. Since then it has leveled off. Once again, this is mirrored by a corresponding decline in the Southwest.

	2008	2011	2014	2017	2020*
US/Canada	838	737	737	733	727
**CPI adj.		(.958)	(.902)	(.869)	(.818)
***Adjusted Total		706	665	637	595
****Percent Change		(-14.6%)	(-20.6%)	(-24.1%)	(-29.0%)
Southwest	112	94	94	94	94
**CPI Adj.		(.958)	(.902)	(.869)	(.818)
*** Adjusted Total		90	85	82	77
****Percent Change		(-19.6%)	(-24.1%)	(-26.8%)	(-31.3%)

CPI Adjusted Median Per Capita Giving					
US/Canada	1,616	1,408	1,468	1,398	1,400
Southwest	1,614	1,251	1,237	1,367	1,401

*The data for 2020 is preliminary and has not yet been finalized by the GMC.
**The US Bureau of Labor calculator was used to establish the CPI adjustment multiplier.
***The baseline for the CPI adjustment was set at 2008 to indicate the subsequent strength of giving relative to that which was reported prior to the last recession.
****The "Percent Change" is CPI percent adjusted total income relative to 2008.

Analysis:

1) The 2008 recession obviously had a major impact on financial giving for local congregations. While the economy rebounded over time, financial giving in local congregations leveled off, and when adjusting for the CPI, it continued to decline. The per capita giving adjusted for CPI similarly declined but then remained fairly steady. So, since 2011, people who continued to attend also continued faithfully to give, but because of the decline in attendance, there were fewer who were giving.
2) Generally speaking, adjusting for inflation, the Church has about 70% of the financial resources today compared to 2008 to carry out its mission and fund its operational needs. With this decline in financial resources, many churches are struggling, while others have adjusted to the new financial reality.
3) Some churches may find it increasingly difficult to financially support a pastor. From another data set, 43% of senior pastors in US/Canada in 2019 were bi-vocational. Of full-time senior pastors, the median total financial package (salary, benefits, housing, social security) was less than $45,000.
4) Giving patterns for generational cohorts are higher for Builders and Boomers and lower for Gen X and Millennials. Looking to the future, this may have an additional impact on financial giving in local congregations as older generations are replaced by younger.
5) The current coronavirus crisis will undoubtedly have a major impact on many local congregations. Depending upon the severity and length of the current recession, this could again impact local church giving. If the 2008 recession is an indication, some congregations that are borderline with regard to viability may find it difficult to remain open without making significant changes.
6) It may be that some of the assumptions of the past regarding what is necessary for a healthy functioning congregation may no longer be appropriate. If "necessity is the mother of invention", there will be some congregations that explore and

discover new ways to carry out their mission. Some of the assumptions that will need to be considered include prioritizing efforts that are directly related to mission, creating and housing income-producing programs and ministries, multi-congregational churches, bi-vocational or volunteer pastors, pastors with multiple charges, decreased staff dependency and increased lay leadership, online gatherings and ministry resources, and house church models.

V Looking to the Future

1) The challenges facing the Church prior to the coronavirus pandemic will continue to be of concern with aging pastors and laity, decreased attendance including youth and young adults, and decline in finances.
2) Some churches will weather the storm and come out the other side similar to the way they have experienced community and ministry prior to the pandemic.
3) For other churches, some of the adaptations they are making during the crisis may continue to be useful. For example, many of the online tools developed during the crisis may continue to be utilized in support of the worship, discipleship and outreach ministries of the Church.
4) For a third group of churches, the current crisis will likely bring issues of sustainability and even viability to a head. Some may not be able to sustain the financial challenges brought on by the pandemic and have no choice but to close. This may represent a loss of presence and ministry in some communities.
5) The closing of some churches may create an opportunity for districts to re-direct resources (especially assets from church properties) toward support for struggling churches, new church planting, and/or specialized staffing.
6) Most importantly, this may be a time when new expressions of ministry emerge. The numerical and financial declines prior to the pandemic combined with the challenges experienced during the pandemic may create an overall sense that old models of ministry are not sustainable or any longer appropriate in many contexts.
7) Leaders who are younger and/or innovative by nature will develop and be given authorization to implement new and creative ways to realign resources to mission. In the best-case scenarios, new forms of ministry will emerge that have greater relevance to the current culture while remaining faithful to our Wesleyan/Holiness tradition. This may look very different in comparison to the Church of the past.

VI Summary Statement

The Church was already faced with major challenges prior to COVID-19. Declines in average morning worship attendance, financial giving, and aging of the clergy combine to suggest that the current set of assumptions about the organizational and fiscal structure of many churches is not sustainable. Generational replacement is not promising as measures of participation for younger generational cohorts also appear to be in decline. Add to this the financial and social impacts of the pandemic. The current crisis presents a major opportunity for many churches to consider new and different ways to carry out their mission. Virus-related realities may have the effect of helping some churches consider their future sooner with all of its technological and missional resources than would otherwise have been the case. For some, the type of changes ahead may not be changes of degree, but changes of kind. While it will undoubtedly be painful for some, the prospects of not changing may be even much more painful in the long run. Innovative leaders at every level, denominational, regional, district and local, can help us think creatively in how to steward our resources in effective and efficient ways as we adjust our methods in order to be faithful to our mission.

Denominational Trends and COVID-19: Strategies for the Future
Ron Benefiel and Greg Crow (Mid-America Region)
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I Introduction

The primary purpose of this summary analysis is to assess and learn from the probable effects of denominational statistical trends as they are interrelated with the effects of the coronavirus pandemic and the current financial downturn on the life and mission of the Church of the Nazarene for churches on the Mid-America Educational Zone (MNU). The data presented was provided by the Research Office in the Global Ministry Center.

II Aging Trends for the Pastoral Cohort

The pastoral cohort for the Church of the Nazarene in US/Canada is aging. This is mirrored by declines on the MNU zone.

Age of Senior Pastors in US/Canada (Percentage)

	2000	2008	2011	2014	2017	2019
Under 30	2.6	2.1	1.8	2.5	2.3	1.6
30-39	17.7	12.7	11.8	11.9	12.0	12.3
40-49	36.2	27.0	22.9	21.4	20.7	20.8
50-59	29.0	34.2	36.1	34.1	31.0	29.3
60-69	13.1	19.6	22.0	23.8	25.7	26.4
70+	1.4	4.3	5.4	6.4	8.4	9.6

Age of Senior Pastors on the MNU Educational Zone (Percentage)

	2000	2008	2011	2014	2017	2019
Under 30	3.8	2.9	2.6	6.5	3.7	2.7
30-39	19.3	16.6	16.3	13.9	15.7	18.5

40-49	35.7	25.3	25.1	24.0	26.0	21.9
50-59	26.0	33.0	33.6	33.3	30.1	29.7
60-69	14.3	18.8	17.5	18.7	18.0	21.2
70+	0.1	3.4	4.9	3.6	5.9	6.1

Analysis:

1) Comparing data for 2000 to that of 2019, there is a marked decrease of younger senior pastors and a marked increase of those who are older. In the US/Canada data, those under the age of 40 declined from 20.3% of the senior pastoral cohort to 13.9%. (Remained fairly constant for MNU zone) This represents a 30% decline of younger pastors in the total sample. Likewise, those over the age of 60 increased from 14.5% to 36.0%. An increase of nearly 150%. (Almost double for MNU zone).
2) Much of the increase of older pastors is undoubtedly related to the numerical strength of baby boomers. Twenty years ago, the boomers were in their forties and early fifties, which corresponds to higher percentages of pastors for those age groupings. As boomers have aged into their sixties and early seventies, there has been a corresponding increase of pastors in those age categories. This is also a likely indication of the aging of laity for many congregations.
3) The millennials are also a very large population cohort. So, we would expect the number of senior pastors to be higher for their age group than for other generational cohorts (similar to the Boomer numbers). Apparently, this is not occurring. This may be due to a higher number of younger pastors serving in staff positions or to some who are planting churches that are not yet fully organized. It may also be a reflection of lower levels of religiosity for millennials (i.e. increase in “nones”) as well as being indicative of lower levels of denominational identity and loyalty.
4) With 36% of senior pastors being over the age of 60 (27.3% for MNU zone) there will likely be an unusually large number of senior pastors retiring in the next decade. (Although an increasing number are serving into their seventies.) This raises some questions for future consideration. For example, how will this affect the pool of potential candidates for churches in pastoral transition? To the degree that older pastors/leaders are replaced by those who are younger, there could be a loss of institutional memory. At the same time, younger leaders may bring new ideas of how to develop approaches to ministry that resonate with the changing cultural context. Possibly this could represent a tradeoff between institutional identity/loyalty on the one hand and innovation on the other.

III Numerical Trends for Congregations

The Church of the Nazarene in the US and Canada has been declining numerically over the past decade. The declines include most statistical measures for which the denomination collects data. The MNU zone has experienced lower declines. Data from 2008 were selected as the base line for percentage comparison to show change relative to the numerical strength prior to the 2008 recession.

	2008	2011	2014	2017	2019 (*)
US/Canada Average Morning Worship (In Thousands)					
US/Canada	519	507	481	456	436 (-16%)
MNU	45	44	42	42	42 (-7%)
Median Congregational Worship Attendance					
US/Canada	60	59	56	52	50 (-17%)
MNU	60	58	50	48	48 (-20%)
US/Canada Children's Discipleship Ministries (In Thousands)					
US/Canada	102	102	98	94	86 (-16%)
MNU	9.1	9.2	8.9	9.2	8.4 (-8%)
US/Canada Youth Discipleship Ministries (In Thousands)					
US/Canada	58	65	60	55	51 (-12%)
MNU	4.8	5.5	5.3	4.9	4.9 (+2%)
US/Canada -- Primary Language English Congregations					
US/Canada	4351	4295	4251	4217	4190 (-4%)
MNU	434	424	434	449	447 (+3%)
US/Canada – Primary Language Spanish Congregations					
US/Canada	444	468	534	623	638 (+44%)
MNU	18	19	34	52	56 (+211%)

*Per Cent Change since 2008

Analysis:

1) Morning Worship Attendance is likely the best single indicator of numerical strength. Most mainline denominations have been showing declines since the 1960's while evangelical denominations have generally been in decline for about the past 20 years. The decline for the Church of the Nazarene in US/Canada began in 2005 and generally ranged between 5-10 thousand per year from 2008 to 20016 and between 10-15 thousand per year for the last three years. The rate of decline appears to be increasing. The percentage decline for the MNU region is much less than for US/Canada as a whole.
2) Declines in Median Worship Attendance with half of all congregations averaging less than 50 raises questions regarding viability for many congregations.
3) The decrease in the number of children and youth may indicate that there is also a generational replacement issue to consider. As older generational cohorts diminish, they may not be readily replaced by those who are younger. The numbers remaining fairly constant for the MNU region is noteworthy.
4) The percent decline in morning worship attendance both for US/Canada would likely be greater if it were not for the notable increase of Spanish language and other immigrant congregations. Spanish language congregations and attendance have sharply increased from 271 in 2000 to 638 in 2019. (From 18 to 56 on the MNU zone.) Other immigrant congregations are showing strong increases as well. This is a growing edge for the church with strong possibilities for the future. The large number of new Spanish language congregations (given that many are new congregations) also contributes to the decrease in median congregational worship attendance.

IV Financial Trends in Local Congregations (In Millions)

Local church giving for US/Canada declined sharply for about three years following the 2008 recession. Since then it has leveled off. Once again, this is mirrored by a corresponding decline in the MNU region.

	2008	2011	2014	2017	2019
US/Canada	838	737	737	733	739
*CPI adj.		(.968)	(.902)	(.869)	(.839)
**Adjusted Total		713	665	637	620
***Percent Change		(-15.1%)	(-20.6%)	(-24.1%)	(-26.0%)
MNU	77	69	69	68	69
*CPI Adj.		(.968)	(.958)	(.869)	(.839)
** Adjusted Total		67	66	59	58
***Percent Change		(-13.0%)	(-14.3%)	(-23.4%)	(-24.7%)
CPI Adjusted Median Per Capita Giving					
US/Canada	1,616	1,408	1,468	1,398	1,424
MNU	1,730	1,531	1,574	1,426	1,391

*The US Bureau of Labor calculator was used to establish the CPI adjustment multiplier.
**The baseline for the CPI adjustment was set at 2008 to indicate the subsequent strength of giving relative to that which was reported prior to the last recession.
***The "Percent Change" is CPI percent adjusted total income relative to 2008.

Analysis:

1) The 2008 recession obviously had a major impact on financial giving for local congregations. While the economy rebounded over time, financial giving in local congregations leveled off, and when adjusting for the CPI, it continued to decline. The per capita giving adjusted for CPI similarly declined but then remained fairly steady. For the MNU region, the number of churches increased, worship attendance and overall giving remained fairly constant. But this was accompanied by a decline in median worship attendance and per capita giving.
2) Generally speaking, compared to 2008, the Church today has about 75% of the financial resources today to carry out its mission and fund its operational needs. With this decline in financial resources, many churches are struggling, while others have adjusted to the new financial reality.
3) Some churches may find it increasingly difficult to financially support a pastor. From another data set, 43% of senior pastors in US/Canada in 2019 were bi-vocational. Of full-time senior pastors, the median total financial package (salary, benefits, housing, social security) was less than $45,000.

4) Giving patterns for generational cohorts are higher for Builders and Boomers and lower for Gen X and Millennials. Looking to the future, this may have an additional impact on financial giving in local congregations as older generations are replaced by younger.
5) The current coronavirus crisis will undoubtedly have a major impact on many local congregations. Depending upon the severity and length of the current recession, this could again impact local church giving. If the 2008 recession is an indication, some congregations that are borderline with regard to viability may find it difficult to remain open without making significant changes.
6) It may be that some of the assumptions of the past regarding what is necessary for a healthy functioning congregation may no longer be appropriate. If "necessity is the mother of invention", there will be some congregations that explore and discover new ways to carry out their mission. Some of the assumptions that will need to be considered include:
    a. prioritizing efforts that are directly related to mission;
    b. creating and housing income-producing programs and ministries;
    c. multi-congregational churches;
    d. increase in the number of bi-vocational or volunteer pastors;
    e. pastors with multiple charges;
    f. decreased staff dependency and increased lay leadership;
    g. online gatherings and ministry resources;
    h. house church models.

V Impact of COVID-19

Current Assessment

The depth and duration of the current coronavirus crisis and accompanying financial downturn are unknown. The projected number of cases and deaths in the US in coming months related to COVID-19 is still uncertain. Medical breakthroughs and new resources may allow for mitigation of the severity of cases and testing for antibodies that possibly indicate immunity. Those who have the appropriate antibodies may have fewer restrictions. Many may be able to return to work. In addition, the warmer (more humid)

summer weather may have the effect of reducing the incidence of the virus in the northern hemisphere. In most of the US, businesses along with restaurants, beaches and parks may be re-opened. Hopefully, there will be significant progress in the development of a vaccine that will be ready for the general population in 12-18 months. With the possibility that the virus could return in the Fall, social distancing will probably continue to be mandated and the size of crowds limited with little or no gatherings at sporting events, concerts or conventions. Some churches may resume physical gatherings for worship (and other functions of congregational life), but given the age-related vulnerability of many congregants, extra social distancing precautions may need to be considered. It will take some time for the economy to rebound. Even though the unemployment rate is high, the government support packages should serve to keep the economy from slipping deeper into a depression.

Implications for the Church in the Short-Term

If past history is an indication, there may be a renewed interest in spiritual matters in the general population. The Church will have the opportunity to respond in ministry to its established members as well as to people in the larger community who are looking to the Church for spiritual guidance. Given the challenges of the day, many churches will find new and creative ways to meet for worship, provide pastoral care and serve those in need. Most congregations will have developed the capability of providing worship services online. By the middle of the summer, churches may have the opportunity to re-constitute small home group gatherings for Bible study, prayer, support and fellowship in addition to "sanitized" gatherings for worship. Online discipleship tools may be widely utilized. Some churches will find ways to respond to needs in the community through ministries of compassion with those who are immune to COVID-19 visiting the sick in hospitals and nursing homes as well as in residential settings. Some may also minister to those who are especially vulnerable in prison, homeless shelters and immigrant detention facilities. Finances will inevitably be tight. Some members will give sacrificially to keep churches and ministries afloat while others may be hesitant given the uncertainty of the future.

Implications for the Church in the Long-Term

1) The challenges facing the Church prior to the coronavirus pandemic will continue to be of concern with aging pastors and laity, decreased attendance including youth and young adults, and decline in finances.
2) The current crisis will likely bring issues of viability to a head. Some churches may not be able to sustain the financial challenges brought on by the pandemic and have no choice but to close. This will represent a loss of presence and ministry in many communities.

3) The closing of some churches may also create an opportunity for districts to re-direct resources (especially assets from church properties) toward support for struggling churches, new church planting, and/or specialized staffing.
4) For other churches, some of the adaptations they made during the crisis may still be useful. For example, many of the online tools developed during the crisis may continue to be utilized in support of the worship, discipleship and outreach ministries of the Church.
5) Most importantly, this may be a time when new expressions of ministry emerge. The numerical and financial declines prior to the pandemic combined with the challenges experienced during the pandemic may create an overall sense that old models of ministry are not sustainable or any longer appropriate in many contexts.
6) Leaders who are younger and/or innovative by nature will develop and be given authorization to implement new and creative ways to realign resources to mission. In the best case scenarios, new forms of ministry will emerge that have greater relevance to the current culture while remaining faithful to our Wesleyan/Holiness tradition. This may look very different in comparison to the Church of the past.

VI Summary Statement

The Church was already faced with major challenges prior to COVID-19. Declines in average morning worship attendance, financial giving, and aging of the clergy combine to suggest that the current set of assumptions about the organizational and fiscal structure of many churches is not sustainable. Generational replacement is not promising as measures of participation for younger generational cohorts also appear to be in decline. Add to this the financial and social impacts of the pandemic. Virus-related realities may have the effect of forcing churches to consider the future sooner with all of its technological and missional resources than would otherwise have been the case. The current crisis presents a major opportunity for many churches to consider new and different ways to carry out their mission. For many, the type of changes ahead may not be changes of degree, but changes of kind. While it will undoubtedly be painful for many, the prospects of not changing may be even much more painful in the long run. Innovative leaders at every level, denominational, regional, district and local, can help us think creatively in how to steward our resources in effective and efficient ways as we

adjust our methods in order to be faithful to our mission.

Appendix 4

British missiologist Stuart Murray describes the shifts from Christendom to our current context:

> ". From the centre to margins: in Christendom the Christian story and the churches were central, but in post-Christendom these are marginal.
> . From majority to minority: in Christendom Christians comprised the (often overwhelming) majority, but in post-Christendom they are a minority.
> . From settlers to sojourners: in Christendom Christians felt at home in a culture shaped by their story, but in post-Christendom they are aliens, exiles and pilgrims in a culture where they no longer feel at home.
> . From privilege to plurality: in Christendom Christians enjoyed many privileges, but in post-Christendom they are one community among many in a plural society.
> . From control to witness: in Christendom churches could exert control over society, but in post-Christendom they exercise influence only through witnessing to their story and its implications.
> . From maintenance to mission: in Christendom the emphasis was on maintaining a supposedly Christian status quo, but in post-Christendom it is on mission within a contested environment.
> . From institution to movement: in Christendom churches operated primarily in institutional mode, but in post-Christendom they must become again a Christian movement."

Murray, Post-Christendom, “Post-Constantinian, Post-Christian…Does the Label Matter?” *International journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 9:3, (Sept 9, 2009): 195-208, DOI: 10.1080/14742250903161482