

The Well-Prepared Local Church Mission Leader

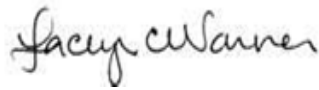
by

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Date: January 20, 2021

Approved:



First Reader



Second Reader



Director

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry
in the Divinity School
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ABSTRACT

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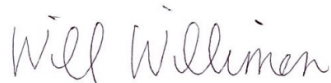
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Abstract

In the United States of America more and more churches are including intentional organized missional outreach efforts as a part of their overall ministry. As this number continues to grow it becomes increasingly important to ensure that the leaders of these missional efforts are properly equipped to lead. This project examines some of the primary competencies (*theological, missiological & practical*) required to ensure that local church mission leaders are well-prepared for their work whether they are laity, clergy, volunteer or staff.

The thesis begins by examining a theology of mission founded on the mission of the Trinitarian God (the *missio Dei*) who now sends humanity out in mission following the model of the incarnation empowered by God the Holy Spirit. This chapter draws from the work of theologians and missiologists while focusing primarily on the Bible. The next chapter considers several missiological principles that are vital for the work of local church mission leaders. The thesis concludes by suggesting a number of effective practices put into use by a number of local church mission leaders. These were discovered by interviewing ten current United Methodist local church mission leaders regarding their approach to a number of practical missional leadership concerns (*getting started, strategic approaches, leadership structure, funding model and short-term experiences*). The thesis offers new and existing local church mission leaders a foundation to construct healthy local church mission ministries.

Dedication

To my family. Without the support of my wife, Jennie and my children, Aidan and Grace, this would not have been possible. The three of you are my deepest joy and delight. I love you!

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, in the United States, there has been significant growth in the number of organized efforts by local churches to engage in missional ministries outside the walls of the church. Of course, historically, churches have regularly sent out international missionaries through denominational or other mission agencies. Churches have also frequently established separate local ministries that aspire to address the local needs of their surrounding community. Over the last few decades, however, there has been an emergence of focused efforts by local churches to participate in “missions”¹ work through their own initiative. These churches that have internal programmatic mission ministries no longer depend solely on the efforts of the “missionary” or para-church/community organizations to address the concerns of the local and global community, but engage in missions on their own merit as well.

Many churches now have staff (full & part-time), clergy or designated volunteer positions such as a Missions Pastor, Serve Leader, Community Outreach Coordinator, Mission Coordinator or Social Justice Director. This illustrates how many local churches now prioritize the way in which they participate in working among their local and global neighbors. Many of the leaders in these roles have been the first to occupy them and have therefore been the first ones responsible for determining the most effective way to lead their respective mission

¹ The terms missions, mission, outreach and missional will be used to define the organized efforts of a church to engage in ministries that extend the work of the church into the local and global community. The author acknowledges that God’s mission in and for humanity goes well beyond what we as the church endeavor to accomplish, however this project aims to better prepare local churches to engage in ministry to and with the greater community. Efforts as broad as tutoring at a local school, serving with Habitat for Humanity, partnering with international empowerment agencies, church planting training, community outreach to the homeless/working poor/disenfranchised, evangelism and other external efforts will be described as “missional” for the purpose of this project. This choice is based on the fact that many churches still utilize the term “missions” and have positions titled Pastor or Director of Missions on their church staff. As this project is attempting to improve the training of those in such positions the author has made the decision to use that term throughout the project.

ministries. They have learned a great deal from the failures and successes they have encountered in their role. However, there still is a significant need to create pathways for current and future local church mission leaders to be better prepared for the important work they are responsible for within the church. Missional outreach is one of the most notable and visible extensions of the church out into the local and global community. As more and more churches choose to engage in organized missional outreach the need to effectively equip the leaders of such endeavors increases. The missional efforts of local churches are too important to entrust to poorly prepared leaders. This project intends to be utilized as a practical tool to equip local church mission leaders regardless of the capacity in which they offer missional leadership.²

This project intends to learn from current local church mission leaders in order to better prepare the next generation of mission leaders. It will also lean heavily upon the work of theologians and missiologists to discover core theological and missiological principles that inform local church missional leadership.

The project will be divided into three chapters:

I. Theology of Mission;

This chapter will address two questions from a theological perspective “Why should the followers of Jesus engage in missional ministry that extends beyond the walls of our churches?” and “How should we engage in missional ministry?”. It will answer these questions by examining *missio Dei*, sent (*apostello*), the incarnation and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. In addition to considering the knowledge of theologians and missiologists this chapter will lean heavily on the biblical text as the primary source for a theological reflection on missions.

² Some churches have full-time mission leaders on staff. Some include “missions” among the listed responsibilities of clergy. Other churches entrust missional leadership to lay volunteers. This project is directed at those who offer mission leadership at their church whether they are clergy/lay or staff/volunteer.

II. Missiological Principles;

This chapter will examine several missiological understandings that will prepare local church mission leaders to healthily engage in missional ministry. It will explore six specific competencies: 1) Holistic ministry 2) Mutuality 3) Empowerment 4) Gift/Asset-based community development 5) Contextuality/cross-cultural awareness 6) Dignity. This chapter will draw from the wealth of knowledge gleaned from missiologists, theologians and missional practitioners.

III. Effective Practices;

The final chapter will lean upon the wisdom of present local church mission leaders to suggest some effective practices that have served their particular contexts well. In many ways this is the “nuts and bolts” chapter for local church mission leaders. It will examine how to begin church-based mission ministries, various strategic approaches, leadership structures, mission ministry funding models and Short-term mission experiences. The author conducted interviews with current local church mission leaders to discover their church’s approach to missional engagement.

CHAPTER TWO: THEOLOGY OF MISSION

One of the important responsibilities that local church mission leaders have is to articulate a thoughtful theology of mission to the congregations they serve. A well-formed theology of mission functions as a foundation upon which all church mission efforts can be established. It works to articulate why and how we are to be involved in missions as a church beyond the walls of our congregation. This section will examine four components of a theology of mission (missio Dei, apostello, the incarnation and Spirit empowerment) giving special attention to biblical texts. It will consider how these function as crucial building blocks for local church mission involvement and how they motivate and encourage healthy missional engagement.

Missio Dei:

*“I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, **so that** you will be a blessing.” Genesis 12:2*

Perhaps the central question that any local church mission leader will need to respond to is, “why missions?”. Why should we as a church engage in ministry outside the walls of our church? This question is asked in a variety of ways. Why should we do anything for “those people” when there is so much that we need to do within our own church? Or, why don’t we let “them” take care of themselves and focus on ourselves instead? “They” have their issues and concerns and we have our issues and concerns. We have to take care of ourselves, before we can help “them” is the sentiment that seems to guide the thinking of many who sit in our sanctuaries. In some ways this line of thinking is understandable. Anytime flight attendants offer pre-flight instructions they inform those flying with minors to put on their own oxygen

masks first before assisting their children with theirs. Axioms in the United States such as “God helps those who help themselves” and “pull yourself up by your boot straps” are indicative of a dominant American norm that elevates independence over and above interdependence. This leads to a strong desire to first look out for my stuff, my people, my neighborhood, my nation and my church before attending to the concerns of others. Frequently, this is an attitude and mindset that confronts local church mission leaders attempting to lead those in their congregation into ministry outside the walls of their church.

Therefore, answering the question, “Why should we participate in any form of mission?” is crucial. It is essential to ground “missions” within the larger framework of Christian discipleship. Local church mission leaders bear a great responsibility of connecting missional engagement to the broader narrative of God’s work in the world. This section will look to answer the “why” question of mission by examining two fundamental theological understandings that greatly influence a theology of mission: *missio Dei* and *apostello*.

Willingen and Missio Dei:

Missio Dei, is Latin for “the mission of God”. It emerged as a theological foundation for missions following the International Missionary Council’s Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in Willingen, Germany in 1952. Prior to Willingen, the term was primarily used in Dogmatics to illustrate the inner-Trinitarian process of “sending” (in Latin *missio* means sending).¹ Schirrmacher notes, “it was coined in the 4th century A.D. by St. Augustine to denote the sending of the Son by the Father and the sending of the Spirit by the

¹Schirrmacher, Thomas. *Missio Dei: God’s Missional Nature, World of Theology Series, Vol. 10*. Bonn: Culture and Science Publishing, 2017, 10.

Father and the Son.”² *Missio Dei* was thus expanded, at Willingen and beyond, to include the extension of “mission” and “sending” beyond the Trinity.

The participants at the Willingen conference were struggling to locate their motivation for mission following the horrors of World War II and amid the increasing spread of Communism throughout the world. For example, in China nearly all visible presence of Christianity was eradicated by the communist government from the country by 1967.³ In an article reflecting on the significance of the Willingen conference Wolfgang Günther notes that the participants realized that, “the end of colonialism was in sight, and with it the end of the era when European expansion and mission were bound up together”⁴ leaving them wondering what that meant for mission. In their struggle to define their motivation for mission they affirmed that the primary source of all missionary activity is the Triune God. It is God’s redeeming mission in the world that motivates our mission in the world. In the final statement from the Willingen conference we read:

The missionary movement of which we are a part has its source in the Triune God Himself. Out of the depths of His love for us, the Father has sent forth His own beloved Son to reconcile all things to Himself...On the foundation of this accomplished work God has sent forth His Spirit, The Spirit of Jesus...We who have been chosen in Christ, reconciled to God through Him, made members of His Body, sharers in His Spirit, and heirs through hope of His Kingdom, are by these very facts committed to full participation in His redeeming mission to the world. That by which the Church receives its existence is that by which it is also given its world-mission. As the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you.⁵

² Ibid.

³ Bates, M. Searle. “Churches and Christians in China, 1950-1967: Fragments of Understanding.” *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 41, no. 2, 1968, pp. 199–213. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2754795. Accessed 4 May 2020.

⁴ Günther, Wolfgang. “The History and Significance of World Mission Conferences in the 20th Century,” *International Review of Mission* 92, 367 (October, 2003): 528.

⁵ Goodall, Norman ed. *Missions under the Cross; addresses delivered at the enlarged meeting of the Committee of the International Missionary Council at Willingen, in Germany, 1953; with statements issued by the meeting*. (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1953), 189.

The actual theological phrase of “*missio Dei*” is not explicitly used, however the Willingen conference is credited with introducing this foundation to missiology. From the Willingen conference *missio Dei* as a theological construct has influenced nearly every stream of Christian thought. Theologian David Bosch observes, “since Willingen, the understanding of mission as *missio Dei* has been embraced by virtually all Christian persuasions”⁶ including Protestants, Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox and many evangelical groups.

Comprehending *missio Dei* has therefore proven to be a theological foundation for mission work. Local church mission leaders will benefit by increasing their grasp on the why and how of God’s mission and then reflecting on the ways that impacts the direction of their church’s mission efforts. Holding even a budding awareness of God’s activity among humanity and creation helps to ground the work that mission leaders conduct. Understanding the Triune God’s mission helps to differentiate our work as churches, as mission organizations and as faith-based ministries from other wonderful global and community organizations/governments that work for the betterment of humanity and society. In fact, having a grasp of *missio Dei* will even help to illustrate how God may be working through these entities as well.

Missio Dei defined:

So, what exactly is *missio Dei*? Where/How do we observe *missio Dei* in the Bible? How does *missio Dei* influence the way that missional engagement is conducted? *Missio Dei* is the redeeming work of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit among humanity and throughout creation. This redeeming work impacts humanity and creation at the same time.

⁶ Bosch, David J. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991, 390.

Missio Dei addresses the resulting consequences of the Fall of humanity and the adverse effects of the Fall on all of Creation. There are those who contend that the best way to read, understand and interpret the Biblical narrative is by utilizing *missio Dei* as the hermeneutical key. In other words, instead of viewing *missio Dei* as a way of understanding biblical scripture some suggest that *missio Dei* is the metanarrative of Scripture. This approach is interesting as it casts God's redemptive mission in creation among humanity as the primary overarching storyline of the Bible. The focus of this project, however, is not to resolve the role of *missio Dei* in the discipline of biblical interpretation. Yet, it is important to note that missiologists, theologians and biblical scholars have appropriated this theological theme as a useful hermeneutical key of the biblical discourse.⁷ The following section will attempt to summarize/highlight how *missio Dei* is seen within the biblical narrative and thus how that influences the "why" of missions within the local church.

The Bible and Missio Dei:

Genesis 3-11 provides the biblical backdrop for God's redeeming work in the world. These chapters illustrate the disobedience, violence, pride and hatred of humanity. We read in Genesis 6:5 that, "The LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually." Genesis 11 describes the scattering of humanity across the earth and the confusing of their languages in

⁷See George Hunsberger's essay following the Fall gatherings of the AAR & SBL conferences entitled "Proposals for a Missional Hermeneutic: Mapping the Conversation". In this essay Hunsberger outlines four approaches to utilizing a missional hermeneutic for biblical interpretation.

the Tower of Babel narrative. What follows is the beginning of God's redemption work, God's *missio Dei*.

Genesis 12:1-3 describes the LORD's call of Abram. "Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'" In the call of Abram, God initiates God's redemptive mission in the Earth. God promises Abram that he will make of him a great nation, that he will bless him and that he will graciously make his name great. Yet, God blesses Abram for a purpose. God promises to do these things for Abram "so that" he will be a blessing. God promises to bless those who bless Abram and to curse those who curse him in order that "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" through him. Walter C. Kaiser Jr. notes, "Not one of these promises of blessing were to be for Abram's self-aggrandizement. Indeed, he and his nation were to be blessed so that they might be a blessing."⁸ God intends to bless the world through Abram, eventually renaming him Abraham, the "ancestor of a multitude of nations" (Gen.17:5). God's mission of redemption has begun. The Abrahamic covenant is, most notably, continued through his son Isaac, his grandson Jacob and his great-grandson Joseph. As their numbers increase, they function as witnesses to the surrounding nations of God's presence and faithfulness. The account of Joseph is perhaps the greatest example of God's redemptive work among the Hebrews pre-Egyptian captivity. Joseph endures enslavement, false-accusation and

⁸ Kaiser, Walter C. Jr. "Israel's Missionary Call" in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*. Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1999, 12.

imprisonment, but always remembers that God is with him. Joseph remains faithful to God and God redeems the horrible events that have befallen Joseph elevating him to one of the highest positions of authority in all of Egypt. Joseph's intercessory efforts on behalf of his family provide protection and provision allowing the Israelites to grow safely in number, at least for a while. The opening words of Exodus read, "Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, 'Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them'" (Exodus 1:8-10a, NRSV). Four hundred years of enslavement ensue, but God remains faithful to the covenant established with Abraham and to the mission of redemption.

Then follows the calling of Moses and the freeing of the Israelites through the events of the Exodus. God makes Israel into a great nation, but they are made so for a purpose. Kaiser highlights Exodus 19:4-6 that indicates Israel was to be a "priestly kingdom and a holy nation". He writes, "The whole nation was to function on behalf of the kingdom of God in a mediatorial role in relation to the nations."⁹ Moses leads God's covenant people into the promised land with the intention that they would function as a witness to the nations of the world.

Following the period of the Judges, Israel establishes itself as a Kingdom under the rule of Saul, David and Solomon in the united-kingdom of Israel and then under the many kings of the northern kingdom (Israel) and the southern kingdom (Judah). The *missio Dei* remains ever present as God relentlessly pursues redemption and restoration for all the world. The Psalmist writes, "May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that your

⁹ Ibid., 13.

way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations. Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you.” (Psalm 67:1-3, NRSV)

When Israel and Judah falter and fail, God sends prophets to remind the people of their purpose. The prophets proclaim that God is with them and that they continue to be blessed so that the nations may be blessed. In the second Servant Song of Isaiah we read, “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth (Isaiah 49:6).” The prophet Zechariah (Zech. 8:20ff) writes of a time when people from “every language” will come to Jerusalem seeking the “LORD of hosts” for favor. He says they will be drawn there because they will have heard that God is with them. The book of Jonah tells the story of a reluctant “missionary” from Israel sent by God to Nineveh, an Assyrian city. It grows more and more evident throughout the Old Testament that the *missio Dei* remains prevalent for all humanity.

As we progress into the New Testament the *missio Dei* continues with the incarnation of God the Son, Jesus Christ, and his earthly ministry. The gospel accounts reveal the teachings, healings, exorcisms and miraculous acts of Jesus. They emphasize who Jesus chose to spend time among during his time on earth, notably that he went to be with the poor, the sick, the notorious sinners in addition to the religious leaders. He proclaimed a message of freedom, salvation, restoration and redemption to all who believed. In Luke’s gospel we learn of a time in a synagogue when Jesus takes the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and reads, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go

free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor". Jesus then tells all gathered in the synagogue that, "today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing (Luke 4:18-21)."

Jesus' message and ministry were not restricted to the Jews, but were for the Gentiles as well. He spent time sharing and ministering among Romans (Luke 7:1-10), Samaritans (John 4), Canaanites (Matt.15:21-28), Syrophenicians (Mark 7:24-30) and Gerasenes (Luke 8:26-39). Jesus Christ, God the Son, the second person of the Trinity put flesh on the *missio Dei*. The biblical depiction of Jesus exemplifies the externally focused and active mission/ministry of God incarnate. Jesus proclaimed a message of hope, forgiveness and reconciliation. He brought wholeness, healing and redemption to those he encountered, Jew and Gentile. He was the very incarnation of *missio Dei*. (Later we will examine in greater detail the significance of the incarnation for a theology of mission).

Following the death and resurrection of Jesus the Bible describes the arrival of God the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity on the day of Pentecost. This initiates the work and participation of the Church, the body of Christ into the ongoing *missio Dei* on the Earth. In the Acts of the Apostles we discover that followers of Jesus now join in God's global mission through the enabling power of God the Holy Spirit. Prior to his ascension, Jesus says to the apostles, "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8, NRSV)." The rest of the book of Acts depicts how God, working through the first apostles, faithfully carries out this declaration. Chapters two through seven occur in Jerusalem, chapter eight is set in Samaria and Judea and chapters nine through twenty-eight occur "to the ends of the earth". We read of Peter, Saul/Paul, Barnabas, Mark, Philip and many others as they go in the

name of Jesus to proclaim the good news through word and deed. God the Holy Spirit continues the *missio Dei* by equipping and empowering the followers of Jesus to carry out God's mission of redemption as partners. The rest of the New Testament includes Epistles from a number of apostles (Peter, Paul, John, etc..) written with the primary purpose of equipping, correcting and challenging the young fledgling churches to remain faithful to the *missio Dei*.

Admittedly, the above section is a featured summary of only a select few biblical accounts that highlight *missio Dei* in Scripture. It was intended to demonstrate that God is a God in motion, actively pursuing and inviting humanity into a restored and redeemed relationship with God.

Some questions to consider now are, "How does an understanding of *missio Dei* influence the work of the local church mission leader?" Why does *missio Dei* remain a significant concept/premise for all who would endeavor to lead others in ministry and mission? *Missio Dei* is central because it links our work, our preaching, our efforts to extend peace, justice and reconciliation with God's work in the world. David Bosch writes, "To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God's love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love."¹⁰ We have the great privilege of joining in God's mission of love, mercy and healing to the world. This leads into the next portion for our consideration in the theology of mission section. We will continue to address the "why" of mission, namely that we are a "sent" people, because God is a God who "sends".

¹⁰ Bosch, 390.

Sent (Apostello):

“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” John 20:21b

One of the ways that *missio Dei* is accomplished is by God “sending”. We first observe the “sending” nature of God among the Godhead. God the Father sends God the Son into the world, then God the Father and God the Son send God the Holy Spirit into the world. The Bible describes God at work in the world through many narratives of God’s redemptive acts. These stories highlight the *missio Dei* where the Triune God is not content to simply allow humanity to continue on a path of destruction. Missiologist David Scott states, “a biblical understanding of mission as sending thus starts with the Triune God sending Godself to the world, especially in the form of God the Parent sending Jesus into the world and God the Parent and Jesus together sending the Holy Spirit into the world.”¹¹ The previous section focused on examples from the Bible that illustrate God refusing to allow the harmful decisions and actions perpetrated by humans against one another and the earth to continue without correction or redemption. God has pursued, is pursuing and will continue to actively pursue the mission of redemption and reconciliation throughout the world. The primary way God accomplishes this now is through the Church, the Body of Christ at work in the world. God does this by sending.

“Apostello”:

Why is this important? What is the significant difference between being sent by God and choosing to go on one’s own volition? One approach to answering these questions is by

¹¹ Scott, David W. *Crossing Boundaries: Sharing God’s Good News through Mission*. Nashville: Wesley’s Foundry Books, 2019, 6.

examining the Greek word “apostello” and by exploring the way this word was used in the Gospels (with special focus on John’s Gospel).

The word “*apostello*” (ἀποστέλλω) is a verb that means to send forth, a messenger, agent, message or command.¹² It is formed by combining “apo” (from, away from) and “stelló” (to arrange, prepare, gather up).¹³ This seems to indicate a greater emphasis on the one doing the sending than on the one/ones being sent. “Apostello” is perhaps better understood as “being commissioned for a task”. It is the root of the noun “apostle” (ἀπόστολος). An apostle is one sent by God with a message or a task for a mission. Understanding that we are *sent* by God is significant as it places the emphasis and origin of the mission with God. It is God’s mission (*missio Dei*), not ours. We are now invited to participate in this divine global mission and are thus sent to do so. We join the narrative with those who have been “*sent*” before us dating back to the first disciples and indeed to those found in the Hebrew Bible (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Ruth, Deborah, Esther, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc..). This is a powerful realization as we link our work with the work that God has been conducting generation after generation through humanity as God continues “to send”.

“Sending” in The Gospel of John:

We observe “sending” multiple times in the Gospel of John. As we examine the use of “apostello” (ἀποστέλλω) in John’s Gospel it offers clues regarding our present purpose as we continue to be “sent” out into the world. First, we will examine the ways in which Jesus was “sent” in the Book of John and then we will consider the way others were “sent” as well.

¹² “ἀποστέλλω definition”, <https://www.billmounce.com/greek-dictionary/apostello> (accessed on May 12, 2020).

¹³ “ἀποστέλλω definition”, <https://biblehub.com/greek/649.htm> (accessed on May 12, 2020)

Jesus, God the Son, was “sent” by God the Father for many reasons and tasks during his time upon the earth. In John 3:17 we read, “For God did not *send* (ἀπέστειλεν) his Son into the world to condemn the world, but so that the world might be saved through him.” Jesus was sent as savior. In John 3:34 we read that Jesus was “sent” as a messenger, “He whom God has *sent* (ἀπέστειλεν) *speaks* the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure (*italics added*).” As a messenger, Jesus speaks as one who has all authority, “the Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands” (John 3:35). He was also sent to complete the work of the Father, “The works that the Father has given me (Jesus) to complete the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent (ἀπέσταλκεν) me” (5:36). The objective of Jesus being sent to “do the works of the Father” appears again in 10:34-39. John 17:3 reveals that he has been sent so that God the Father and God the Son might be known, “And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent (ἀπέστειλας).” In 17:8 and 17:21 Jesus shares that he has also been sent so that the world may believe that you have sent me. “As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent (ἀπέστειλας) me (John 17:21)”. Jesus desires for his disciples, for those who will believe in him through the words of the disciples and the entire world to know that he was “sent” by God the Father. And finally, the Gospel of John indicates that Jesus has been sent as a demonstration of God’s love for the world. Jesus prays desiring, “that the world may know that you have sent (ἀπέστειλας) me and have loved them even as you have loved me (John 17:23).” John’s Gospel indicates that Jesus, God the Son, the second person of the Trinity was sent as Savior, as a messenger, to complete the works of God the Father, to be known, to be believed and as a demonstration of God’s love.

Jesus was not the only one “sent” in John’s Gospel. We also observe examples of John the Baptist and the Disciples being sent. We read, “there was a man sent (ἀπεσταλμένος) from God, whose name was John (John 1:6, NRSV).” John was sent, “as a *witness to testify* to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to *testify* to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world (John 1:7-9 *italics added*).” John was sent as a witness to testify. He was sent as a messenger. He had full awareness of his mission, that he was sent as a messenger and witness ahead of Jesus. He knew that once the Messiah arrived his role as a messenger and predecessor must decrease (John 3:22-30). In John 4:38 Jesus tells the disciples, “I *sent* (ἀπέστειλα) you to *reap* that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor (*italics added*)”. The disciples are sent to reap. Jesus is clear with the disciples that they are to do the work that God has sent them to do regardless of whether or not they labored for those results. Jesus appears to be more concerned with the end result than with who accomplishes a particular part of the labor. This is significant as once again it highlights that the work and mission are primarily God’s. God is the originator, the sender and the one who sees the work to completion.

Perhaps the most significant use of “apostello” regarding the “sending” of others is spoken by the resurrected Jesus to the disciples as they gathered in a locked house in Jerusalem. In John 20:19-23 we read of Jesus appearing to the disciples, who are frightened for their lives, and therefore hiding in a locked house. Jesus suddenly appears among them and says, “Peace be with you (20:19).” He shows them his wounded hands and side and again pronounces peace to them saying, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent (ἀπέσταλκεν)

me, so I send you (20:21).” He prayed these same words for the disciples as observed in chapter 17:18, “As you have sent (ἀπέστειλας) me into the world, so I have sent (ἀπέστειλα) them into the world.” However, in this locked Jerusalem house he officially commissions the disciples as the “sent” ones into the world. He breathes on them, empowering them with the Holy Spirit (20:22), so that they can now join as active participants in the *missio Dei*. Thomas Schirrmacher notes that in the Gospel of John, “the sending of the disciples is understood as a continuation of the sending of Jesus by his Father and the sending of the Holy Spirit by the Father and Jesus.”¹⁴ He continues by writing, “It is surely no coincidence that Jesus, who sees himself as God’s sent one, whereby the word *apostello* (to send) is frequently used, not only sends (*apostello*) his closest colleagues but also names them with the qualifying term of *apostle*.”¹⁵

The Gospel of John shares the narrative of Jesus Christ, God the Son, the “sent one” of the Trinity now sending/commissioning his followers to join in the *missio Dei* as messengers and co-laborers in the work of God in the world. The sending of Jesus’ followers began with the first disciples and has continued to the present day. God continues to send his followers in mission out into the world for his glory as messengers, as ambassadors and as laborers. Christopher Wright states, “The mission of God’s people, in this dimension of sending, and being sent, is to be caught up within the dynamic sending and being sent that God the Holy

¹⁴ Schirrmacher, 21.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

Trinity has done and continues to do for the salvation of the world and the revelation of his truth.”¹⁶

Commissioned:

So, what does “being sent” mean for present-day followers of Jesus? How does it influence the understanding of the local church mission leader especially regarding the way he/she invites others into missional engagement? Primarily, it helps in recognizing that we are co-laborers in the redemptive, salvific and restorative work of the Trinity throughout the world. Realizing that we have been commissioned and sent by God as continuations of the *missio Dei* is a humbling, freeing and empowering reality. It is humbling to recognize that God has chosen to include each of us in the *missio Dei*, in spite of our frailties, short-comings and failings. It is freeing to acknowledge that the responsibility of God’s redemptive work in the world rests primarily with God. And it is empowering to grasp the overwhelming privilege that the God of all creation is now sending us as divinely commissioned partners.

It is critical for local church mission leaders to share with their churches that they have been “sent” by God into the world. To teach that as they are sent, they join in the age-old and ongoing narrative of the “sending God” who remains fully devoted to redemption and salvation. David Scott declares, “It is important to emphasize that, in mission, both the Church and individual Christians are the sent, not the senders. God is the sender, and God ultimately starts, owns and controls mission.”¹⁷ It is important to note that being “sent” does not always mean that one is sent to another place. Admittedly, that is frequently the case. However, the

¹⁶ Wright, Christopher J.H. *The Mission of God’s People: A Biblical Theology of the Church’s Mission*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010: 211.

¹⁷ Scott, 6-7.

emphasis is less on the geographic nature of God's sending and more on the commissioning. Wright states, "Being sent was of the essence of apostleship, though the sending was conceived more as commissioning or authorizing for a task than as necessarily involving geographical travel."¹⁸ Indeed, some will be sent to other regions and nations.

One of the most exciting developments in the world Christian movement is the "sending" of missionaries from the global south to other parts of the world.¹⁹ This shift in the global Christian movement demonstrates how God faithfully works through people from all over the world to participate in the *missio Dei*. However, a majority of Christians will not be "sent" to another location, but will indeed be "sent" or rather "commissioned" to remain in their current place, but with an external mindset. This by no means reduces the magnitude of "being sent" as a "home missionary". They possess just as important a role in the *missio Dei* as the "international missionary". Regardless of where we, as followers of Jesus, are "sent" the truth remains that we are "commissioned" by God to continue the work of God's mission (*missio Dei*) near and far.

Sent for what?

Yet, what have we been "sent" to do? An examination of the central focus of the "sending" of Jesus, of the Holy Spirit, of the apostles and of the early church indicates that a primary role for those being "sent" is to function as messengers. Jesus reads the words of the

¹⁸ Wright, 211,212.

¹⁹ Cheng-Tozun, Dorcas. "What Majority-World Missions Really Looks Like: Christians from the Global South are invigorating international missions. Here's how.," *Christianity Today*, August 26, 2019, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/women/2019/august/what-majority-world-missions-really-looks-like.html> (accessed May 23, 2020). This article illustrates the growing number of missionaries going from the global south to other areas of the world including Europe and the United States of America.

Prophet Isaiah saying, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to *bring good news* to the poor. He has sent (ἀπέσταλκεν) me to *proclaim* release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to *proclaim* the year of the Lord’s favor (Luke 4:18-19, NRSV *italics added*).” Followers of Jesus are also sent as messengers of the good news proclaiming freedom, redemption and reconciliation. In Romans we read, “How are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent (ἀποσταλῶσιν)? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’ (Romans, 10:14,15).” We join in the ministry of proclaiming the good news through the words we speak, the lives we live and the actions we take. Continuing in Luke’s Gospel we discover Jesus not only proclaiming the good news of release for the captives and recovery of sight for the blind, but also actually releasing people from captivity to demonic possession (Luke 4:31-37, 41; 6:18; 7:21; 8:26-39; 9:37-43; 11:14-23) and disease/physical detriment (Luke 4:38-40; 5:12-26; 6:6-11, 18; 7:1-17, 21; 8:40-56; 13:10-17; 14:1-6; 17:11-19) and restoring sight (Luke 7:21; 18:35-43). David Scott notes, “When Jesus sent his disciples as his messengers, he was expecting them to witness through the evidence of their lives to the truth of his message.”²⁰ We therefore follow the example of Jesus as we are sent to proclaim the message of good news through our words and actions.

Followers of Jesus are also sent as ambassadors or representatives of God. In 2 Corinthians we read, “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the *ministry of reconciliation*; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to

²⁰ Scott, 11.

himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So, we are *ambassadors for Christ*, since God is making his appeal through us (2 Corinthians 5:18-20a, NRSV *italics added*)." Ambassadors are those who are sent to represent and who are given authority to operate on behalf of and in the interest of the one who sent them. The Ambassador of the United States of America to the United Kingdom of Great Britain operates on behalf of and in the interest of the United States government as an authorized representative. If we are "sent" as ambassadors of Jesus, then we humbly serve as representatives of Jesus at work in the world. This means that we continue the work of Jesus through efforts that promote reconciliation, justice and hope. It means that we regularly offer and extend grace, mercy and God's love in tangible ways to the world. It means that we lead efforts in caring for God's creation as stewards entrusted to care for the gift of creation. In essence, it means that as ambassadors we promote what the Triune God would have us focus on as those who have been "sent".

As ambassadors we have been sent to join God in the ministry of reconciliation. We strive to promote reconciliation between God and humanity, internal reconciliation, interpersonal (person to person and societal) reconciliation and reconciliation between humanity and Creation. First and foremost, the ministry of reconciliation involves representing God by sharing the good news that reconciliation with God is attainable through the work of Jesus Christ, God the Son. We recognize and name the harm, division and brokenness caused by sin, but we do not stop there. We proclaim with boldness the grace-filled love of God available to all through the life, ministry and work of Jesus Christ.

As ambassadors of the ministry of reconciliation we also diligently work to promote internal reconciliation on a personal level. We live in a world filled with people who harbor a lot of internal grief, shame and disappointment regarding who they are as individuals. They believe internal narratives that falsely declare that they are useless and worthless. As ambassadors, we offer a counter-narrative of good news declaring that God sees them as having high value and high worth.

We have also been sent to promote reconciliation amongst people, individually and corporately. Violence, hatred, racism and injustice between people continues to plague God's humanity. As ambassadors we are thus sent by God to continue God's work to bring peace, wholeness, forgiveness and healing in our relationships with each other. This type of reconciliatory work occurs person to person, among groups and also on a larger societal level.²¹ This provides a theological platform for work in ministries that promote peace, justice and reconciliation.

And as ambassadors of Jesus Christ we are sent to work toward the reconciliation between humanity and Creation. As stewards of the earth we represent God in the ways we care for the earth and all other creatures. It is important to demonstrate through our actions that these divine gifts do not exist just for our consumption, but are there for us to care for and steward.

God the Father sent God the Son to and for the world. God the Father and God the Son have sent God the Holy Spirit to and for the world. We continue to live in a time where God the

²¹ See Emmanuel Katongole and Chris Rice's book *Reconciling All Things: A Christian Vision for Justice, Peace and Healing*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008. Katongole and Chris Rice explore the role the Church can and should play in the restorative work of reconciliation that is biblical, transformative, holistic and global.

Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit have sent the followers of Jesus into and for the world. We are sent with authority as messengers and as ambassadors representing Jesus Christ.

We go into the world as authorized and sent participants in the *missio Dei*. This is why we go into the world in mission. The motivation and origin of our being in mission is not found within, but instead is discovered in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. As followers of Jesus, we simply participate in God's ongoing *missio Dei* as we are sent by God to continue the redeeming and reconciling work of the Triune God.

These first two sections have attempted to answer the question, "Why are we to engage in mission?" The next two sections will approach answering the question, "How should we engage in mission?" from a theological viewpoint.

Incarnational Model:

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." John 1:14a

The birth of Jesus of Nazareth altered the course of history. God the Son, the second person of the Trinity came to live and dwell among us; as a human. The theological term used to describe this is the *incarnation* which means "to take the flesh of". The Doctrine of the Incarnation holds that God was in the world as the person of Jesus Christ.²² Eugene Peterson describes it as God "taking flesh and blood and moving into the neighborhood (John 1:14)."²³

This is what we celebrate each year at Christmas. We sing with joy and acclaim, "Veiled in flesh

²² Article II "Of the Word, or Son of God, Who Was Made Very Man" in The Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church we read, "The Son, who is the Word of the Father, the very and eternal God, of one substance with the Father, took man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin; so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one person, never to be divided; whereof is one Christ, very God and very Man." *United Methodist Church Book of Discipline*. Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2016, 66.

²³ Peterson, Eugene. *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002.

the Godhead see; hail the incarnate Deity, pleased with us in flesh to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel!"²⁴ The incarnation of the second person of the Trinity has not only altered the course of history, but has also altered how we engage in mission. Local church mission leaders should look to the incarnation of Jesus as a model for how we as followers and imitators of Jesus should conduct mission. Missiological Anthropologist Darrell Whiteman writes:

The Incarnation shows us that God has taken both humanity and culture seriously. So, the Incarnation tells us something about God's nature. It also becomes a model for ministry in our own time. In the same way that God entered Jewish culture in the person of Jesus, we must be willing to enter the culture of the people among whom we serve, to speak their language, to adjust our lifestyle to theirs, to understand their worldview and religious values, and to laugh and weep with them.²⁵

Before considering the incarnation as a model for missional ministry it is instructive to examine the implication and significance of "God with us" in the person of Jesus of Nazareth via a brief exploration of Matthew's Gospel.

The Gospel of Matthew and Emmanuel:

The Gospel of Matthew begins with an angel of the Lord appearing to Joseph in a dream. The angel says, "'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel', which means, 'God is with us.'" (Matthew 1:20-23, NRSV). At the onset of Matthew's gospel "God with us" is announced to the reader. This theme continues

²⁴ Wesley, Charles. "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" in *The United Methodist Hymnal: Book of United Methodist Worship*. Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989, 240.

²⁵ Whiteman, Darrell. "Anthropology and Mission: The Incarnational Connection," *The International Journal of Frontier Missions* 21.2 (2004): 84.

throughout the book concluding with the promise given by the resurrected Jesus when he declares, “surely I will be with you always” (Matthew 28:20). The key theme of Matthew is the arrival of Emmanuel “God with us”. New Testament scholar Donald Senior highlights a number of times when this theme appears in Matthew. He writes:

At the very end of the gospel the risen Christ assures the community that he will be with them until the end of time (28:20). In the community discourse (18:20), Jesus promises to be present wherever two or three of the disciples gather. And in the judgment parable of (25:31-46), the disciples are reminded of Jesus’ presence with the ‘least’ members of the community.”²⁶

Matthew takes great care to emphasize that God is with us all the time. Emmanuel is among us in the worshipping community, he is with us among the poor and imprisoned and he is with us as we go out in mission.

“God with us” and Missions:

This emphasis functions as a reminder for the church and especially for those leading missional efforts that “God with us” is at the core of all we do. This comprehension uniquely distinguishes our work as a church in the world from other organizations. Regardless of the type of activity we engage in, whether working in schools, with the homeless, providing genuine community for those with special needs, or through our international partnerships we are “sent” with the understanding and central belief that “God is with us”! Theologian Ulrich Luz states, “Jesus is the Immanuel, the ‘God with us’; his assistance, his power, his commandments and his teachings are a constant foundation of life.”²⁷ This recognition underscores our belief that the work of the Kingdom of God is primarily God’s work in the

²⁶ Senior, Donald. *The Gospel of Matthew*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997, 90.

²⁷ Luz, Ulrich. *New Testament Theology: The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 140.

world and not ours. We are essentially given the invitation to join in what God is doing. “God with Us” is the cornerstone of all we do in mission out in the world.

An emphasis on Emmanuel also guides the way we engage in ministry by following the example Jesus set by being among us. The incarnational model of Jesus’ ministry highlights how he shared life with humanity and ministered by teaching, encouraging, correcting and healing in the normal course of events. Jesus did not appear to minister to someone or to a group in a prescribed way with an established preexistent agenda, but instead ministered as opportunities emerged. Chapters 8 and 9 of Matthew’s Gospel are filled with examples of how the people *came* to Jesus. The leper “*came* to him and knelt before him, saying, ‘Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean’” (Matthew 8:2, NRSV). The centurion *came* to him (8:5), the two demoniacs *coming* out of the tomb *met* him (8:28), the disciples of John *came* to him (9:14), a leader of the synagogue *came* in and knelt before him (9:18), a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years *came* up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak (9:20), two blind men *followed* him (9:27), and a mute demoniac was *brought* to him (9:32). This provides a wonderful organic example and model on how effective mission ministry can occur.

Ministry ‘with’ over ministry ‘to’:

Too often churches enter a location, be it local or international, with the intent to “do ministry”. The motivation seems to be to “accomplish” as much as possible. Often the question asked before a mission experience is “what are we going to do?” This question or approach is not inherently wrong, but it does seem to miss the point. As we examine Jesus’ earthly ministry, it does not seem to focus so much on what he did while he was here on earth.

It does however seem to emphasize the fact that he was *with us* in the first place. Of course, there are numerous accounts in the Gospels of Jesus healing the sick,²⁸ raising the dead,²⁹ restoring sight to the blind,³⁰ and freeing people from demonic possession.³¹ Yet in most of these events we read that the people come to him. The distinction is small, but significant as it may influence missional strategies. Jesus seems to value “being with” the people over what he can “do for” the people.

At times it does not appear that this is what churches value as they go out in mission. Too frequently it seems a greater importance is placed on what will be done and not on simply being with people. Being “with” instead of doing “for” is the primary emphasis of Samuel Wells book A Nazareth Manifesto. Wells writes, “There is no *for* that is not designed to bring about *with*. That is what it means to say *being with* is an eschatological conviction: *being with* is the telos of all God’s action, and thus should be of ours (italics added).”³² This is the way Jesus engaged in ministry and should therefore serve as a model for missional engagement for those intent on following Jesus. Jesus ministered primarily through the framework of relationships, not through objectives or tasks. Local church mission leaders and ministries should do likewise. This framework may be categorized as an incarnational model to missions.

An incarnational model of mission ministry emphasizes “being with” instead of “doing for”. It is characterized by patience, listening and identification with and through relationships. It is an approach that gives special attention to the “place” of those you are ministering among.

²⁸ Matthew 8:16, 12:15, 14:14,36, 15:30

²⁹ Luke 7:11-15, 8:40-42, 49-56; John 11:1-44

³⁰ Matthew 9:27-30, 12:22, 15:30,31, 20:29-34; Mark 8:22-26, 10:46-52; Luke 7:21-22, 18:35-43; John 9:1-12

³¹ Matthew 8:28-34, 12:22-32, 17:14-21; Mark 1:21-28,39, 5:1-20, 9:14-29; Luke 4:31-37; 8:26-39, 9:37-43, 11:14-23

³² Well, Samuel. *A Nazareth Manifesto: Being with God*. Chichester: John Wiley and Sons Ltd., 2015, 25.

This means learning about the history, the wounds, the victories, the losses and all other relevant aspects that have impacted the community and the people. An incarnational approach operates on the foundational belief that God is already present and at work in and among the community and people. Darrell Whiteman notes that utilizing an incarnational approach means, “We start with where people are, embedded in their culture, because this is where God started with us in order to transform us into what God wants us to become.”³³ As we focus on “being with” instead of “doing for” we enter into the position and place of others even if this requires downward mobility. The “incarnation for Jesus led to crucifixion, and this means for us that there will be many things in our life that we will have to die to—our biases and prejudices, our lifestyle, our agenda of what we want to do for God.”³⁴ The incarnation of Jesus, God the Son is a physical proclamation that all humanity is worth redeeming. Local church mission leaders occupy an important role as they point to the beauty and power of the incarnation as a model for how we are to approach missional engagement.

Characteristics of an Incarnational Model:

Samuel Wells provides valuable principles that guide how to enter into ministry that emphasizes “being with” rather than “doing for”. I suggest that these principles highlight some valuable characteristics of an incarnational model of missions. While I will not attempt to describe all of them, I will illustrate a couple that are particularly notable. Wells suggests that, “our calling is to imitate the way God is....God originally made, and has endlessly reiterated, a decision never to be except to be with us and our way of embodying that faith is constantly to

³³ Whiteman, 84.

³⁴ Ibid.

look for ways to be with God, with one another, and with the creation.”³⁵ The author of Ephesians writes, “Be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us (Eph. 5:1,2).” Wells emphasizes that as we look to imitate God, we “follow the way God is with us in Christ” which will include abiding, pain, suffering and solidarity as we enter into the world of others, especially among the disadvantaged, just as Jesus entered into our world.³⁶ Another principle, suggested by Wells, that informs a healthy incarnational model of mission states that, “being with does not start with a problem” recognizing that “we do not configure situations as problems needing solutions.”³⁷ Our task and purpose for missional engagement is not to “fix” people or communities. We should never presume to know what would be helpful or beneficial or even the best way to share “good news” until we have spent time with and among. Again, Wells writes, “being with means letting go of unsustainable and mistaken notions of altruism.”³⁸ As followers of Jesus we are “sent” to be among and to be “with”, we are not sent to save or to redeem. Jesus Christ is the only “Savior” and “Redeemer” that this world will ever need. An incarnational model strives to imitate and to represent “God with us”.

An incarnational model also involves the use of questions (i.e. Jesus w/ the woman at the well), it involves exploration (i.e. Paul in Athens) and it requires patience. It goes beyond looking at statistics and demographics, not ignoring them, but avoiding the temptation to allow those to unilaterally speak for an area and people. Incarnational missional ministry seeks for congruence between the spoken message and the embodied message. Ross Langmead notes

³⁵ Wells, 27.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Wells, 29.

³⁸ Ibid.

that, “Incarnational mission is mission in community. Congruence is the key to incarnational mission, and evangelism properly takes place in the context of a measure of congruence between the message proclaimed and the life demonstrated in the Christian community.”³⁹ As we live in community we are provided the opportunity to meet with and “minister” with others on their terms likely leading to a deeper transformation for all involved. Langmead summarizes an incarnational model of ministry stating, “Incarnational mission is not merely a style of mission but an understanding of mission which sees it as following the pattern of the mission of Jesus, enabled by the risen power of Christ present today, and a small part of the ongoing incarnating mission of God.”⁴⁰

We are called and invited by God to participate in the *missio Dei* and are thus *sent out* as co-laborers with the *incarnation* of Jesus Christ as our model. As we follow the incarnational model established by Jesus, we seek to imitate him by being with instead of solely doing for, we ask questions, we explore, we demonstrate patience and strive for harmony between the spoken and embodied message. The incarnation of Jesus Christ, “God with us”, provides a useful theological foundation for local church mission leaders on how they should carefully engage in missional ministry.

Spirit Empowered:

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth”. Acts 1:8

³⁹ Langmead, Ross. *The Word Made Flesh: Towards an Incarnational Missiology*. Lanham: University Press of America, 2004, 234.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 235.

The last section of the Theology of Mission chapter will reflect on the truth that we have not been sent out powerlessly but are indeed empowered by God's Spirit. This truth further informs the local church mission leader on "how" we as churches participate in mission ministry. God the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, empowers our missional engagement. In John 14:16,17 Jesus promises to send the Advocate (παράκλητον) to be our helper, our counselor to guide us into all truth. Following the ascension of Jesus Christ, the promised Holy Spirit is sent to enable, motivate and equip the followers of Jesus to be witnesses of the good news around the world. This is celebrated each year during the season of Pentecost. The presence of the Holy Spirit serves as an ongoing declaration and reminder that God remains faithful to the promise to remain with us. We are not sent out on our own, but continue to have God among us and within us as we go out into the world.

The objective in this section is not to comprehensively define the person or work of the Holy Spirit, but rather to highlight the ways God the Holy Spirit influences and empowers missional engagement. It would be a mistake to disregard the active role that the third person of the Trinity has in the *missio Dei*. For this reason, this section will focus on some of the active ways that God the Holy Spirit participates in sending us out in mission.

Empowerment for all:

The Holy Spirit empowers all believers. Thomas Oden writes, "every believer is offered the continuing privilege of living under the empowerment of the Spirit."⁴¹ The Spirit empowers the followers of Jesus to proclaim the good news. In John's Gospel we learn that God the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth who will abide with us and be in us (John 14:17). We

⁴¹ Oden, Thomas. *Life in the Spirit: Systematic Theology Volume Three*. Peabody: Prince Press, 1992, 180.

learn that the Holy Spirit will teach us and remind us of all that Jesus has said to us (John 14:26). In the Book of Acts, we discover that the Spirit (πνεύματος) of God empowers the disciples to boldly proclaim the truth of God, to prophesy, to release others from captivity and to heal. God is now working through humanity to proclaim the kingdom of God through word and deed. This proclamation does not belong to the church, yet the church is a primary carrier as God the Holy Spirit works within and through the church for the world. Lesslie Newbigin writes, “Mission is not just something that the church does; it is something that is done by the Spirit, who is the witness, who changes both the world and the church, who always goes before the church in its missionary journey.”⁴² It is however quite extraordinary to realize that God desires to include us in the sacred task of kingdom work. As such God the Holy Spirit sends, calls and equips the church for work in the world.

Peter is an informative example regarding the ways in which God the Holy Spirit works within us and through us for the work of mission. On the day of Pentecost, immediately after the “filling of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:1-4) Peter stands and addresses all who have gathered in Jerusalem. Following his Spirit empowered sermon, about three thousand were added to the number of believers. Peter then heals a man lame from birth (Acts 3:1-10) and is once again “filled with the Spirit” to boldly speak about Jesus Christ of Nazareth in the presence of those who have accused and arrested him (Acts 4:1-22). Later on, we read that Peter was sent by the Holy Spirit to the home of Cornelius, a Gentile. At first Peter resists, as he initially desires to hold to the stipulations of Jewish law, but the Spirit overcomes his resistance. It is

⁴² Newbigin, Leslie. *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission, Revised Edition*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995, 56.

only through the intervention and guide of the Holy Spirit that Peter comes to realize that, “God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him (Acts 10:34,35).” As Peter is speaking to a gathering consisting of Jews and Gentiles the Holy Spirit “fell upon all who heard the word...even on the Gentiles (Acts 10:44-48).”

We learn, once again, from Peter’s experience that the *missio Dei* is not limited to a select few, but extends to all. This should remind those who function as mission leaders that the work is primarily God’s. It reminds us that we must resist our urge to falsely construct limitations to the ways that God might choose to work through us. Mission leaders need to remind all who engage in mission that it is by God’s invitation that we participate in God’s work in the world. At times, just like Peter, we will hesitate, we will feel uncomfortable and potentially even resist what the Holy Spirit is attempting to accomplish through us. Yet, if we remain open to the work of God’s Spirit, we have the opportunity to observe the kingdom expanded upon the earth through us.

Charismata for all:

God the Holy Spirit also extends gifts (charismata) to all for the benefit of the Body of Christ at work in the world. We learn of these gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12 and Ephesian 4. Thomas Oden writes, “Gifts of the Spirit are distributed not by human preference or private choice but as the sovereign act of God the Spirit.”⁴³ Oden continues to categorize the *charismata of the Spirit* into three categories: witness, community and service.⁴⁴ Gifts such as

⁴³ Oden, 186.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 189.

exhortation, discernment and hope are given for the benefit of the community of faith. Spiritual gifts such as teaching, evangelism, speaking, prophecy and knowledge are given with the aim of witness to the world. Finally, gifts like healing, serving and mercy are offered to the community of faith with the objective of service to all. The *charismata* of the Holy Spirit are extended to all, but all do not receive the same *charismata*. In Romans 12 we read, “we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us” and in Ephesians 4 likewise, “the gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11,12).” This emphasizes the creative generosity of God as God shares the beauty of the *missio Dei* with us as the created. As various members of the body of Christ, we join with each other, woven together by God the Holy Spirit, for the purpose of God’s mission in and for the world.

Preparation for all:

Another important aspect to consider regarding God the Holy Spirit is the work of the Spirit done in advance of any church, mission or ministry effort. Wesleyans call this “prevenient grace” and Lesslie Newbigin terms it the “previousness of the kingdom.”⁴⁵ This theological concept proclaims that God is at work in the lives of individuals, communities and people groups even when there is no actively present witness from the church. United Methodists declare that *prevenient grace* is, “the divine love that surrounds all humanity and precedes any and all of our conscious impulses.”⁴⁶ It is the belief that God the Holy Spirit works in and

⁴⁵ Newbigin, 56.

⁴⁶ *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*. Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2016, 52.

through the lives of individuals, communities, cultures and nations before, during and after any missional engagement. This should offer comfort as it highlights the reality that God remains deeply committed to the work of redemptive and restorative grace regardless of the presence of the church.

A working pneumatology impacts our understanding of missions. A growing understanding of God the Holy Spirit impacts our anthropology in addition to our theology as one considers how the Spirit works through us in and for the world. We discover that God values us in the ways that God desires to include us in the *missio Dei* as we are empowered and sent out by God the Holy Spirit. We are not sent out unprepared or ill-equipped, but instead are sent with the knowledge that we will be empowered by the Holy Spirit to boldly proclaim the good news in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. We are sent with the realization that we have all been given various *charismata* for the work/benefit of the church and the world. As we go, we recognize that God has already been at work in and among the people and places that we are sent to as ambassadors.

Theology of Mission Summary:

Local church mission leaders play a pivotal role in teaching a theology of mission to those in their congregations. The first chapter of this project took time to examine the “why” and “how” of mission from a theological perspective. We determined the reason why we actively engage in mission is that as disciples of Jesus we join together in God’s Mission (*missio Dei*) as we are sent (*apostello*) by God. We then considered how we are able to effectively join in God’s redemptive work? The *incarnation* was suggested as a missional ministry model and the central role of empowerment by the *Holy Spirit* was also examined. It would be unwise for

any local church mission leader to devalue the significance of a theological foundation for mission. In many ways, this is what separates the missional engagement by churches from other community, governmental or organizational social improvement endeavors. A robust theology of mission undergirds why we go out in mission, points to the source of all mission, provides a model for mission and functions as an ongoing reminder that we are empowered for mission.

CHAPTER THREE: MISSIOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES

Introduction:

This chapter of the project will examine some of the vital competencies that missiologists,¹ missionaries and local practitioners have discovered and employed over the course of their ministry and work. This chapter will not attempt to offer a comprehensive survey of all missiological principles. It will instead offer several principles that the author believes are vital for local church mission leaders to grasp as they prepare to direct the missional efforts of their local church. Time will therefore be given to consider these six missiological principles:²

1. Holistic ministry
2. Mutuality
3. Empowerment
4. Gift/asset-based community development
5. Contextuality/cross-cultural awareness
6. Dignity

An awareness of these basic missiological principles is important for local church mission leaders as it enables them to effectively lead with sensitivity and care.

¹ Missiology may be defined simply as the study of Christian mission. There are many working definitions of “missiology” and there have been many approaches and questions on how/where to include missiology in theological study (see Bosch 489-496). For example, some have established missiology as a separate discipline of practical theology or as a separate theological branch altogether. Others decided to integrate missiological study into the other theological “schools” (biblical text, church history, systematic, practical). For his part, David Bosch called missiology the “mother of all theology”. Although, theology functions as the root system for this discipline of study, missiology also pulls from the social sciences (i.e. sociology, anthropology and psychology) in the scope of its focus.

² These principles were selected based on the learned experience of the author, the observations and writings of other local church mission leaders, missiologists and theologians. Since 2009 I have been privileged to belong to a cohort of local church mission leaders named the Large Church Mission Connection (LCMC). The LCMC is comprised of Mission Pastors and Mission Directors of larger (more than 1,000 in attendance) United Methodist churches across the United States. Once a year we gather to learn, share and grow together in our capacity to be effective local church mission leaders. The combined learning of this cohort has shaped the way that each of us approach the task of being effective “resident Missiologists” in our local church settings. I owe a great amount of gratitude to my LCMC colleagues who have greatly shaped the content and selected principles that are focused on in this chapter.

Miscommunication and misappropriation of the Gospel has caused harm over the years through dehumanization, paternalism, colonialism, syncretism and at times a misrepresentation of God. Those engaging in missional ministry can fall into the trap of believing that they themselves are the Savior, the hero or the cure for all malady (individual and communal). This project hopes to provide a greater awareness of the learning and benefit of these missiological principles so that local church mission leaders can better train those in their congregational settings to engage in healthy missional practices.

It is likely that each church can share stories of how they made mistakes regarding missional outreach over the years. Obviously, no church extends ministry from the worshipping community with the goal of causing harm to the communities they intend to serve or to the gospel message, but too frequently this occurs. Unfortunately, at times our efforts and ministries result in dishonoring or devaluing the worth of others by our words, actions and unintended messages. For example, we run the risk of communicating that we do not believe that a community is capable of coming up with their own solutions when we focus solely on the problems that we feel exist in a community. There are two concerns with this as an approach. The first is that we feel we know what “the problem” is that needs to be fixed without even engaging the community. The second is that we believe that we are “the solution”. This type of mentality leads to dependency and disempowerment. Additionally, it is problematic as it devalues the God-given worth and giftedness that is present within each individual, culture and community. Mission leaders of local churches need to be aware of these risks in order to cautiously guide their faith communities into missional engagement that empowers, encourages and equips the communities they intend to serve. Having an awareness of some of

the principles discovered in the practical theological discipline of missiology will aid mission leaders in avoiding such pitfalls.

The list of missiological principles in this project is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather are suggested as foundation blocks upon which to construct healthy local church mission ministries. *Holistic ministry* emphasizes a congruence of missional efforts that address the entirety of an individual, a community and a culture. It does not prioritize either verbal proclamation or social action over the other. *Mutuality* stresses ministry “with” instead of ministry “to/for”. It prioritizes listening and partnership as missional practices. *Empowerment* focuses on an abundance rather than a scarcity mentality. Empowerment desires to affirm, encourage and unlock the gifts and abilities that are already present within an individual or community. *Gifts or Asset Based Community Development* is an approach toward empowering individuals and communities to grow/develop utilizing the gifts/assets that are already present among them. *Cross-cultural awareness & contextuality* encourages all who engage in cross-cultural ministry to become conscious of their own cultural worldviews and dispositions. Simultaneously, cross-cultural awareness requires study and discovery of the cultural perspectives of the hosting culture. *Dignity* as a missiological principle is perhaps better understood as a commitment to honor the *imago Dei* present in all. This includes those we serve among as well as ourselves.

Holistic Ministry:

The first missiological principle to be examined is *holistic ministry*. We begin with holistic ministry as this approach to mission and ministry should be the cornerstone to the way local church mission ministries are conducted. *Holistic ministry* is based on the belief that the

Triune God is indeed Lord of all. As such, God cares about all aspects of our existence. This includes the spiritual, physical, material, economic, and ecological components of life. Holistic ministry focuses therefore on the “whole” person and the well-being of “whole” communities. It emphasizes the eternal, but proclaims that the eternal has present implications as well.

“The Split”:

For a majority of the Twentieth century there existed a great divide between the Christians who emphasized social responsibility, the so-called ‘Social Gospel’, and Christians who stressed personal evangelism. This came to be known as the “fundamentalist/modernist split”.³ Present-day holistic ministry finds its origin in the aftermath of this theological/missiological divide and is therefore beneficial to briefly examine. Michael Goheen writes, “these early traditions developed in counterpoint to one another and cultivated sharply divergent understandings of mission. Word and deed were torn asunder.”⁴ This led to two primary missional streams of Protestant Christianity. The Ecumenical branch (or Social Gospel/Modernist Tradition) characterized by the World Council of Churches and the Fundamentalist branch (or Evangelical Tradition). Michael Goheen outlines some of the varying

³ In *Soul in Society: The Making and Renewal of Social Christianity* Gary Dorrien outlines the history of the three phases of twentieth century (modernist) social Christianity: Progressive era social gospel modernism, Christian realism and postmodern/liberationist Christianity. Dorrien traces how progressive theologians challenged many of the social structures of their day acting on their belief that Christianity must confront social ills. He examines the influence of Walter Rauschenbusch, Reinhold Niebuhr, and John C. Bennet among others. On p.19 Dorrien writes, “In the biblical faith recovered by social Christianity, the reign of God is an immanent/eschatological reality that engenders community, peace, and justice. The spiritual reality of the resurrected Christ is the ground of a hope that sustains and transcends Christian struggles for justice and peace.”

⁴ Goheen, Michael. *Introducing Christian Mission Today: Scripture, History and Issues*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014, 228.

perspectives of these two missional branches by describing their understandings of time (history), sin, salvation and the focus of the gospel.⁵

The Ecumenical tradition was characterized by three primary features. First was a “this-worldly” focus stressing the present over the future. It believed that a peaceful, equal social order was attainable now and that the Kingdom of God could be a present reality.⁶ Gary Dorrien notes they believed “A reduction of the kingdom to heaven eliminated the kingdom’s social dimension and thus ‘substituted asceticism for a revolutionary movement’. This distortion of biblical faith was often sealed by reducing the present meaning of the kingdom to an individual’s quest for eternal salvation.”⁷ Second was an anthropocentric approach by which “mission” was primarily centered on human efforts, techniques and social programs. Finally the Ecumenical tradition focused on the social over the individual. An implication of this particular emphasis was that sin was primarily understood socially rather than personally. “Salvation” was therefore experienced by societal change achieved by human social action.

The Evangelical Tradition, on the other hand, stressed a different understanding of time (history), sin, salvation and the gospel. It understood the “Kingdom” as a future reality, thereby minimizing the importance of present realities whether positive or negative. The Evangelistic Tradition was pessimistic in its view of history believing that it was progressively getting worse. Conversely, the Social Gospel Tradition held an optimistic view of history that life is progressively improving due to education, reform, technological advancements and social

⁵ See Goheen’s description of “The Evangelical Tradition” and “The Ecumenical Tradition” in chapter Six “Holistic Mission: Witness in Life, Word and Deed” in *Introducing Christian Mission Today* for further discussion on the split between word and deed that occurred in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

⁶ Dorrien, Gary. *Soul in Society: The Making and Renewal of Social Christianity*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995, 21-30.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

programs. Regarding sin, the Evangelical Tradition believed that sin is primarily a personal rather than a social reality. Therefore, salvation occurs individually instead of corporately through societal advancement. They believed that those in the Social Gospel Tradition were diluting the message of the gospel with the belief that humanity could usher in “salvation” through its own efforts and achievements. The Evangelical Tradition felt that this contradicted the salvific work of Jesus Christ on behalf of humanity.

Admittedly, this is a simplified depiction of these two approaches to mission emphasis. One stressed social engagement and the other a clear verbal proclamation of personal salvation. Each of these streams deemphasized the significance of the other. This led to incomplete articulations of the whole gospel of Jesus Christ. Goheen writes, “The Social Gospel Tradition stressed the horizontal dimensions of salvation (relations among humankind), while the Evangelical Tradition emphasized the vertical (relations between God and humankind).”⁸ The proponents of the Social Gospel were perhaps too overly optimistic regarding the progress of human history believing that in time advancement would lead to a society with very few ills. However, those in the Evangelical Tradition were perhaps too overly pessimistic regarding the material world, choosing instead to focus almost exclusively on the future (or on life after death). Each tradition had deficiencies that were exposed by the other in theory, practice and theology. Each tradition was also likely guilty of an over-correction in their attempts to respond to the other. Many within each tradition began to recognize the existing deficiencies and thus made efforts to offer corrections.

⁸ Goheen, 230.

In the latter part of the Twentieth century the two branches of the modernist/fundamentalist divide began to once again form a unified current of Christian mission emphasizing both personal evangelism and social responsibility. At the conclusion of his opening address at the first International Congress on World Evangelization held in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1974, Billy Graham articulated his hope that, “we can state what the relationship is between evangelism and social responsibility. Let us rejoice in social action, and yet insist that it alone is not evangelism and cannot be substituted for evangelism.”⁹ Section Five of the Lausanne Covenant (the covenantal document that emerged from the Lausanne Conference) is entitled “Christian Social Responsibility”. This marks a significant shift and correction of evangelical Christians to include and promote ministries that address the present, focusing on social reform, justice and reconciliation. It reads, “We affirm that God is both the Creator and the Judge of all men. We therefore should share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men from every kind of oppression.”¹⁰

A similar correction is observed within the Social Gospel Tradition (which came to be known as the Ecumenical Tradition). Perhaps, the gathering that highlighted this the most was when the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches met in Geneva in July 1982. They published a resulting document entitled, “Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation”, that demonstrated the desire to reclaim evangelism as

⁹ Graham, Billy. “Why Lausanne?”. July 1, 1974 Plenary Address to The First International Congress on World Evangelization. <https://www.lausanne.org/content/why-lausanne-print>. Accessed July 15, 2020.

¹⁰ Stott, John ed., *Making Christ Known: Historic Mission Documents from the Lausanne Movement, 1974-1989*. Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997, 24.

a central missional component of ministry.¹¹ In the preface of this article we read, “Sin, alienating persons from God, neighbor and nature, is found both in individual and corporate forms, both in slavery of the human will and in social, political and economic structures of domination and dependence.”¹² The Ecumenical Tradition takes the time to name sin as not just a social reality, but an individual one as well. The World Council of Churches called for a unity of the Global Church realizing that the division between Evangelical and Ecumenical, between word and deed damaged Christian witness.

There is an increased awareness among these two traditions that harm has been caused both internally and externally as a result of the great divide and distinction between social action and verbal proclamation. From this recognition great effort was made to bridge the divide. The Evangelical Tradition made a commitment to both word and *deed* looking to address social concerns that plague the world in addition to a verbal proclamation of the gospel. Latin American missiologist René Padilla called this type of engagement “comprehensive evangelism” in his address to the Lausanne Congress in 1974. For Padilla, evangelism needed to also produce concrete ethical results in addition to professions of faith in Jesus Christ. Klaus Bockmuehl notes that for Padilla, “there can be no antithesis between loving God and loving one’s neighbor, or between faith and works, eschatology and ethics, evangelism and ministry, conversion and social renewal nor can one differentiate between primary and secondary tasks in missions.”¹³ Likewise, those in the Ecumenical Tradition,

¹¹ *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, “Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation” Volume: 7 issue: 2, page(s): 65-71 Issue published: April 1, 1983

¹² *Ibid.*, 65.

¹³ Bockmuehl, Klaus. *Evangelicals and Social Ethics: A Commentary on Article 5 of the Lausanne Covenant*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1979, 8.

committed to both deed and *word* adding verbal proclamation of the abundant and eternal life found in Jesus Christ,¹⁴ to ministries of social action.

In Praxis:

This historical backdrop is particularly significant for present-day local church mission leaders as it provides a warning of what can occur when too much emphasis is placed on either word or deed. An overly emphasized distinction between the two leads to an unnecessary division creating an unwanted divide. Some congregations will have those who believe that the only important thing is for people to be “saved”. There will be others who believe that the only thing that matters is for the church to address issues of justice, poverty and reconciliation in our world today. This type of thinking is a false dichotomy that only leads to division. Perhaps, it is the job of the local church mission leader, more than any other ministry leader, to exemplify a holistic ministry approach that seamlessly coheres word and deed in such a way that any distinction feels unnecessary. If done effectively, such a leader will construct missional engagement that rejects the either/or dichotomy regarding word-deed, individual-social, present-future, and instead embrace a holistic approach founded in the Bible and exemplified by Jesus Christ.

Holistic ministry, therefore, focuses on word and deed, on individuals and community, and on the present and future. In practice, it verbally shares the good news of a God who loves and forgives simultaneously addressing human need in its various forms. Holistic ministry cares for each individual person and additionally recognizes that, collectively, individuals form communities, societies and nations. It understands that individual sin and corporate sin are

¹⁴ World Council of Churches., 67.

real, concurrently causing destruction to individuals and society. Finally, holistic ministry strives to address the here and now with a constant recognition of life beyond our earthly existence. Thus, it proclaims both a hope for now and the not yet. Holistic ministry is a comprehensive approach to missional engagement concerned with the physical, spiritual, material, structural, individual and social components of human life.

Mutuality:

Before any form of holistic ministry can occur, there must be time spent with the individual, neighborhood or community. This too frequently feels inconvenient and unnecessary to many of our churches today. Spending time “with” requires patience and time, two things that too many North American Christians are not regularly willing to extend. Instead, we generally prefer to be involved in missional ministry that is ready made and quick, eliciting immediate results. In fact, in my experience as a Minister of Missions I have observed that most initially imagine missional engagement to involve actions such as constructing homes, leading Vacation Bible Schools in “under-privileged” communities, holding evangelistic crusades, passing out food at a local shelter or other *immediate* mission opportunities. Of course, there are times when engagement like this is appropriate. However, what needs to be evaluated is how the church formed such a list. Over the years I have been involved in too many missional outreach activities that were primarily formed and initiated by the church (or mission organization) instead of in consultation with the community/individual we intended to serve. In fact, in my role as a mission leader, there have been too many times where I was the one organizing such events.

A False Assumption:

The problem with this approach is not with any specific ministry action, but with the operating assumptions and the decision-making process. We too frequently assume that “they” want “us” to come in and “fix” their problems. We also assume that we know what their problems are before taking any time whatsoever to get to truly know them and understand their realities. This type of approach has the tendency to place the needs of the church above the needs of the community. We place our need and desire for efficiency, cost-effectiveness and results above the needs of the community we intend to serve. Those in the North American church seem to prefer ministry activities that provide immediate observable results. We like to be able to answer the question, “What did you accomplish when you were in *(fill in the blank)?*” with measurable results. Most prefer to be able to answer by saying, “we built a church, or we led a VBS with 200 children, or we led an evangelistic crusade where 50 people professed faith in Jesus”. In many ways, this desire is simply a reflection of the western cultural value of achievement and productivity in relationship to time. Indeed, one of our driving cultural aphorisms coined by Benjamin Franklin is, “Time is money!”¹⁵ highlighting that we generally do not want to waste time. This may work effectively in business, but can be quite damaging in mission.

Perhaps, before examining the importance of mutuality it would be helpful to consider an illustration where little to no mutuality was present. This story demonstrates how rushing in with assumptions and the compulsion to “fix a problem” can cause unintended harm without

¹⁵ Franklin, Benjamin. “Advice to a Young Tradesman, [July 21, 1748],” *Founders Online*, National Archives (<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-03-02-0130>), accessed July 22, 2020.

taking the needed time to learn and understand. It is an account from my personal ministry experience when my wife and I served with Mercy Ships (on board the M/V Caribbean Mercy).

During our time in a Central American nation some of the crew members on the ship were made aware of a horrendous situation for a particular woman and her children. They went to visit the woman and discovered, to their horror, that what they had heard was in fact true. The woman (we will call her Gloria) and her five children were living in a chicken coop on her family's property at the bottom of a hill. Gloria struggled with addiction, and due to her addiction, her family would not permit her or her children to live in the house. Instead, all of them were forced to live with the chickens. This was as bad as it sounds. Her family was treating Gloria and her children as if they were not even human. Apparently, her family believed that if she was making the decision to abuse her body with substances then they had no responsibility to offer her dignity and care. Gloria worked as a prostitute to earn money for drugs and alcohol, and by all accounts had given up any and all hope of living a productive life. Gloria's family would offer her and her children the scraps from their table to eat, just like the chickens.

Obviously, those from the ship who went to meet Gloria were utterly shocked to discover the inhumane ways that she and her children were being treated. They returned to the ship and shared their discovery. Those who heard Gloria's story were appalled and felt compelled to do something to help her and her children. We felt a responsibility to act to bring about change. We viewed the ways that Gloria and her children were being treated as acts of violence against them denying them basic human dignity. Gloria and her children, in their position of weakness and vulnerability, were being abused by her family.

Our motivation to act was grounded in compassion and with the theological underpinning that everyone is created in the image of God and thereby has value and worth. Although our motivation to respond was good, I believe we ended up causing more problems and harm for Gloria than aid. The community on board the Caribbean Mercy was made up of people from around the world representing nearly thirty nations. Yet even with that multi-national diversity, a North American/Western mentality prevailed in this instance.

There was one man from the ship who visited Gloria (we will call him Stan) who could not bear the thought of her or her children spending one more night in the chicken coop. He had to do something. Stan was a builder, and understandably, his solution was to build them a house. Stan was quite forceful and intimidating, and since this was something he felt compelled to do, he worked hard to persuade others. The thought of building Gloria a house seemed a good idea to most and gained momentum to the point where it seemed unstoppable. Early on a few of us approached Stan and some of the other leaders of this effort to express our concern that we needed to take some time to think about the implications of constructing a house. Unfortunately, our concerns were quickly brushed aside. After that I decided to keep quiet and instead reluctantly offered my help.

The Outreach team leader and I were then tasked to drive about an hour and a half away to locate the owner (the family patriarch) of the land to get his permission to construct an additional house on his property. After receiving his consent, we went to the family and to Gloria to share the news that we were going to construct a three-bedroom house for her and her children to live in free of any cost to them. Immediately, work began on the house, and within four weeks we stood in a circle around the newly constructed home dedicating it with a

prayer of blessing. Gloria assured us that she was going to get her life together and her family committed to always allow Gloria and her children to reside in the home. Everyone who was a part of this endeavor felt so blessed that we had the privilege of addressing such a horrendous situation and “fixing” it within such a quick period of time. We believed that God had sent us to bring healing to this broken family. Unfortunately, instead of helping to heal we caused more harm by creating more division in their family and, as we later discovered, out in the community as well.

We were not the only ones aware of Gloria’s situation, as several local children’s homes, ministries and churches also knew about it. We discovered that many of them had been working diligently to determine an appropriate solution for Gloria and her children in the absence of a social service institution empowered to remove the children from such a horrid living environment. Any action that they planned to take needed to be done with patience as they earned the trust of the family, of Gloria and the children. These local organizations realized that this was a complex situation involving an abusive family, a woman struggling with addiction and wounded children. They desired to find a healing solution for everyone involved, but that all ended the moment that we intervened to “fix” the situation. As soon as we decided to intervene, the family stopped listening to the suggestions of the other organizations once they realized that we planned on increasing the value of their land by building another house on it completely free. They did not want to do anything at all to jeopardize that, so they essentially played along with us until we departed for our next port of call.

A half a year after we left to go to our next outreach location, some members of our Mercy Ships team were making a follow up trip. They went to visit Gloria and family to see how

they were. To their dismay, they discovered that Gloria was back in the chicken coop with her children as the family had forced her out of the new home so that some of them could reside there instead. As a result of our desire to help we had damaged the connection and trust between Gloria (and family) with the local ministries that were attempting to provide a lasting solution. Our compulsion to “fix” the situation, believing that we knew what was best without even really consulting the community, or God for that matter, ended up making their reality more complicated and broken than it was before we had arrived.

This illustration, from my ministry experience, provides an example of an inappropriate myopic approach to ministry. We did not extend the needed time required to determine the best way to interact with this very complex situation. My hope is that local church mission leaders will do all that they possibly can to avoid similar mistakes. How then do we engage in missional ministry that honors, respects and protects those we intend to serve?

“With” not “To”:

Effective missional engagement requires mutuality. The local church mission leader must lead their congregation into missional efforts that emphasize ministry “with” people instead of ministry “for” people. Too often western Christians falsely believe that they are the cure, the remedy, or worse, that they are the Savior for those they are among. At its best this line of thinking is prideful and arrogant, but at its worst, it is idolatry causing great harm. We are certainly not the savior, but it would be wise to follow the example of the Savior. In our attempt to model our missional engagement after Jesus Christ of Nazareth we realize he prioritized being among the people listening and partnering together with them.

In the “Theology of Mission” chapter we examined the Incarnation as a model for missional engagement. Nothing communicates mutuality more than being among people sharing in the joys, struggles and triumphs of their life. Jesus typified this by living among us as a human who experienced pain, sorrow, joy and suffering. It is impossible to communicate that the whole person matters and that the full measure of their life is valuable if you do not spend time “with” them. Jesus, God the Son, clearly understood this. He also allowed people to speak on their own terms and provided space for them to express their needs and desires on their own instead of determining what they were in advance.¹⁶ Jesus did not function like a medical practitioner or a mechanic who only looked to “fix” brokenness. Instead, he lived among the people and engaged in ministry “with” them. This meant that he suffered when they suffered, he ate what they ate, he grieved when they grieved and celebrated when they celebrated. We must avoid the temptation of objectifying those we attempt to serve by doing ministry “to” them instead of “with” them. One of the ways that we avoid this is simply by listening.

Listen Well:

Listening may seem obvious, but it is important not to underestimate how critical this simple act is in mutual holistic ministry. Listening well requires that we understand individuals, communities and cultures on their terms. Alan Roxburgh believes that “listening” is a practice that congregations should employ in order to bring about positive change in our churches. For

¹⁶ One example of this is with Jesus’ encounter of the crippled man at the Pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-18). We read that each day the man came to the pool hoping to be healed, but instead of automatically healing him Jesus asks him, “Do you want to be made well?”.

Roxburgh the practice of listening involves listening to one another and listening to God.¹⁷ He writes:

Listening is a way of unbinding one another, inviting us to forget ourselves and set aside the need to provide solutions or answers or to cover our ignorance or vulnerability. We practice laying down the need to be heard, and instead practice hearing. Specifically, we are listening to one another, listening to God, and listening to the neighbor.¹⁸

Listening well invites us to search for and discover the way that God is already at work in advance of us. Wesleyan theology declares that God is already graciously at work throughout creation through God the Holy Spirit. God preveniently works within individuals, but perhaps God also does such work within communities and cultures as well.¹⁹ We have the opportunity to join in and partner with the work that God is doing. But, in order to effectively do this, we must listen and observe so that we are able to discern God's work. As we listen, we discover what the joys, the sorrows, the celebrations and the wounds are within a community. This is categorically different than our assuming what we believe them to be. Instead, a commitment to listen well challenges us to embrace these realities as the community understand them.

This is central to any form of mutual holistic ministry. Local church mission ministries should resist projecting their thoughts on what a community's strengths and weaknesses are. Instead, this is something to be worked on together. Those from the church may certainly offer some insight, but it is inappropriate and likely harmful to assume that they know the hopes and struggles of the community. We can prevent this mistake by considering

¹⁷ Roxburgh, Alan. *Joining God, Remaking Church, Changing the World: The New Shape of the Church in Our Time*. New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2015, 56-69.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 58.

¹⁹ Don Richardson classifies this prevenient work as "redemptive analogies". In his books *The Peace Child* and *Eternity in their Hearts* Richardson demonstrates from his own observations of cultures as a missionary and from his study of other missionaries that there are aspects embedded within each culture that provide an analogous key to sharing the gospel message. He names these "keys" redemptive analogies.

the role we occupy while seeking mutual missional engagement. In his article “The Viable Missionary”, missiologist Donald Larson suggests some possible roles we can occupy that encourage listening and observation.²⁰ Larson wrote this article to missionaries working primarily in non-Christian nations, however his suggestion of viable roles that missionaries might adopt are applicable here. He recommends that we should assume the roles of learner, trader and storyteller. For our purposes, I am more interested in the role of “learner”. Larson writes, “Assuming the role of learner symbolizes a number of important things to residents that are important in the communication of the Gospel. The learner’s dependence and vulnerability convey in some small way the messages of identification and reconciliation that are explicit in the Gospel.”²¹ Assuming the role of a “learner” directly places you in a position to listen more effectively. Learners are naturally curious asking questions that then require one to listen intently. Initially entering a community as a learner emphasizes a relationship based on mutuality. It communicates that those in the community have value and something to offer as teacher or guide even if they struggle with economic poverty.

Partnership:

After taking the needed time to listen well, another important component of mutuality is partnership. Partnering involves working together toward mutually agreed upon goals. In a way, “partnership” is intentional mutuality where the merit is observed not solely on successfully attaining goals, but by working and serving together. Partnership operates on the realization that more can be accomplished together than by working separately, recognizing

²⁰ Larson, Donald N. “*The Viable Missionary: Learner, Trader, Story Teller*” in *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. VI, No. 2, 1978, 155-163.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 162.

that transformation does not occur unilaterally. Eric Swanson and Rick Rusaw note, “People or entities don’t partner together unless they really believe that they can accomplish more together than they can accomplish by themselves.”²² Partnerships thrive when the community comprised of residents, churches, schools, organizations and all who have a vested interest in the progress and well-being of an area commit to a common goal. Ron Sider states, “God created people to live in community, and a healthy community is made up of diverse institutions. Ideally, the church should come alongside local institutions and strengthen them to do their part with justice, integrity and effectiveness.”²³

The New Testament speaks to the benefit of the various parts of the Body of Christ working in harmony together.²⁴ We read that each member has value and is required in order for the entire body to function at its optimal best. This is true within the Church and perhaps it is true in the community as well. As partnerships are established, they work to cover any existing weaknesses with the strengths from others in the partnership. In essence, partnerships are beneficial by making weaknesses less damaging and strengths more beneficial.

In order to participate in partnerships, it is important to take time to learn and understand what some of the components of effective partnerships are. Ron Sider is helpful here as he notes six characteristics of partnerships that lead to mutual benefit for all the entities involved.²⁵ These six qualities of healthy partnerships between churches and communities (i.e. neighborhoods, non-profits, other ministries, etc..) are listed below.

²² Swanson, Eric and Rick Rusaw. *The Externally Focused Quest: Becoming the Best Church for the Community*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass A Wiley Imprint, 2010, 125,126.

²³ Sider, 228.

²⁴ See Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-31; Ephesians 4:1-16

²⁵ Sider, 229-232.

Healthy partnerships:

1. Have a compatible core mission
2. Do not hinder the faith or evangelistic witness of the church
3. Are founded on mutual trust and respect
4. Involve a sense of ownership on both sides
5. Do not substitute for the gifts and resources of the congregation
6. Involve clear communication and accountability

These qualities are not necessarily present from the beginning, but it is useful to regularly consider them as all strive to work together. Working toward mutual benefit is a process involving failure and success, harm and forgiveness as well as sorrow and joy. The goal of these partnerships may indeed differ from one to the other, but the guiding principles should remain consistent in order to maintain mutuality.

When local church mission ministries take time to listen well and to prioritize partnerships as they engage in the community (local and international), mutuality emerges. As churches take these needed steps, they demonstrate their focus on ministry “with” instead of ministry “to” people. A mission ministry characterized by mutuality emphasizes care on the whole person, community and context. It refuses to assume that as an “outsider” they know what the strengths and weaknesses are in any given setting. It places greater emphasis on the process (partnership) than on the results. Mission ministries that emphasize mutuality instead of a “giver-receiver” paradigm promote health, healing and holism.

Empowerment:

In the early 1990s Reverend John Perkins encouraged the Church to go “beyond charity to reconciliation and development, to become a lamp hanging on a post, which gives light to a dark world.” He challenged, “the whole church, to take a whole gospel on a whole

mission to the whole world.”²⁶ For well over half a century Perkins has dedicated his life to holistic ministry committed to the belief that the Gospel of Jesus Christ must be proclaimed through words, reconciliation and community engagement/transformation. His ministry, primarily in areas of great urban poverty, has focused on empowerment. Perkins recognized that a “charity mentality” is useless if it fails to address the “personally defined felt needs” of the community. He writes, “Acts of charity can be dangerous because givers can feel good about actions that actually accomplish very little, or even create dependency. Overcoming an attitude of charity is a difficult task because it requires givers to demand more of themselves than good will.”²⁷ Bob Lupton goes even further by defining this type of charity as being toxic.²⁸

Before exploring what empowerment is and what it looks like, we will briefly examine the potential damage caused by choosing to operate with solely a charity mentality. To be clear, I believe the well-intended compassion and care by churches is a good and God-honoring motivation. However, as John Wesley instructed, we must take all the care we can to ensure we do no harm.²⁹ It grows increasingly evident that providing charity and relief solutions to situations that require empowerment and development does indeed cause great harm. Determining whether or not your church operates with a “charity mentality” may be one of the most difficult and complicated tasks of a local church mission leader. However, it is vital to regularly examine whether or not our efforts and actions are promoting dependency instead of

²⁶ Perkins, John. *Beyond Charity: The Call to Christian Community Development*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993, 18.

²⁷ Ibid, 23.

²⁸ Lupton, Robert. *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help (And How to Reverse It)*. New York: Harper Collins, 2011.

²⁹ Wesley, John. *The Nature, Design and General Rules of the United Societies*, 5th Ed. 1747, 5.

interdependency. Are we empowering or disempowering? The negative impact of our potential disempowerment may prove to be crippling to the communities we intend to serve.

Just Money?

One tendency for those in the West is to believe that money alone will solve the complex set of problems facing those in poverty. Bob Lupton offers Haiti as a case study. He notes that prior to 2010 \$8.3 billion in international aid was given to Haiti, but the country ended up 25 percent poorer than they were before receiving the aid.³⁰ Lupton comments, “Decades of free aid from well-meaning benefactors has produced an entitlement mentality and eroded a spirit of entrepreneurship and self-sufficiency. Humanitarian responses unaccompanied by disciplined development strategies become a curse on a country.”³¹ Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert add that:

Despite an estimated \$2.3 trillion in foreign aid dispensed from Western nations during the post-World War II era, more than 2.5 billion people, approximately 40 percent of the world’s population, still live on less than two dollars per day. And the story in many North American communities is similar, with one initiative after another failing to meet its intended objectives. Indeed, forty-five years after President Johnson launched the War on Poverty the poverty rate in America stubbornly hovers around 12 percent,³² decade after decade, year after year.³³

Of course, sharing financial resources will be required in missional engagement. However, believing that money is the cure for poverty is misleading, destructive and based on mounting evidence, ignorant. Local church mission leaders must carefully gauge the best way of sharing financial resources so that empowerment is fostered.

³⁰ Ibid. 36.

³¹ Lupton, 36.

³² The current official poverty rate in the U.S. is 10.5 percent according to the UC Davis Center for Poverty Research (<https://poverty.ucdavis.edu/faq/what-current-poverty-rate-united-states>), accessed on September 23, 2020.

³³ Corbett, Steve and Brian Fikkert. *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor...and Yourself*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012, 133-134.

No Quick Fix:

Money is not the sole solution and neither are attempts for a “quick fix”. These types of solutions are typically only surface level, giving the appearance of repair while ignoring the deep-rooted underlying issues. I have been guilty of looking for quick fixes in my time in missional leadership. I led a two-month long mission experience to a coastal Central American city. While we were there, we took a walk (on our own) around the city with the objective of getting a feel for the area. During our walk we noticed that even though the area had wonderful beaches with restaurants, cafés and bars overlooking beautiful Caribbean waters, there was a lot of trash scattered along the sand. We came to the quick conclusion that the vast amounts of litter were damaging the tourism industry and therefore harming the local economy. We “knew” what needed to be done. So, we arranged a meeting with the Mayor’s Office to inform them that we were planning on scheduling a “Beach Clean-up Day”. We received permission from the city to hold this “event” and then proceeded to print and post fliers all around the city announcing this beach clean-up effort. It will perhaps come as no surprise that on “Beach Clean-up Day” we were the only ones there with our trash bags. We were operating under the illusion that the simple act of holding a clean-up day would spark the desire of the local residents to join in and take ownership of the cleanliness of their beach. This certainly did not occur, and in all likelihood, offended the local residents, business owners and government. Our effort failed because we focused on what “we” saw as an issue without consulting the local community and as a result of our near-sidedness. We believed that the “Beach Clean-up Day” would be a quick-fix to the struggling local economy. We were guilty of

only seeing the perceived “problem” instead of focusing on the many positives that were already present.

Addressing issues connected with poverty requires more than money and quick-fix short-sided solutions. Instead, it requires a consideration of what is already present in the community (gifts, talents, resources, innovative ideas, etc..) and doing all that can be done to create conditions where they are empowered. A primary question to consider is: How might local church mission leaders along with the indigenous stakeholders work together to create an environment where empowerment can occur?

Relief, Rehabilitation or Development?

Perhaps the first thing required is to assess the context or “phase” of the situation. Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert suggest that, “the first step regarding working with the poor in any context is to discern whether the situation calls for relief, rehabilitation, or development”³⁴ and that failure to do so frequently causes unnecessary damage. They define *relief* as “the urgent and temporary provision of emergency aid to reduce immediate suffering from a natural or man-made crisis.”³⁵ This phase is characterized by a giver and receiver dynamic. For example, in the aftermath of a hurricane, external organizations, churches and government programs give aid and assistance to those in the storm struck region. *Rehabilitation* “seeks to restore people and their communities to the positive elements of their pre-crisis condition.”³⁶ This is the recovery phase of the process where those most impacted by the event now participate with the outside help in the work of restoration. Finally, *development* “is the

³⁴ Ibid., 99.

³⁵ Ibid., 99, 100.

³⁶ Ibid., 100.

process of ongoing change that moves all the people involved, both the ‘helpers’ and the ‘helped’.”³⁷ Corbett and Fikkert note that, “development is not done *to* people or *for* people but *with* people.”³⁸

Taking the needed time to examine and determine the “phase” that a community is in is important to the process of empowerment. There are times when what is most required is external financial aid and assistance. When a disaster (natural or human) occurs destroying the infrastructure, economy and property of an area, then relief is desperately needed. However, if aid and assistance continue years after a particular crisis, then the well-meaning external organizations are likely causing more harm to the community than help. Likewise, too frequently, local church mission efforts misdiagnose the symptoms of poverty as resulting from a crisis and therefore implement *relief* responses and actions to situations that require *development*. We have learned over the years that this leads to disempowerment and dependency.³⁹ The remainder of this section will focus on some of the important attributes of creating a climate where development and empowerment can occur.

Sharing:

Perhaps one of the most significant ingredients required in a recipe for empowerment is that of “sharing”. Admittedly, this sounds quite simple and reminds us of something we learned in kindergarten. However, a willingness to “share” resides at the core of empowerment and development.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 100.

³⁹ A great deal of gratitude is due to the work of John Perkins, Bob Lupton, Steve Corbett, Brian Fikkert and others who have demonstrated through their ministries and books the harm that churches can cause if they are careless in their compassion.

One way “empowerment” can be viewed is as a sharing of power. This is true on a macro level and should be explored as such, but this project is focused on the role local churches led by mission directors plays. Local church mission leaders have the opportunity to promote assisting the powerless through a sharing of time, resources, relationships, money and power. Mery Kolimon defines *empowerment* as, “a process where the powerless come to discover and increase their personal power and to *share* and use their social power to challenge the prevailing unequal distribution of power and to claim their rights at all levels: personal, social-cultural, and political (*italics added*).”⁴⁰ Perhaps the role of local churches is to work alongside of the community to create the conditions where this can occur. This will mean doing all that can be done to remove any obstacles that might stand in the way of empowerment. For example, many churches work to bridge the education gap in high-poverty schools by providing tutoring, mentoring and reading “buddies” in order to increase the educational opportunities in a community.⁴¹ These educational obstacles in high-poverty schools continues the cycle of disempowerment from one generation to the next. Churches have the ability to share their time thereby increasing the availability of educational opportunities for the next generation. This is a form of empowerment.

Resources should also be shared. Lacey and Gaston Warner note that, “for John Wesley, voluntary economic sharing in Christian community was the best evidence of a

⁴⁰ Kolimon, Mery. “Empowerment: A New Generative Theme of Christian Mission in a Globalized World,” *Exchange* 40 (2011): 39.

⁴¹ See the work and research of Stanford Professor Sean Reardon highlighting the education inequality linked primarily to poverty levels. See Educational Opportunity Project (<https://edopportunity.org/>)

sanctified life.”⁴² Money is not the key, but a willingness to share financial resources is certainly important to empowerment. What is required is discernment and caution in the ways that churches “share” money. Are churches giving to simply fix the problem and as a way to avoid any relational involvement? Or are churches using their money toward efforts that promote development such as micro-lending, training and increased educational opportunities and sustainable support? A generous and wise sharing of finances can lead to empowerment.

Enabling & Equipping:

Another vital characteristic of empowerment is the role of *enabling and equipping*. Bob Lupton says, “development is about *enabling* indigenous people to help themselves (*italics added*).”⁴³ This is one step beyond addressing the obstacles that prevent sustainable development. It moves to a sharing of power by helping to usher in developmental opportunities like training and equipping. This might take the form of community organized apprenticeships, mentoring programs or structured training opportunities.

One organizational example of enabling is with the International Leadership Institute (ILI). ILI intentionally gathers indigenous Christian leaders together to be trained in their own language by people in their own nation and culture. The expressed goal of these training events is to “accelerate the spread of the gospel”,⁴⁴ but the method of accomplishing this is via the empowerment of local indigenous leaders. These training conferences bring leaders from a region together to collaborate, share and grow together. In many nations the training of

⁴² Warner, Lacey and Gaston. *From Relief to Empowerment: How Your Church can Cultivate Sustainable Mission*. Nashville: Foundry Books, 2018, 71.

⁴³ Lupton, 69.

⁴⁴ International Leadership Institute. <http://iliteam.org> (accessed August 14, 2020).

emerging Christian leaders remains difficult and dangerous. As a result, these equipping conferences prove to be very valuable to the participants.

ZOE Empowers is another organizational example regarding the powerful impact of enabling and equipping. On their website they note that 380 million children in the world are trapped in the cycle of poverty and that empowerment is their only way out.⁴⁵ They state, “Orphaned and vulnerable children living in extreme poverty are abused, sick and isolated from their community. Handouts and begging help them to survive temporarily. Our solution addresses all their challenges, across eight areas of life,⁴⁶ equipping them to overcome poverty with their own efforts—and for good.”⁴⁷ Enabling and equipping encourages the missional efforts of a local church to walk alongside of the powerless, helping them to discover their own path of empowerment.

Three (or Four)-Self Formula:

The work of empowerment is always on a trajectory toward what missiologists have termed the “three-self formula/principle”.⁴⁸ This formula focuses primarily on indigenous churches, but perhaps the principle can be applied to the work of empowerment as well. The three-self principle emphasizes the goal for each indigenous community to be self-governing,

⁴⁵ ZOE Empowers. <https://zoempowers.org/> (accessed December 9, 2020).

⁴⁶ These eight areas are food security, secure housing, health & hygiene education, income generation, child rights, community connections and spiritual strength.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ The three-self formula was coined in the 19th century by Henry Venn, Director of the Anglican Mission Society, and Rufus Anderson, who led the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. It has since been used by many Mission organizations as a guide to determine their efficacy. It is important to note that many have expressed concerns about this formula, but at its most basic form it simply encourages the indigenous community to develop and progress on their own merit.

self-supporting and self-propagating (*the Three-selves*). Missiological Anthropologist Paul Hiebert added self-theologizing as a fourth “self”.⁴⁹

The objective of this formula is essentially empowerment. It should be the hope and desire of each church that is working in “mission” with a community⁵⁰ (local or international) for it to be in a position where its residents are the primary ones making the important decisions about their community (*self-governance*). Another goal is for the community to develop to a point where it is able to sustainably exist and financially support whatever plans it feels led to conduct (*self-supporting*). The third principle envisions members of the community as the ones who eventually work to multiply their efforts within and beyond their particular community (*self-propagating*). Finally, the fourth principle, “self-theologizing” is important for churches who work to plant churches and/or faith-based Christian ministries. Paul Hiebert notes that, “theology is divine revelation understood in human contexts.”⁵¹ An acknowledgement of our varying contexts ultimately leads to the understanding that each of our own cultures, experiences and histories influence our theology. To force a specific theology upon a particular community is nothing more than theological paternalism. Growing to accept the need for a community to self-theologize may be one of the most difficult tasks of local church mission endeavors. Yet, this is vital to empowerment. It demonstrates that each and every individual and community has the God-given capacity to engage the biblical text from their own context.⁵²

⁴⁹ Hiebert, Paul. *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1985, 195-224.

⁵⁰ Community is used here in a generic sense. A “community” may be another church, a neighborhood, an organization, a village or really any group of people that one’s church engages in a missional relationship.

⁵¹ Hiebert, 198.

⁵² Contextualization will be examined in greater detail in the next section.

A wonderful example of a local church effectively encouraging “self-theology” among the churches it plants is Kasr El-Dobara Evangelical Church in Cairo, Egypt. Over the past few decades it has planted many churches throughout the Arab world, including Arab immigrant churches in Europe and Australia. One of the distinguishing aspects of their church planting efforts is that they focus on training and equipping indigenous leaders to do their own theological thinking, create their own forms of worship and to implement their own evangelistic efforts. Even though these churches are “planted” by Kasr El-Dobara they do not require the church plants to use their name, adhere to their theological tenets, or remain under their ecclesial authority/supervision.⁵³

An Oath to Empower:

Bob Lupton provides quite possibly the most effective tool for churches who desire to empower the communities (especially poor communities) they serve alongside in mission. This tool is an oath that he invites all who work with the poor to uphold in a similar way that those in the medical profession take the Hippocratic Oath. He named it “The Oath for Compassionate Service”.

*The Oath for Compassionate Service*⁵⁴

- Never do for the poor what they have (or could have) the capacity to do for themselves.
- Limit one-way giving to emergency situations.

⁵³ Yousef (excluding his last name to preserve confidentiality), ZOOM conversation with author August 23, 2020. Yousef has conducted several church planting trainings throughout the Arab world over the past ten years. The churches planted from these efforts exhibit the fruit of the “four-self” formula.

⁵⁴ Lupton, 8-9.

- Strive to empower the poor through employment, lending, and investing, using grants sparingly to reinforce achievements.
- Subordinate self-interests to the needs of those being served.
- Listen closely to those you seek to help, especially to what is not being said. Unspoken feelings may contain essential clues to effective service
- Above all, do no harm.

If churches abide by this oath as they work with the poor, it will likely create fertile soil where empowerment can occur. This oath is packed with essential principles that strive to cultivate meaningful and mutual relationships between churches and the community. Adhering to this oath also decreases the likelihood of unintended harm, dependency and disempowerment. A careful examination of the components in “The Oath for Compassionate Service” reveals one essential characteristic...humility.

Be Humble!

Humility requires an understanding of one’s identity and role. It necessitates that each entity in the relationship neither overly inflates nor deflates their significance. Churches must recognize that they are not the savior, the solution nor are they unnecessary. They certainly do have a part to play, but primarily their function is to serve the needs of the community. The author of Philippians writes, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but *in humility* regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others (Phil. 2: 3,4 *italics added*).” As churches strive for individual and community empowerment, they must follow the example of Jesus Christ who modeled humility in speech and action. Jesus was aware of his identity, yet chose to serve in ways that honored and

empowered those around him.⁵⁵ Local church mission leaders have an opportunity to model a Christ-like attitude by surrendering status in order to benefit those in the community that they are serving. This will look differently for each leader depending on the context, time and situation. However, it is important to regularly examine our actions to determine if they are motivated by self-fulfillment or by a desire to be fully subservient to the benefit of the community.

Summary:

Robert Moffitt defines Biblically based development as, “any movement of individuals or groups in the mental, physical, spiritual, and social arenas toward God’s present and future purposes for us.”⁵⁶ There is a redemptive and hope-filled trajectory in the work of empowerment. It acknowledges and clings to the active faith that God remains at work in the lives of individuals, the well-being of communities and through the Church. Note that this is indeed a slow process with gradual progression. However, if the desired goal is for those in the community and for the community itself to discover and grow into its God-given potential then slow growth is worth it. Local church mission leaders guide their congregations into the deliberate work of empowerment because they understand that it helps all to embrace God’s invitation within them. Lacey and Gaston Warner write, “Empowerment is a response to the triune God’s act of redemption in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit pulling the doer and receiver closer to God and each other by creating a collaboration that respects each party’s

⁵⁵ See John Chapter 13 as an illustration of Jesus’ awareness of his identity and status. Jesus knew he had come from God and was returning to God, yet took the role of a servant to serve the disciples by washing their feet. He does this in order to teach them and to empower them to go and do likewise.

⁵⁶ Moffitt, Robert. “The Local Church and Development,” in *The Church Response to Human Need*, Vinay Samuel and Christopher Sugden, eds. Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003, 235.

contributions and gifts in the midst of God’s unconditional grace.”⁵⁷ Empowerment proclaims that everyone has a contribution to make, a gift to share and assets that can make our world a better place one community at a time. Perhaps the most important contribution to the intentional work of empowerment is Gift/Asset Based Community Development. Due to the significance of this strategic missional approach, it requires its own dedicated section even though it is directly linked to the work of empowerment.

*GIFT/ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (ABCD).*⁵⁸

The idea that all have been given gifts and talents is present in the New Testament.⁵⁹ This idea was explored in greater detail in the “Charismata” sub-section of Chapter One.⁶⁰ If Christians maintain the belief that all have been created in the image of God (*imago Dei*), then it holds to reason that all have something of benefit to contribute to the community. Obstacles such as poverty, resource imbalance, political instability, violence and preventable disease (to name just a few) do not cancel out the gifts and assets present within individuals and communities.

“ABCD” defined:

John L. McKnight and John P. Kretzman are credited with developing an approach to development entitled “Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)” which they outline in their book *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a*

⁵⁷ Warner, 49.

⁵⁸ Throughout this section “gifts” and “assets” will be used interchangeably. The use of “gifts” highlights the God-given resources, abilities, talents etc. that God has given to every person within every community. Using the word “gifts” functions as an ongoing reminder of this truth.

⁵⁹ Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12-14, Ephesians 4

⁶⁰ See p.34.

Community's Assets.⁶¹ This book suggests that at the core of community development (empowerment) is a dedication to work toward “inside-out” solutions rather than “outside-in” solutions. This approach shifts from focusing on the needs and deficiencies of a community to the gifts that are present. It does not ignore the needs and struggles of the community, but simply chooses to focus on the strengths instead of on the weaknesses. This approach elevates the resources, abilities and assets that are already present within individuals and communities.

A Gifts Based Community Development approach refuses to dehumanize the residents of a community by assuming they have nothing of value to offer toward the development of their own community. Obviously, churches would not intend to dehumanize a community, but too frequently our actions, aid and charity communicate this indirectly. As has been previously discussed, unnecessary/unwarranted charity causes harm, dependency and disempowerment.

The Traditional Path:

Kretzman and McKnight call the “outside-in” path of development the “Traditional Path”.⁶² They note that the negative images that “outsiders” typically maintain of deeply impoverished areas (be they urban/rural or domestic/international) form a mental “map” of a community. The problem is that even though these negative images only tell a part of the story, the resulting mental “map” pretends to tell the whole story.⁶³ This partially formed mental “map” then leads to the assumption that a community has nothing to offer and must be fixed due to problems such as crime, dependency and disease. Kretzman and McKnight note

⁶¹ Kretzmann, John T. and John L. McKnight. *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*. Chicago: ACTA Publications, 1993.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 1.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 2.

that, “once accepted as the whole truth about troubled neighborhoods, this ‘needs’ map determines how problems are to be addressed, through deficiency-oriented policies and programs.”⁶⁴ If one believes that a community is nothing but “deficient”, then it is necessary to provide external aid. This naturally leads a community to believe that they have nothing to offer and must therefore rely on external help to exist, creating a cycle of dependency. Perhaps the way churches view a community is just as important as what a church does with a community.

Capacity-Focused Development Path:

A Gift Based Community Development approach focuses on the potential and possibilities that are present within a community instead of the “problems”. It is an optimistic approach characterized by encouragement, opportunity and ownership. Kretzman and McKnight have called this the “Alternative Path” or the “Capacity-Focused Development” approach.⁶⁵ This path, “leads toward the development of policies and activities based on the capacities, skills and assets”⁶⁶ already present within a community. It suggests an alternative “map” of gifts and assets compared to the needs/deficiency-based map of the “Traditional Path” to community engagement. The Capacity-Focused approach believes that everyone in the community has gifts to contribute to the process of community-building regardless of income, age, disability or status.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Kretzmann and McKnight, 4.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Imago Dei:

The Gifts Based Community Development method of empowerment holds fast to the theological understanding that God created humanity in God's image (*Imago Dei*).⁶⁷ It maintains a steadfast belief that God is at work within each person and each community. Wesleyan theology certainly adheres to the theological concept of a fallen humanity, but according to Howard Snyder it does not lead with that truth. Instead Snyder notes that for Wesley, "the first word in evangelistic witness is not bad news but good news: Not, 'You are a sinner,' but 'You bear God's image.'"⁶⁸ Wesleyan theology does not ignore the implications of sin, but it does not begin with sin. It begins with God's original creative intent, then acknowledges the problem and finally redeems through divinely given grace. This soteriological understanding perhaps provides an alternative mental "map" for the way churches should approach communities. This "map" refuses to begin with the deficiencies and problems that exist, but instead chooses to begin with an acknowledgment of the *imago Dei* that is present within all. Then, together with the community, we learn of the obstacles that are present. And then, through God's grace and the empowerment of God's Spirit, work toward community development and restoration.

The Values of the ABCD Approach:

If this approach is the most effective and honoring of those created by God, then how might local church mission leaders direct the missional engagement of their congregations

⁶⁷ "God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.'" Genesis 1:27-28a (NRSV).

⁶⁸ Snyder, Howard. "Theology and Mission in Wesleyan Perspective" Essay from Missiology Seminar ESJ School Asbury Theological Seminary, March 7, 2007, Revised Draft Wilmore, 2014.

toward a Gift/Asset Based Community Development? Perhaps the best way of encouraging this method is to simply adhere to the values suggested by the ABCD Institute.⁶⁹ These are driven by a desire to provide a community honoring mentality for all interested in gift-based community development. Churches would be wise to adopt similar values as they work with and alongside those in a given community (local or international). The ABCD Institute offers seven values. They are:

1. Start Small
2. Build Relationships for Mutual Support
3. Nurture Citizen-Led Action
4. Work for Equity & Justice
5. Believe in Possibility
6. Lead by Stepping Back
7. Include Everyone⁷⁰

These values encourage development through inside-out empowerment. It does not exclude external involvement, but does place the primary impetus for development upon the community itself. Maybe a primary objective of a local church mission leader is to function as a bridge connecting people together from the church and the community. John Perkins states that bringing people together is one of the greatest attributes of authentic churches.⁷¹ The harsh reality is that development and empowerment are unlikely to occur if we remain segregated and separate as churches and communities, as rich and poor, as white people and people of color, as citizens and immigrants, etc....

⁶⁹ Asset-Based Community Development, "Values," <https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/about/Pages/Values.aspx> (accessed Aug. 27, 2020).

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Perkins, 48.

Summary:

Churches and the missional efforts of churches are not the Savior to the struggling communities of the world.... Jesus is. At the same time however, we continue to be a *sent (apostello)* people as a part of the *missio Dei*. Over time we have discovered that we must be careful with the way we “go” into the world. We need to be cautious with the individuals and communities that we are attempting to serve. We must make every effort to work toward empowerment and development avoiding the common pitfall of overextending charity and aid. The Gift/Asset-Based Community Development approach provides a platform for achieving empowerment that honors all involved; the Church, the community and God.

Contextuality and Cultural Awareness:

All ministry and mission occur within specific contexts and cultures that differ depending on place and time. The defining factors of context and culture include (but are not limited to) language, dialect, rituals, dress, art, family systems, and many other regionally and nationally structured understandings and ways of life. It is important to recognize that the needs, wounds, histories, capabilities and strengths of one region or community may greatly differ from another. What proves effective in one location and context may fail in another. Local church mission leaders maintain a responsibility to be aware of the context and culture where their churches are serving in order to better prepare those they lead in missional engagement. This includes a recognition of the primary worldview of an area and people. It will also involve an exploration and understanding of our own worldview with the biases and preferences that accompany it.

An important aspect of a well-developed missiology is thus the need to contextualize. This includes a contextualization of ministries and programs as well as the content of the message into forms and metaphors that will be understood by the audience and culture where one is serving. This is true not only in international cross-cultural settings, but locally as well. This section will examine the significance of worldview, ethnocentrism, cultural awareness and contextualization for the local church mission leader.

Worldview and Culture defined:

To begin, it will be beneficial to consider a few definitions concerning culture and worldview.⁷² It is important to note that culture and worldview can be understood quite broadly (i.e. Western culture, African worldview, Asian culture etc.), but can additionally be divided into smaller sub-sets and subcultures (i.e. youth culture, Asian-American, deaf culture, etc.).⁷³ Also, regardless of one's family of origin or upbringing, everyone has been shaped and developed within a particular "family culture" that has contributed to their worldview and presuppositions about the world.

Linguist and biblical translator Dr. Eugene Nida provides a simple and readily accessible definition of *culture* defining it as, "all learned and shared human behavior".⁷⁴ Missiological Anthropologist Paul Hiebert defines *culture* as, "the more or less integrated systems of ideas,

⁷² It important to note that there are many functional definitions for "culture" and "worldview". This project is not concerned with establishing a consensus regarding the many definitions of culture/worldview, but instead is concerned with helping local church mission leaders grow in their comprehension regarding culture/worldview and how it impacts missional engagement.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Nida, Eugene. *Custom and Cultures: Anthropology for Christian Missions*. Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2001, 28.

feelings, and values and their associated patterns of behavior and products shared by a group of people who organize and regulate what they think, feel, and do.”⁷⁵

Anthropologist Charles Kraft provides a useful distinction between what he terms “surface-level culture” (patterned behavior) and “deep-level culture” (worldview assumptions). He defines *worldview* as, “The culturally structured set of assumptions (including values and commitments/allegiances) underlying how a people perceive and respond to reality. It is included in culture as the deepest level presuppositions upon which people base their lives.”⁷⁶

Individuals and communities are shaped and formed by the predominant worldview of their region. Our worldview consists of deeply entrenched assumptions that influence our perception and engagement with the world around us. Typically, our worldview is constructed from implicit assumptions that are generally taken for granted. These “below the surface” assumptions influence our behavior, perhaps without our even realizing it. To illustrate this Paul Hiebert highlights the widely held North American assumption that floors are “dirty”.⁷⁷ He notes that this assumption leads North Americans to only sit, sleep and eat on “platforms” such as chairs, beds and tables. Conversely, a traditional Japanese assumption is that the floor is “clean”. This informs their behavior to sit and sleep comfortably on the floor. Since the floor is “clean”, it is customary to take one’s shoes off when entering someone’s house to preserve the cleanliness of the floor. Worldview assumptions like this shape our behavior and ultimately our surrounding culture.

⁷⁵ Hiebert, 30.

⁷⁶ Kraft, Charles. “Culture, Worldview and Contextualization” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*. Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2000, 385.

⁷⁷ Hiebert, 42-43.

Our relationship with time, food, work, child rearing, play, rest, possession, and many others (if not all) of our behavior are directed by our worldviews. Discovering these basic worldview assumptions does not happen overnight. It takes time to learn of the worldview that shapes the decisions and the behavior of the community that we are seeking to “be with” in ministry, whether foreign or local. It also takes time to discover our own assumptions, preferences and biases. Hiebert writes:

Because these assumptions are taken for granted, they are generally unexamined and therefore largely implicit. But they are reinforced by the deepest of feelings, and anyone who challenges them becomes the object of vehement attack. People believe that the world really is the way they see it. Rarely are they aware of the fact that the way they see it is molded by their world view.⁷⁸

Ethnocentrism:

If we choose not to acknowledge the varying worldviews held by others and choose instead to engage situations only from our perspective, it can lead to dismissive, demeaning and even oppressive behaviors. This type of mentality and disposition is known as *ethnocentrism*. Cultural Anthropologists Roger and Felix Keesing define *ethnocentrism* as, “viewing other people’s ways of life in terms of our own cultural glasses.”⁷⁹ Churches and local church mission leaders must constantly and consciously prevent an ethnocentric proclamation of the Gospel. This type of presentation declares that “they” must become like “us” in order to follow Jesus.

Struggling to avoid an ethnocentric proclamation of the Gospel is nothing new. We observe the early church, as described in the Book of Acts, battling this very issue. In Acts 15

⁷⁸ Ibid., 45.

⁷⁹ Keesing R.M. and F.M. *New Perspectives in Cultural Anthropology*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971, 21.

we learn of a group of Judean believers teaching new Gentile converts that, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved (Acts 15:1b).” This controversial teaching leads to the discussion, debate and ultimate decision made at “The Council of Jerusalem”. The debate centered on whether or not Gentile believers needed to become culturally Jewish in order to be saved and become a part of the church. After much debate and testimonies from Peter, Paul, Barnabas and James they arrived at the conclusion that Gentile believers were free to follow and worship Jesus within their own socio-cultural framework.⁸⁰ However, as Kraft notes, “the Church has continually forgotten the lesson of Acts 15.”

He writes:

We have continually reverted to the assumption that becoming Christian means becoming like us culturally. When, after New Testament times, the church required everyone to adopt Roman culture, God raised up Luther to prove that God could accept people who spoke German and worshipped in German ways. Then Anglicanism arose to show that God could use English language and custom, and Wesleyanism arose to let the common people of England know that God accepted them in their culture.⁸¹

The Missional Imperative of Contextualization:

The tendency to resort to a cultural default mode is understandable as all are more comfortable within their own cultural systems and worldviews. Plus, taking the needed time to discover, comprehend and adjust message and ministry to forms that are culturally appropriate is hard work. However, even though *contextualization* (the name for this type of work) may be difficult, it is essential. In fact, contextualization of message and ministry is a missional imperative that each generation must undertake in order to faithfully participate in the *missio*

⁸⁰ Kraft, “Culture, Worldview and Contextualization, 384.

⁸¹ Ibid., 384.

Dei. Missiologist and church historian Lamin Sanneh writes, “In acknowledging that Christianity has fostered ‘ethnic identity’ in its spread across the world, we also recognize the critical judgment that Christians may exercise on matters of ethnic exclusiveness. The death of many Christian communities can be traced to that exclusiveness.”⁸² In other words, if present-day Christians, especially local church mission leaders, fail to realize that a contextualized message and ministry is required, then the spread of the Gospel from one culture to another will ultimately cease. “Western” churches cannot force “non-western” churches to be culturally “western” prior to becoming disciples of Jesus. Doing so would prevent an authentic spread of the gospel and could ultimately lead to *syncretism* as well.

Steps of Contextualization:⁸³

If contextualization of message and ministry is needed, then effort must be made to determine how to effectively do it. The first step is to become aware of our own cultural and worldview dispositions and perspectives. As previously noted, these are frequently implicit thus requiring internal examination of our own context. Our own context is shaped by numerous cultural, economic, political, linguistic, and family system realities. These carry with them an influence on the ways we view time, money, relationships, race, age, gender, class, family, work, play and rest among many other defining aspects.

In most cases it is difficult to determine the influence that one’s cultural perspective has on their thoughts, emotions and behaviors until compared to other cultural perspectives. Linguist Richard Lewis formed a model that helps to locate and better understand

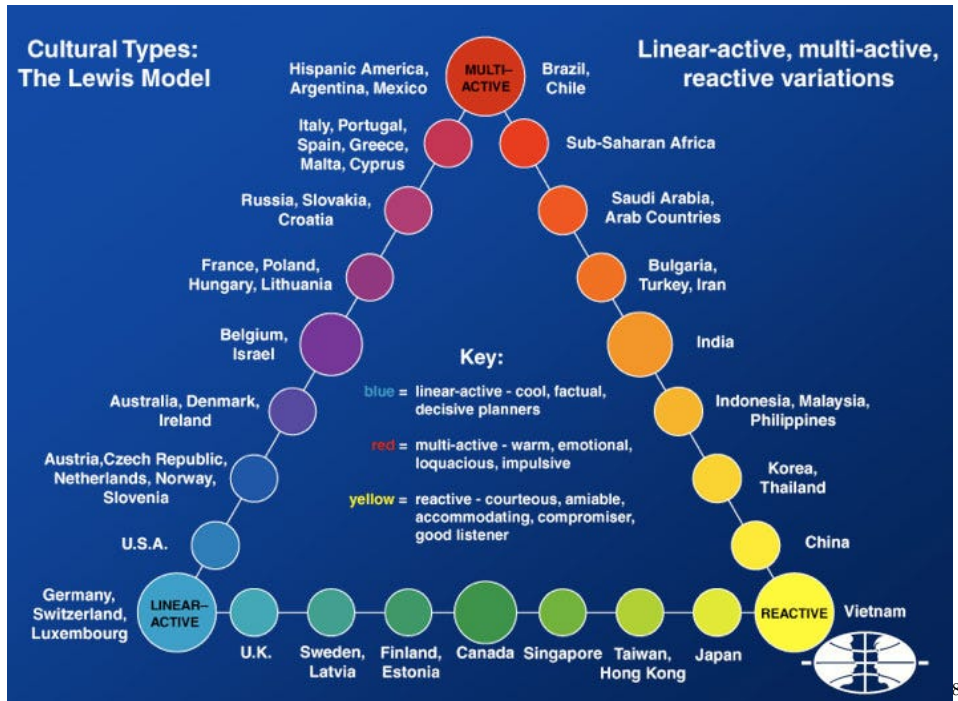
⁸² Sanneh, Lamin. *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1989, 47.

⁸³ The “steps” for contextualization do not necessarily occur in chronological order. Perhaps, the steps of contextualization would be better understood as occurring simultaneously as cross-cultural relationships emerge and exist.

predominant national cultural perspectives. “The Lewis Model” was primarily constructed to assist multi-national and multi-cultural businesses to function more effectively cross-culturally. However, the insights of “The Lewis Model” are informative for local church mission leaders who also operate in multi-cultural settings. Lewis claims that the hundreds of national and regional cultures can roughly be organized into three primary cultural groups: linear-active, multi-active and reactive.⁸⁴ The model attempts to categorize the way different cultures view tasks, time and communication. For example, let us consider the way the “Lewis Model” distinguishes different cultures with regard to communication and listening styles. Lewis notes that, “Linear people tend to communicate to give and receive information. Multi-active people tend to communicate to express opinions and build relationships, whereas reactive people tend to communicate in order to create harmony.”⁸⁵ The chart below illustrates how “The Lewis Model” places a number of national cultures within the linear-active, multi-active and reactive chart. It is important to note that this model is a tool that provides assistance in cultural awareness and is not meant to stereotype any particular national culture. Lewis has simply observed that certain characteristics seem to be more present within specific national cultures than others.

⁸⁴ Lewis, Richard D. *When Cultures Collide: Managing Successfully Across Cultures*. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2000, 36.

⁸⁵ Gates, Michael J., Richard D. Lewis, Iouri P. Bairatchnyi and Mark Brown. “Use of the Lewis Model to Analyse Multicultural Teams and Improve Performance by the World Bank: A Case Study”, *The International Journal of Knowledge, Culture & Change Management* 8:12 (2009): 55.



As we engage in cross-cultural relationships it is important to recognize that each of us comes from a specific cultural persuasion that influences our comprehension of the world around us. As a citizen of the United States my relationship with time has been greatly impacted by the capitalistic western worldview. My culture informs me that “time” is one of our most precious commodities. “Time” is therefore not something that should be “wasted” or “killed”, because “time is money” and is something that should be “saved” and “respected”. If I am leading a meeting that is running over the agreed upon time allotment, I will likely end the meeting even if we have not yet accomplished what we needed to accomplish. I would probably say, “I believe we need to come to a stopping place since we have run over and I want to respect everyone’s time”. However, as Lewis notes, this likely would not happen if this

⁸⁶<http://www.crossculture.com/services/cross-culture/> (accessed September 5, 2020)

meeting were occurring in countries like Colombia, Saudi Arabia or Italy. He writes, “They will ignore the passing of time if it means that conversations will be left unfinished. For them, completing a human transaction is the best way they can invest their time. For an Italian, time considerations will usually be subjected to human feelings.”⁸⁷ We should never underestimate the importance of recognizing our own cultural dispositions prior to engaging other cultures as it can help to avoid misinterpretation, misunderstanding and potential unintended harm.⁸⁸

Another step in the process of contextualization is to listen and learn. The importance of listening has already been explored in the Mutuality section,⁸⁹ but it also has a critical role in contextualization. If we do not take the time to listen and learn, then we will fail to recognize the beauty, distinctions and differences found in a culture different from our own. We might also cause unintended harm by using an offensive term, symbol or reference. My wife is British and I have certainly discovered that the meaning of some words in North American English differ greatly from the meaning of the same word in British English. Some of these words when spoken will cause the hearer to snicker and/or blush.

In some instances, we may end up communicating an entirely different message or meaning than we intended to communicate. An extreme example of this is described in Don

⁸⁷ Lewis, Richard D. “How Different Cultures Understand Time”, *Business Insider*, June 1, 2014, <https://www.businessinsider.com/how-different-cultures-understand-time-2014-5> (accessed Sept. 5, 2020).

⁸⁸ The Cultural Intelligence Center provides very useful resources for increasing cultural awareness and adaptability. Cultural Intelligence (CQ) focuses on four capabilities that need to be developed in order to relate and work effectively with people from different backgrounds. Cultural Intelligence begins with CQ Drive—the curiosity and motivation needed to work well with others. Next is CQ Knowledge—understanding the kinds of differences that describe one group versus the next, without resorting to stereotyping specific cultures. Third is CQ Strategy—learning how to plan effectively in light of cultural differences. And finally, is CQ Action—being able to adapt behavior when the situation requires it. The Cultural Intelligence Center offers varying levels of training to better equip and prepare individuals and institutions to effectively function cross-culturally. (<https://culturalq.com/about-cultural-intelligence/>, accessed September 25, 2020). A number of local church mission ministries have utilized the certification courses offered by The Cultural Intelligence Center to train those in their congregation participating in cross-cultural mission relationships.

⁸⁹ See p.47.

Richardson's book The Peace Child.⁹⁰ In this book Richardson tells the story of the time he and his family spent among the Sawi people of Papua New Guinea. As they lived among the Sawi as missionaries they soon discovered through their dedication to listen and learn that the Sawi culture "valued treachery as an ideal".⁹¹ Richardson recognized the deep rootedness of this value after sharing the passion narrative of Jesus with the Sawi. To his shock the "hero" of the story to the Sawi was not Jesus, but rather Judas Iscariot for the way in which he deceived and betrayed Jesus. This led Richardson to search for another way to communicate the meaning of the story. The only way that this was possible was for him to listen and learn. For Richardson it was more important to convey the greater meaning of the story than a commitment to any particular form or set way of communicating it. Richardson was deeply committed to articulating the message in terms, symbols and forms that would be culturally understood by the hearer.

Listening and learning are essential to contextualizing culturally sensitive and appropriate ministries, biblical translations and messages. In order to effectively do this, we must become students of the "cultures"⁹² that we are among as guests. Mary Clark Moschella's book Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice⁹³ is helpful here as it provides tools for ministry leaders (and local church mission leaders) to carefully learn about the communities we look to serve, including our own. According to Moschella, "Ethnography is a way of immersing yourself

⁹⁰ Richardson, Don. *The Peace Child*. Glendale: G/L Regal Books, 1974.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁹² This is beneficial for international and local cross-cultural relationships. Too frequently, we assume we understand the experiences, histories and narratives of an area simply because they are geographically near to us. Making this assumption easily leads to misunderstanding and unintended harm.

⁹³ Moschella, Mary Clark. *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2008.

in the life of a people in order to learn something about and from them.”⁹⁴ It involves observing, listening and inviting those we are among to share their stories. As we observe and hear their stories, we will begin to discover the narratives, worldviews, and significant relationships that guide their lives. These discoveries, along with the enabling of the Holy Spirit, will assist in contextualizing the gospel message and ministries in ways that will be more readily embraced by a community. In Acts 17:16-34 we witness the Apostle Paul observing and listening to the Athenian people thereby functioning as an ethnographer in many ways. We read of Paul engaging the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, studying the Athenian objects of worship and reading their poetry. From this culturally aware position Paul was better prepared to contextualize a presentation of the gospel message that would be better understood by the Athenians.

When we combine a growing awareness of our own cultural perspective with an increasing knowledge of another culture obtained by listening and learning we are better equipped for contextualization. However, there is another aspect in the process of contextualization that should be considered. It is actually more of a disposition than an additional step to be taken. It is the recognition that the process of contextualization requires critical thinking which examines all cultural practices, behaviors and traditions through a Christian worldview. Paul Hiebert suggests that the process of critical contextualization⁹⁵ involves filtering cultural practices, values, rituals, language and perceptions through a biblical lens. Hiebert emphasizes that this should be a neutral engagement with any and all

⁹⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁹⁵ Hiebert, 186-192.

cultures/cultural practices, including our own. The process of examining cultural practices through a Christian lens has existed since the days of the early Church. The Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) is once again informative as we observe the early church taking the time to consider if adhering to customary Jewish practices and rituals is required to be a part of the Church. As we have already discussed, it was determined at the Council that it was not necessary to “become Jewish” first in order to become “Christian”. The impact of this decision has thereby required a contextualization of the gospel in every culture and in each generation. Charles Kraft uses the analogy of a tree to describe the process of a critically formed biblical contextualization. He writes:

The gospel is to be planted as a seed that will sprout within and be nourished by the rain and nutrients in the cultural soil of the receiving peoples. What sprouts from true gospel seed may look quite different above ground from the way it looked in the sending society, but beneath the ground, at the worldview level, the roots are to be the same and the life comes from the same source.⁹⁶

Kraft feels so strongly about affirming a contextualized Christianity that he writes:

God intends today’s Christianity to be dynamically equivalent⁹⁷ to New Testament Christianity, perceived by people today as excitingly relevant to the problems they struggle with. Though many non-Western churches today are dominated by Western approaches to doctrine and worship, it is not scriptural that they remain so.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Kraft, “Culture, Worldview and Contextualization”. 389.

⁹⁷ Dynamic equivalence was coined by linguist Eugene Nida. He contended that a formal equivalent word for word translation of the Bible would lead to misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the biblical text. He proposed a dynamic equivalence to biblical translation emphasizing the importance of conveying meaning over form. A former classmate of mine from Papua New Guinea provided an example from his cultural context regarding Revelation 3:20. He stated that in his culture they translated “Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking” to “Listen! I am standing at the gate, coughing”. He shared that the only ones in his context who “knocked” on the doors in his community were Witch Doctors and everyone else waited at the gate and “coughed” awaiting permission to enter. If they had translated it word for word and used “knocked” instead of “coughed” they would in essence have been insinuating that Jesus was the community Witch Doctor!

⁹⁸ Kraft, 389.

Summary:

Local church mission leaders should strive to lead the members of their church into missional ministries that are culturally aware, avoiding ethnocentrism, that are culturally sensitive and that contextualize the message of the gospel. If ministries of missional engagement fail to do so, then we risk misrepresenting God through our communication and our ministry focus.

Dignity:

The final missiological principle that this project will consider is the role “dignity” plays in missional engagement for everyone involved. The work of holistic ministry, empowerment, gift-based community development, contextualization and cross-cultural awareness must all be done under the canopy of dignified relational engagement. Missional engagement must always be concerned with honoring and preserving the dignity of those residing in the ministry area, especially in high-poverty regions. At times, without realizing it, in an attempt to provide assistance, churches and organizations rob or at least damage the dignity of those they intend to assist.⁹⁹ This can harm self-esteem, self-worth and may ultimately lead to dependency among the poor.

⁹⁹ The opening illustration from chapter 3 of *Toxic Charity* provides a wonderful example of this point. Lupton describes his first Christmas living in Atlanta’s inner city. He shares how he had previously organized Christmas gift collection and delivery events from his suburban church to the children in inner city homes. Previously, he had given no considerable thought to the potential implications of these acts of charity. However, now as a neighbor this was the first year that he observed the negative impact that these efforts can have on the dignity of the parents. He notes that as the gifts were delivered by the suburban churches, he noticed the fathers quietly exiting out the back doors. Lupton began to recognize the shame that these parents were experiencing as their inability to give gifts to their children was laid bare on Christmas Eve. Instead, of feeling joy these parents were feeling ashamed.

Dignity Personified:

Before considering how to engage in dignified missional relationships it is important to examine and define human “dignity”. According to Phil Hissom,

Dignity refers to inherent value and worth. And there is no other person of greater worth than Jesus. This bodes well for the rest of us. For rather than devaluing the rest of humanity, his high value elevates our own. Humans are not only created in God’s image (Gen. 1:26), our likeness is how God chose to reveal his eternal son (Phil. 2:7).¹⁰⁰

Humanity is not only created in the image of God (*imago Dei*) but is also the form that the second person of the Trinity chose to assume in the person of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Human dignity, as defined by God, therefore declares that all have value and worth. It is not important who you are, where you are from or what you have done. God proclaims that all are valuable. Local church mission leaders should always keep this truth directly in front of those sitting in their sanctuaries. This truth should shape the attitude, conduct and relational engagement of all who serve in mission. Hissom suggests that Jesus Christ functions as the standard of human dignity by which the dignity of all is measured. He writes, “In a very real sense, Jesus *is* Dignity.”¹⁰¹ How then did Jesus use his status and high-value? The Apostle Paul provides an answer. He writes,

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death---even death on a cross. (Phil. 2:5-8)

¹⁰⁰ Hissom, Phil. *Dignity Serves: Participant’s Guide, Version 4*. Orlando: Polis Institute, 2010, 1.

¹⁰¹ Hissom, 1.

Too frequently there is a belief that, due to an attained status, certain things, places, behaviors and even some people are below us or too “undignified” to associate with. This is not a Christ-like attitude. Unfortunately, it has regularly taken root among churches.

Too Undignified?

In the mid-eighteenth century we learn that John Wesley and George Whitefield had to take “Church to the streets” because those viewed as low status (i.e. *colliers/coal-miners*) were deemed unworthy to come and worship in the sanctuaries of the Church of England. Whitefield began preaching to large numbers in Bristol, gathering several thousand, primarily colliers, to hear him preach in the “open air”.¹⁰² He sent for his old university friend John Wesley to come and help preach and organize. Howard Snyder states that initially Wesley did not know if he should accept the offer to go and join Whitefield. Wesley’s brother, Charles, was against the idea believing it to be too undignified. Howard Snyder notes that, “John submitted the decision to the Fetter Lane Society¹⁰³ which cast lots and decided he should go.”¹⁰⁴ Even though he was initially reluctant to preach outside of organized church services, he quickly saw the effectiveness of this ministry and thus began regularly preaching and organizing the many new followers of Jesus into societies and bands. Snyder writes, “The Wesleyan Revival had begun. From the beginning it was a movement largely for and among the poor, those whom ‘gentlemen’ and ‘ladies’ looked on simply as part of the machinery of the new industrial

¹⁰² Snyder, Howard. *The Radical Wesley and Patterns for Church Renewal*. Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980, 32-33.

¹⁰³ The Fetter Lane Society in London was a group established by Moravians and Anglicans attended by Charles and John Wesley and other “Holy Club” members. See “The Fetter Lane Society: 1738-1740” by Colin Podmore in *The Moravian Church in England, 1728-1760*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998, 30-71.

¹⁰⁴ Snyder, 33.

system.”¹⁰⁵ Thankfully, Whitefield and eventually the Wesley brothers recognized that all should have the opportunity to hear the good news of a God who loves them and who cares about the way they live their lives. The Wesleyan revival highlights that all deserve God’s grace regardless of a perceived “status” in life. In fact, it demonstrates that these statuses are solely human constructs and not divinely created. It also exhibits, as Jesus modeled, that none are too high or valuable or dignified to “condescend”¹⁰⁶ to any form of ministry if the Kingdom of God is expanded through it.

Dignified Missional Relationships:

How then do we encourage, emphasize and exist in dignified missional relationships? Perhaps one of the best ways to emphasize dignity is to work to better comprehend the realities and situations facing those with whom we are in ministry, especially those living in poverty. In order to honor dignity, time is required to discover the various components of poverty: material, physical, emotional, relational and spiritual. In the book *Bridges out of Poverty*¹⁰⁷ Ruby Payne, Philip DeVol and Terie Dreussi Smith work to establish an accurate mental model of poverty, middle class and wealth. They attempt to inform those working with the poor how to better engage those in poverty in order to improve relationships and outcomes in ways that honor and protect their dignity. There are two components they suggest that are of particular note concerning dignity. First, they name the existence of “hidden rules” among the classes (poverty, middle class, wealth). These “hidden rules” influence decision making

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ I am reminded of the second verse of “Come Christians, Join, to Sing” UM HYMNAL #158. “Come, lift your hearts on high: Alleluia! Amen! Let praises fill the sky: Alleluia! Amen! He is our guide and friend; to us he’ll condescend; his love shall never end: Alleluia! Amen!”

¹⁰⁷ Payne, Ruby K., Philip E. DeVol and Teri Dreussi Smith. *Bridges out of Poverty: Strategies for Professionals and Communities*. Highlands: Aha! Process, Inc., 2001.

depending on the social/economic class you belong. For example, Payne, DeVol and Dreussi note that these “hidden rules” impact the view of and relationship with money depending upon one’s particular class. They state that for those in the “poverty class” money is to be used and spent. For those in the “middle class” money is to be managed and for those in the “wealth class” money is to be conserved/invested.¹⁰⁸ As we learn about such “hidden rules” we grow in our appreciation of differing perspectives that shape decision making and behavioral patterns. This will hopefully prevent rash accusations and conclusions that devalue others, especially those primarily in the “poverty class”. The second component of interest concerning dignity suggested by Payne, DeVol and Dreussi is refusing to “place blame on the victims of poverty for being in poverty”.¹⁰⁹ When we blame or falsely believe that it is their fault for their life situation due to choices they have made, we heap shame upon them. As we do this, we rob, or at least diminish, the dignity of others.

Dignified Interdependence:

The goal of the local church mission leader in honoring the dignity of all is to achieve missional relationships characterized by “dignified interdependence”. Phil Hissom suggests that this is the ideal context for our lives.¹¹⁰ Dignified interdependence is a three-way fellowship between God, others and oneself in which all parties participate.¹¹¹ Hissom writes, “From this well-supported position we learn to deeply enjoy our dependence on God, being helped by others, and sacrificially serving those God places in our lives.”¹¹² As we nurture dignified

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.,43-45.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.,8.

¹¹⁰ Dignified interdependence is the stated goal of the Dignity Serves training curriculum.

¹¹¹ Hissom, 2.

¹¹² Ibid.

interdependence, all depend upon God, all are served by others and all serve others. Aiming for dignified interdependence functions as a type of relational compass that constantly guides our missional relationships. As all depend upon God, trust in each other and strive to be trustworthy, an all-encompassing dignity emerges which honors the *imago Dei* present in everyone. We honor God (as the perfect example of Dignity), we respect the dignity of others, and proclaim that we have something to offer as highly valuable children of God.

Missiological Principles Summary:

So far, we have examined the significance for local church mission leaders of understanding, from a theological perspective, “why” and “how” we should engage in mission. Through God’s grace we participate in the *missio Dei* as we are *sent* by God imitating Jesus with the *incarnation* as our model *empowered by the Holy Spirit*. In this chapter, we have considered “how” we might best approach missional relationships in healthy and holistic ways by considering six core missiological principles. A primary objective for local church mission leaders is to construct *holistic* mission ministries that focus on the “whole” person and the “whole” community by seamlessly proclaiming the gospel through word and action. These holistic missional ministries seek *mutuality* between the church and community that lead to *empowerment* where the *gifts/assets* of all are unlocked and encouraged to flourish. Well-prepared local church mission leaders also pursue high levels of *cultural awareness* with *contextualized* ministries and messages. Through it all they aspire to constantly respect the *dignity* of all involved, honoring the individuals, communities, church members and most importantly God in all missional efforts and relationships.

CHAPTER FOUR: EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

The concluding chapter will suggest a number of effective practices for local church mission leaders. These practices may be applied in various settings to carefully engage the congregation in missional ministry that points to God while attempting to avoid unnecessary harm. These “effective practices” have emerged from conversations, interviews and from lessons learned from my own personal experience resulting from over fifteen years of local church mission leadership. Ten interviews were conducted via ZOOM with local church mission leaders of United Methodist congregations across the United States.¹ This section will examine some of the various “nuts and bolts” of local church mission ministries by considering the following questions facing local church mission ministries:

1. How do we get started? (“Getting Started”)
2. What is our strategic approach? (“Strategic Approach”)
3. How should we structure our Leadership team? (“Leadership Structures”)
4. What missional funding model should we use? (“Funding Models”)
5. Should we provide short-term mission experiences? (“Short-term Experiences”)

Before considering these questions, it is important to remember that one of the primary responsibilities of local church mission leaders is to analyze and determine the context of the church they are serving. Time must be given to learn the congregation’s history of missional engagement. It will be important to discover who the primary stakeholders or opinion leaders are regarding missions in the congregation. Are there missional efforts that the church is proud

¹ Six of the churches were large congregations (1,000 or more in weekly worship), two were mid-sized (250-750 in weekly worship) and two were small (less than 250 in weekly worship). The original plan was to travel to some of the churches in order to conduct in-person interviews but this was not possible due to the Covid-19 global pandemic. The original plan was also to include a few more churches but unfortunately there was a lower than expected response rate to a request for interviews especially among smaller and midsized congregations. However, among the leaders interviewed I was able to discover a variety of approaches concerning the way their mission ministries are organized.

of and are there any significant roadblocks to missions? There will be a need to determine if there is an underlying belief that directs them to look out for themselves as a church before going or doing anything elsewhere. In many ways, local church mission leaders need to function as a “missiologist” to the church they are serving first by praying, observing, listening and discerning prior to leading the congregation beyond the walls of the church.

Getting Started:

Sometimes the most difficult step in leading a local church mission ministry is figuring out how to begin. The starting point for each local church mission leader will differ depending upon the situation, context and experience of a church’s missional efforts. It will not be the same from one church to the next. It will be different depending on whether the leader is staff, clergy or lay. Perhaps the church has not previously been active in intentional mission efforts. This will therefore be the first attempt to initiate missional endeavors. Or maybe the church has been actively involved in missions for thirty years. Is the church rural, suburban or urban? Is it affluent, primarily middle class, or economically poor? Is it older, younger or generationally blended? Each of these conditions and others will influence how a local church mission leader will begin their time of service. This section will offer some suggestions on how to begin that have been effective for others.

Pray & Discern:

This may seem obvious, but too often, local church mission ministries do not take time to pray seeking God’s leadership and direction. By taking the needed time to pray, we remember that the work is first and foremost God’s work. As followers of Jesus, we are the

“sent” ones who now have the privilege of participating in the *missio Dei*.² Prayer reminds us that “mission” is primarily God’s work. There is a need to pray all types of prayers. Pray *confessional* prayers asking God to forgive, restore and redeem the harm that we have caused by our direct action or by our neglect. Pray *petitionary* prayers asking God to use us in ways that bring God’s Kingdom to earth (Matthew 6:10). Pray *intercessory* prayers on behalf of others acknowledging our limitations and recognizing the many realities that are beyond our power to influence and impact. One of my Seminary professors encouraged those in his class to change nothing during their first year of ministry at a church, but to only pray.³ Prayer reminds us to be patient and to discern God’s direction. Prayer should not be underestimated or devalued by local church mission leaders. If one truly believes that God is the progenitor and sustainer of missions then prayer is essential.

Listen & Learn:

In close proximity to prayer is the need for the local church mission leader to take the needed time to listen and learn. It is important to learn the “missional history” of the congregation to discover existing/previous missional commitments, passions and relationships. What missional endeavors, past or present, give them a sense of pride? Are there any moments in the history of the church that indicate a resistance to missions? For example, one church noted that leading up to a major capital campaign effort, an attempt was made to have ten percent of all committed capital campaign funds set aside for missions. This was met with

² Rev. Dr. Carey Akin, ZOOM conversation with the author, November 23, 2020. Carey Akin the Missions Pastor at Mt. Bethel UMC in Marietta, Georgia notes that the church-wide belief that they are a “sent” people helped influence their missional direction. Carey also stated that prayer was integral in their process of choosing how best to engage missionally as a church.

³ Dr. Robert Tuttle. *Servant as Evangelist* class. Asbury Theological Seminary, Spring 2000.

significant resistance and led to a notable set-back in the church's missional efforts for the next several years. This church demonstrated a "we need to take care of ourselves first prior to extending beyond the walls of the church" mentality. It is important that the newly arrived local church mission leader learn of moments like this as they help to take the missional pulse of the congregation.

It is also important to learn about the community where the church is located. What are some of the strengths of the community? What is already present (programs, organizations, ministries, etc..) within the community?⁴ What is the community known for? What are some of their greatest struggles?⁵ What underlying values (*worldview*) influence their behavior and decisions?⁶ Listening to and learning from the community enables local church mission leaders to better understand the questions that a particular community is asking. This will then prevent local church missional efforts from providing answers to questions that the community is not even asking. For example, I once led a group that provided a Thanksgiving meal for an entire apartment complex. Many of the residents came for the meal (*who wouldn't turn down delicious free food*), but what they really wanted and needed was tutoring for their children. We did not sufficiently take the time required to listen and learn and therefore wasted effort and resources by providing an "answer" to a "question" that the community was not even asking. We assumed they were asking, "what are we going to eat for Thanksgiving?", but the "question" they were really asking was, "how can we better prepare our children when they have fallen behind educationally?".

⁴ Both St. Luke's UMC and Mt. Bethel UMC indicated that they took time to explore what was already present within the community to determine how they might best collaborate with them.

⁵ These questions were explored in the Empowerment and Gifts/Asset Based Community Development sections.

⁶ See the Contextuality & Cross-Cultural Awareness section.

Learning these realities will influence the way in which a local church mission leader leads their church into intentional mission. One tool that may prove useful is one primarily utilized for organizational change: *appreciative inquiry*.⁷ Appreciative inquiry is an approach to organizational change that focuses on imagining “what could be” instead of emphasizing “what’s not working”. Jane Watkins, Bernard Mohr and Ralph Kelly define appreciative inquiry as, “An inquiry that focuses on the generative and life-giving forces in the system that we want to increase discovered through the process of seeking to understand by asking questions.”⁸ Appreciative Inquiry can be used internally within the church and externally in the community (local/international) to determine what is working well and to discover the hopes and dreams of all stakeholders.⁹

Hopefully, after taking the necessary time to pray, discern, listen and learn, a clear vision will emerge as to what one’s local church should focus on missionally. It is important to note that each church’s missional vision will differ. God’s calling, the giftedness/passions of each congregation and the community context will be unique depending on time and place. The next portion will consider various strategic approaches that churches have adopted in order to focus their energy, relationships and resources.

⁷ Mariam Mengistie, ZOOM conversation with the author, November 19, 2020. St. Luke’s UMC in Orlando conducted a church-wide Appreciative Inquiry initiative to determine the strengths, passions and desires present within their congregation

⁸ Watkins, Jane M., Bernard J. Mohr and Ralph Kelly. *Appreciative Inquiry: Change at the Speed of Imagination*. Center for Creative Leadership: 2011, 22.

⁹ Consult appreciativeinquiry.champlain.edu/ as a platform to assist in the work of appreciative inquiry. This site is hosted by The David L. Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry at Champlain College in continuing partnership with Case Western Reserve University’s Weatherhead School of Management. David Cooperrider is the primary founder of appreciative inquiry as a philosophy of organizational change.

Strategic Approaches:

Perhaps one of the most difficult parts of being a local church mission leader is saying “no” to numerous ministries, missions and organizations that are doing wonderful work. Yet, this may be one of the most important aspects of the job if one is to ensure that the church’s missional focus is maintained. However, saying “no” is made difficult in the absence of any clear focus or strategy. This section will offer a number of ways that several local churches have decided to organize their strategic approach to missional engagement.

Acts 1:8 Strategy:

One way that a number of churches have decided to strategically organize their missional work is based on Acts 1:8.¹⁰ This verse reads, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8 NIV).” The verse has been used as a map for where the church should engage in mission. This approach equates Jerusalem with local mission, Judea with regional/national, Samaria with a focus on those of differing faith/cultural backgrounds and ‘the ends of the earth’ with international. Churches that follow Acts 1:8 as a guiding principle make sure that they are involved in local, regional/national and international missions. With regard to “Samaria” they make sure that they have missional relationships with those who differ from them in some way (racially, economically, religiously, culturally, etc..).¹¹ In this strategic approach special attention is given to the conjunction “and” that is used instead of

¹⁰ Of the conversations held by the author with various churches Matthews UMC, Murphy UMC, McEachern UMC all utilize the Acts 1:8 strategic approach as a way of organizing their missional approach.

¹¹ Jeff Jernigan, ZOOM conversation with author, November 6, 2020. Jeff is the lay mission leader for McEachern UMC in Powder Springs, Georgia. Jeff notes that McEachern defines “Samaria” as places where we are not comfortable.

“or”. They recognize that the imperative given by Jesus does not say, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem or Judea or Samaria or to the ends of the earth”, but indeed says “**and**”. For churches that use Acts 1:8 as a strategic guide, they intend to have a missional presence and connection in the modern-day equivalents of Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

Issue-Based Strategy:

Another strategic method that some churches have taken is to focus their missional efforts on specific issues. They decide to take this approach for a number of possible reasons. One reason is that they are uniquely qualified to address a specific area of concern. For example, their church may have a number of educators in the congregation which places them in the position to effectively address the education gap if one exists in their community. Another reason may be a particular calling or passion for a specific issue that they feel led to address.¹² Some churches make it their aim to combat poverty and thus all of their missional endeavors are focused on alleviating poverty.¹³ Others may focus on ministries that address homelessness, addiction or have a specific calling to plant churches in areas of the world with few to no churches. The rationale behind this approach is that, as they focus on a particular issue or issues, they acquire a skill set and beneficial experience that enables them to become increasingly effective in addressing their issue(s) of concern.

¹² Mt. Bethel UMC in Marietta, Georgia has chosen to focus on four core areas. 1. Children 2. Unreached/Persecuted 3. Trafficking/Enslaved 4. Homeless/Extreme Poverty. They partner with one organization locally and one organization internationally per core focus area for a total of eight core partners.

¹³ Rev. Vicki Walker, ZOOM conversation with author, November 30, 2020. Vicki is the Minister of Missions at Hyde Park UMC in Tampa, Florida. She noted that they focus their mission strategy and thus their missional partnerships on the goal of poverty alleviation.

Place-Based Strategy:

Another strategic approach utilized by a number of churches is one that centers on one particular area. For some churches this may be a particular nation, a people-group, a neighborhood or even a specific block. They are so dedicated to this community, whatever it may be, that all of their missional efforts are focused on this defined area.¹⁴ This type of approach requires a commitment to walk alongside those in the “community” regardless of what the struggles or celebrations may be. This is not a single-issue type of engagement, but indicates a dedication to the whole community. This approach does not simply focus on poverty, addiction, homelessness, the education gap, or any other specific issue, but instead engages all of these issues as they emerge in the life of the community. Obviously, the churches that engage in this type of strategic approach do not have a wide-spread impact, but they do observe a deeper-level transformation in the community that they journey alongside in ministry.

Relationally-Focused Strategy:

This type of approach indicates a commitment to specific missionaries or indigenous leaders no matter where they may go in mission. It may be to an individual who was raised in the life of the congregation who discerned a call into missional service. The congregation makes an intentional commitment to support this individual and/or others in their missional work regardless of where it takes them. It could also be to a specific indigenous leader with

¹⁴ St. Luke’s UMC in Orlando focuses a significant portion of their missional engagement on a particular neighborhood in Orlando. They endeavor to see this community transformed via health improvement, improved housing and food security for all the residents of this defined neighborhood. One important aspect to this approach for them is involving their partners (be they residents, organizations or other ministries) in all of the elements of their missional work. They hope to ensure that it is not only St. Luke’s work in their neighborhood but all of their work combined together with the goal of community transformation.

whom the congregation has formed a relationship over the years. They feel called to support and “send” this leader into his or her particular field of ministry. A relational focused strategy in many ways resembles the way Paul, Silas and Timothy were supported by churches as they journeyed as missionaries.

Summary:

The intent of determining a particular strategic approach is to aid the local church mission leader in making decisions that align with their church’s missional focus. If a strategic approach has not been established then it will be difficult to establish a clear missional direction for the church and it will be increasingly difficult to answer questions regarding the purpose of the church’s missional endeavors. Many churches have members who develop a passion for a particular mission or ministry. While this is a good thing, it can prove complicated if many members have differing missional passions. This may create a competition for missional dollars and/or volunteers. Hopefully, none of you will never have to attend a Missions Committee meeting where one member is attempting to elevate a specific mission by downplaying the significance and impact of another member’s specific mission. Meetings like that can get ugly, hurtful and confusing when we consider that we should all be in this together. Situations like that can be avoided with a well-formed strategic focus.

The aim of this section is not to necessarily recommend one strategic approach above another, but simply to stress the significance of having a missional strategic approach. Whether it is based on Acts 1:8, on a specific issue, a defined community, trusted relationships or an assembled hybrid of these, it is critical to construct a strategic framework to guide the church’s missional decision-making.

Leadership Structures:

There are several ways to form leadership teams that organize the missional decision making of the congregation. This section will describe a number of these. As with determining a strategic focus, choosing a missional leadership structure will depend upon the context of one's church. The intent is not to emphasize one over the other, but to simply describe several functional options.

Staff/Clergy Driven:

This leadership model depends on paid-staff to operate and direct the missional efforts of the church. They occupy positions with titles such as Missions Pastor, Outreach Director and Missions Director. They have been given the primary responsibility to ensure that the missional focus and directives of the congregation are being achieved. This type of missional leadership structure is typically found in congregations that can financially afford such a position and therefore are usually only seen in larger churches.¹⁵ At times, some clergy will have “missions” as one of the responsibilities, among other congregational duties, that they are expected to lead.¹⁶ Certainly, unpaid volunteers and laity have a critical role to play in effectively achieving the missional goals and objectives of the congregation. In this model, a majority of the

¹⁵ Susan Luttrell, ZOOM conversation with author, May 14, 2020. Susan is the Director of Mission and Serving at First Methodist Mansfield (FMM) in Mansfield, Texas. Susan notes that a majority of the mission decision making at FMM is made by staff regarding financial disbursements and strategic involvement. FMM also has a Pastor of Missions whose primary responsibility is to educate the congregation regarding the ‘why’, ‘how’ and ‘what’ of their missional involvement.

¹⁶ Rev. Wil Posey, ZOOM conversation with author, November 12, 2020. Wil is the Lead Pastor of Murphy First UMC in Murphy, NC. Wil is an example of a solo pastor who provides thoughtful missional leadership for the congregation he serves in addition to the general clergy oversight that he provides. There are no other staff who provide missional leadership yet Wil recognizes the need for there to be organized intentional efforts to extend the ministry of Murphy First UMC beyond the wall of their congregation. They are in the process of forming a lay mission committee but at present Wil is responsible for their missional efforts.

decision-making remains the responsibility of the staff member or clergy providing missional leadership.

Volunteer/Lay Driven:

Many churches are not in the financial position to support either a paid part-time or full-time missional leader and must therefore depend upon volunteer leadership. The reality is that a majority of churches must rely on willing, skilled and properly equipped lay/volunteer leadership to guide the missional efforts of their congregation.

Churches desiring to centralize their missional efforts will typically form a “Missions Committee” (Serve Team, Outreach Committee, Global Impact Team, etc..). There are a number of methods by which to construct a volunteer driven Missions Team. One approach is through an elected leadership model.¹⁷ This could follow the procedures already established for other elected leadership teams within the congregation such as Trustees, Staff Parish, Administrative Council, and Finance. United Methodist congregations are instructed to create a “Committee on nominations and leadership development” tasked with the charge to, “identify, develop, deploy, evaluate and monitor Christian spiritual leadership for the local congregation.”¹⁸ Those who are elected to the Missions Committee would follow the same procedures as those elected to other leadership teams serving within the congregation.

Another approach to creating a centralized Missions Committee is to have representatives or “champions” of the various mission ministries connected to the congregation sit on the committee. For example, the committee may be formed by a number

¹⁷ Of the churches interviewed Matthews UMC, McEachern UMC and Mt. Bethel UMC utilize elected leadership teams for their lay mission leadership teams. Those elected to these teams generally serve for three-year terms.

¹⁸ *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*. Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2016, 195.

of individuals who provide leadership for the church's varying food, education, poverty, church-planting and addiction missional ministries.¹⁹ One potential concern to this type of leadership structure is that it may create a scarcity mentality where each ministry is attempting to obtain resources (money, volunteers, space) for their particular mission in competition with all the other missions. This can be avoided with a strong committee chairperson who keeps the focus on the agreed upon missional purpose and strategy of the church.

Some churches may choose a de-centralized approach to their missional leadership structure.²⁰ This method allows individuals and small groups such as Sunday School classes, Bible studies, age-level ministries (youth, children & older adult) and men's/women's ministries (i.e. United Methodist Men & United Methodist Women) to determine their own missional activity. This *laissez faire* method allows for the passions, abilities and desires of the individuals and small groups of the congregation to operate on their own without the oversight of a centralized church missional leadership team. Initially, this approach may prove fruitful as it helps to establish a missional culture within the congregation encouraging all to pursue some form of missional engagement. However, it may eventually lead to competition between the groups in the absence of any clear missional directive, vision or strategy.

A Hybrid Approach:

This method includes both paid and volunteer missional leadership. The paid clergy/staff and volunteer mission leaders work in tandem to ensure that the missional goals,

¹⁹ Of the churches interviewed Hyde Park UMC, Davidson UMC, and St. Luke's UMC utilize this form of a centralized lay mission team. In some cases, the Mission Council Chair is an elected position but the remainder of the Mission Team is comprised of those who serve as mission representatives/champions/liaisons between the church and the partners.

²⁰ Of the churches interviewed Louisburg UMC and Murphy First UMC organize their missional leadership decision making this way.

strategy and vision of the church are maintained and developed. There are a number of ways that this occurs and will depend upon the size of the church and the number of paid staff employed to focus on missions. My current setting utilizes a hybrid approach to missional leadership. I have the privilege of working primarily with lay volunteers who are passionate about our missional engagement locally, nationally/regionally and internationally. I primarily focus on the overall missional vision and activity of our congregation, while the majority of the lay volunteers primarily focus on specific areas. This approach is quite fluid and will differ from one congregation to the next depending upon a number of variables.

Whether clergy or lay, staff or volunteer, it will be necessary for the local church mission leader to determine the most appropriate leadership structure for their church context. This will depend on the resources available, the stage of organized missional ministry that the church is currently in and the existing leadership models already in place.

Funding Models:

As with all ministry endeavors it is important for the local church mission leader to determine the most effective way of funding the mission ministry within their church setting. This section will offer a brief description of a number of potential funding approaches that have been utilized by churches to financially support missional outreach.

Faith Promise:

The Faith Promise funding model²¹ is an above and beyond method for missional support. The idea is that church members make a financial commitment toward the missional

²¹ Brown, Keith and John W. Hoover. *Faith Promise and Beyond: Unlocking the Resources of the Church to help fulfill the Great Commission*. Kearney: Morris Publishing, 1995

efforts of the church that extends above and beyond their general church contributions.²² It is a commitment made in faith by either an individual or a family toward missions. A Faith Promise financial commitment is not a pledge, but a commitment made in faith believing that God will provide the money through either a reordering of priorities, innovative ideas, or unexpected income. The money contributed via Faith Promise commitments does not typically go into a church's general fund, but rather into a separate designated account for missions. This account is usually managed by the Missions Committee with oversight from the Finance Committee of the congregation.

Faith Promise commitments are normally separate from general fund pledges in an entirely different part of the year. Many churches have an established time during the year with a worship series focusing on missions, typically called a Global Impact Celebration. During these mission centered celebrations, many of the missionaries, ministries and organizations supported by the church are present so that the congregation is able to learn more about the impact their missional giving is having as they hear about the work being conducted. These Celebrations are a wonderful way to acknowledge the work that has already been accomplished and prepare for the work that lies ahead. They attempt to provide an equal measure of celebration and challenge inviting the church to grow in its personal dedication and participation in the *missio Dei*.

²² Of the churches interviewed McEachern UMC and Matthews UMC primarily receive their missional funding via the Faith Promise model.

General Budget Percentage:

This method includes mission finances within the general budget of a church. There are many churches which designate, or at least attempt to designate, ten percent of their budget toward missional efforts.²³ Others who use this system are not able to commit that high of a percentage, but still include “missions” within their general budget.²⁴

One of the benefits of this approach is that all who give to the church do so with the understanding that all of their tithes, offerings and financial gifts are given to the work of the church in its entirety. They give with the recognition that they are contributing to the necessary internal operations of the church (facilities, rent/mortgage, salaries, programmatic costs, etc.), but also to the external outreach of the church (missions).

This method typically still requires the oversight of a Missions Committee to determine the best ways to distribute the monies designated for missions. One difference between the Faith Promise approach and a “general budget” approach is that the overall leadership²⁵ of the church decides the amount of money that be will set aside for missions. In the Faith Promise method, the amount of missional giving is determined by the overall amount of above and beyond contributions that are made.

One risk that some local church mission leaders have noted regarding the general budget approach to mission finances is that whenever a congregation endures a difficult financial season, one of the first expense line items to get reduced is missions. This risk can be

²³ Of the churches interviewed Hyde Park UMC, First Methodist Mansfield, Davidson UMC and St. Luke’s UMC primarily fund their missional efforts via ten percent of their church’s general budget.

²⁴ Of the churches interviewed Murphy First UMC financially supports missions in this capacity.

²⁵ This may be the Finance Committee, the Administrative Council, the Church Council, Pastoral leadership, Church Administrators or whatever system that a local church has created to establish the general budget.

mitigated if a church has constructed a robust missional culture that has a *missio Dei* thread woven through its DNA. Yet, even with a strong missional identity, it still may prove difficult to maintain a high level of missional giving when the financial circumstances of the church require budgetary restrictions. In these times churches will usually choose to reduce missional dollars first rather than reducing internal staff positions.

Fund-Raising and Special Offerings:

This approach is usually supplemental to other methods of missional financial support within churches. These are usually held at special times or seasons throughout the year to increase missional church monies.

Many churches have gotten creative when it comes to ideas for missional fund-raising events. Traditional ideas like spaghetti suppers, BBQ sales, pumpkin patches, Christmas tree lots and car washes continue to be utilized, while new events like chili cook-offs,²⁶ church plays, craft bazaars²⁷ and silent auctions are now also being used to raise money for local church mission efforts. The idea behind most of these fund-raising events is to combine an occasion for community and fellowship with the opportunity to raise money for missions. Many of these are replacement events as they replace an activity that individuals/families would have spent money on, but choose instead to give it for the purpose of missional support.

Special offerings are frequently taken for missions at seasonal worship services such as World Communion, Christmas Eve, Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and

²⁶ Murphy First UMC holds an annual chili cook-off along with a yard-sale.

²⁷ Louisburg UMC conducts an annual Craft Bazaar where all the funds raised go toward their missional efforts.

Easter.²⁸ Many churches choose to use these unique worship services as an opportunity to focus attention on the external outreach of the church by highlighting a specific missional partnership to increase awareness and raise support.²⁹

As mentioned above, fund-raising events and special offerings are generally not the sole source of missional giving for local churches. Most churches that already have at least a modestly formed mission ministry combine these types of events with either a Faith Promise or “general budget” method of missional financing. However, for churches that have little to no missional funding or contributions, they may prove to be a helpful tool for kick-starting an overall missional awareness within the congregation. Fund-raising events and special offerings can provide the necessary space and time to share stories, testimonies and outline the potential impact missional engagement can have on the community, be it local, national or international. Church leaders who desire to initiate a missional presence in their church may want to consider inviting a missionary, a non-profit ministry leader or anyone who has a strong passion for outreach efforts to speak at these events or special services as a way to spark interest.

Endowment:

One additional method of missional funding to consider is via an endowment.³⁰ Some churches that have endowment funds have a portion of the endowment dividends designated

²⁸ Matthews UMC designates their Holy Week and Christmas Eve service offerings to missions. In addition to those Mt. Bethel UMC also designates their Easter and Pentecost offerings for missions.

²⁹ For example, First Mansfield Methodist designates their entire Christmas Eve offering each year to support Zoe Empowers.

³⁰ “Endowments are cash accounts (derived from donations or as a part of estate giving) designated for a specific restricted use. typically used by large institutions such as universities, hospitals and other non-profits. The original ‘assets’ form the ‘corpus’ which can be added to over time. The ‘corpus’ is not usually used to contribute to the designated purpose, but instead interest

for the mission ministry of the church.³¹ Due to the nature of endowments, it may take several years to generate any substantial income from the fund.³² However, over time and depending on the size of the endowment, it may prove to be a strong funding source for the missional efforts of the church. Similar to fund-raising and special offerings, endowments typically supplement another missional funding source.³³

Summary:

Regardless of the funding model selected, missional giving is an important piece in the life of a congregation. The local church mission leader has a significant role to play in articulating the way local churches help to “send” others out in missional outreach whether they are “sent” out from the church directly or “sent” as partner missionaries, ministries or indigenous leaders. One of the ways this is accomplished is through the generous financial gifts given by the people of local churches. These gifts enable those “sent” in mission to focus primarily on their work, reducing their concern for their financial well-being. Perhaps giving toward the missional work of God in the world is a part of our discipleship journey as we recognize that not only do we directly participate as those who are “sent”, but we also enable others to “go” through our financial generosity. We observe the early church financially supporting Paul helping to “send” him to Thessalonica (Philippians 4:14-19) enabling him to

derived from the corpus is given to fund the intended purpose.” <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/tools-resources/endowments> (accessed October 29, 2020).

³¹ Twenty five percent of McEachern UMC’s mission budget comes from designated interest from an endowment.

³² In 2019 Matthews UMC began an endowment. A portion of the interest derived from the corpus will go to support the missional efforts of the church but it will likely be several years before this occurs.

³³ St. Luke’s UMC established a Mission Capital Endowment. A “tithe” from any building campaign that they conduct for capital improvements or additions to their church campus is placed into their Mission Capital Endowment. They use the interest derived from this endowment for specific mission capital expenses/projects that emerge from their mission partners.

share the gospel. Missional funding is directly linked to our discipleship journey as we actively join God's work in the world by not only "going" but also by helping to "send".

Short-term Mission Experiences:

I have discovered, when asking churches how/if they are involved in missional activity, that a common response is noting how they are involved in short-term mission experiences. They will mention a particular member of their congregation who has gone on a variety of trips to help in the construction of churches, schools and even medical centers. They will point to the week-long trips their youth have participated in, typically domestic, but sometimes international. For many congregations sending church members on short-term mission trips has been the primary form of their missional involvement. It is important to note that this approach and the overall efficacy of short-term missions has encountered a great deal of scrutiny. The aim of this project is not to persuade any local church mission leaders to either engage in or avoid short-term missions (STMs), but rather to offer a list of potential negatives, positives and a number of questions to consider if the decision is made to participate in STMs. The goal concerning STMs is to better prepare leaders to approach these experiences more effectively and in ways that do not inflict harm on the hosting ministry, mission and community.

Potential Negatives and Limitations:

A healthy consideration of a church's involvement in STMs requires an examination of some of the potential negatives and limitations associated with such endeavors. One possible negative is the amount of financial resources it takes to "send" a team from a church to the destination. The total cost for a trip obviously depends on the location and the duration of the stay. The average participant cost (food, lodging & flight) for an international STM is between

\$1,000 and \$2,500.³⁴³⁵ If the church sends a ten-person team with a cost of \$2000 per participant for flight, food and lodging, that means that \$20k is invested by either the participant, the church or other supporters before any financial investment is even made into the community. There is no escaping the high financial cost of sending international STMs. Many make the argument that this money could be more effectively invested in the host community instead of spent to send an inexperienced North American church team.³⁶ If this is true, then an over-reliance on STMs by a church as the primary missional focus is thus poor stewardship of God's resources.

Another potential detrimental impact comes when the existing and ongoing work of the onsite ministry (*church, mission, organization*) are undermined by the efforts of the STM team. This occurs when the STM does something "for" the community that they could have done for themselves. This type of effort may cause unintended harm to the community by creating an unnecessary dependency on the sending agency or on outside aid in general.

There are also inherent limitations surrounding the scope of what can feasibly be achieved by STMs. Many may feel called to go and preach the gospel to the nations sharing the good news of a God who loves and cares for all. If one believes that the best way to embody this calling is through a STM, then they would be mistaken. Robert Priest writes:

Insofar as Christian mission includes the goal of communicating the gospel to the least Christian and least evangelized peoples of the world, then it must also be recognized the STM paradigm is a poor vehicle for achieving such ends. Traveling teams of monolingual and monocultural lay Christians, using brief windows of vacation time, cannot be

³⁴ Gravelle, Giles. "Short-Term Missions & Money", Moving Missions <http://movingmissions.org/wp-content/pdfs/short-term-missions-and-money.pdf> (accessed December 8, 2020).

³⁵ Having led over fifteen STMs over my tenure the personal cost has consistently fallen in this range.

³⁶ See Joann Van Engen's article "The cost of short-term missions" in Catapult Magazine (Vol. 4, Num. 21) and "Why You Should Consider Cancelling your Short-Term Mission Trips" by Darren Carlson (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-you-should-consider-cancelling-your-short-term-mission-trips>, June 18, 2012) accessed November 13, 2020.

effective at getting the Bible translated into minority languages of the world; they are poorly prepared to present the Christian message in highly sensitive regions of the world. Churches that make STMs the sole focus of their global mission involvement are embracing a pattern of mission where the goal of communicating the gospel to the least Christian and least evangelized peoples of the world largely disappears.³⁷

If evangelism is a primary goal for an STM, it would be helpful to recognize the limitations placed on such a short-term experience.

Another potential limitation of STMs exists when the trip occurs in a location without any long-term partnership in the area or of an existing ministry. If a trip takes place in such a destination, then there is no opportunity for ongoing relationships and therefore a decreased likelihood for any meaningful transformation on the part of the host or the STM participants. When local church mission leaders choose to send teams to a different destination year after year, it in many ways amounts to nothing more than mission-based tourism.

Potential Positives:

There are a number of possible beneficial results from STMs when the sending congregation is thoughtful and intentional with the purpose and objective of the experience. There are potential benefits for both the STM participants and for the hosting ministry (mission, church, organization) and the recipient community.

It would be naïve to ignore the potential positive impact of an STM upon the participants. STM experiences have a high probability for increased spiritual growth for those who go. There is a lot of preparation that goes into making such a trip. The participant must raise the funds to go, learn about the host community and in most cases, they are required to

³⁷ Priest, Robert J. "Short-Term Missions as a New Paradigm" in *Mission after Christendom: Emergent Themes in Contemporary Mission*. Eds. Obgu Kalu, Peter Vethanayagamony and Edmund Kee-Fook Chia. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010, 99.

use some of their vacation time in order to go on the trip. All of these components, when combined with distant travel and cross-cultural realities, create an experience that is “set-apart” from most others. In many ways an STM participant can be viewed as a combination of a tourist, a pilgrim and a volunteer. Robert Priest writes

Like pilgrimages, these trips are rituals of intensification, where one temporarily leaves the ordinary, compulsory, workaday life ‘at home’ and experiences an extraordinary, voluntary, sacred experience ‘away from home’ in a liminal space where sacred goals are pursued, physical and spiritual tests are faced, normal structures are dissolved, *communitas* is experienced, and personal transformation occurs. This transformation ideally produces new selves to be reintegrated back into everyday life ‘at home,’ new selves which in turn help to spiritually rejuvenate the churches they come from, and inspire new mission vision at home.³⁸

An STM is a wonderful way to create a moment of spiritual transformation for the participant where they are no longer able to rely on the known, routine experiences and cultural comforts of their life, but instead are invited to venture outside of their norms if for only a brief amount of time. In this way a STM experience mirrors a pilgrimage. However, an STM is not a pilgrimage in the traditional sense because STMs have an expressed “mission” in their purpose. Priest continues by noting that, “Unlike other forms of pilgrimage, STM trips explicitly intend to serve and help others in distant places. That is, they aim not only for self-transformation, but for change in the places to which they go.”³⁹ This is where the leadership of the local church mission leader becomes important. They have a great opportunity to create a meaningful and potentially transformative experience for the STM participant. However, this must not occur at the expense of the host community.

³⁸ Priest, Robert, Terry Dischinger, Steve Rasmussen and C.M. Brown. “Researching the Short-Term Mission Movement” in *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XXXIV, no. 4, October 2006, 433-434.

³⁹ Ibid. 434.

There are positives for the host community as well if an STM is conducted in a healthy fashion. A vast majority of STMs travel to host communities that already have a significant Christian presence. Most of these communities already have well-established churches, ministries and “missional” outreaches to their neighbors. Frequently what they lack is financial resources, open doors and leverage for social change. These are things that visiting STMs are potentially able to provide. When writing specifically on the impact of STMs from North America and Europe on Peru Robert Priest states:

The primary reason STM groups travel from the United States to Peru (rather than vice versa) is economic, not religious. These groups are not bringing a Christian faith that currently is present in the United States or Europe but is absent in Peru. Rather, these groups travel from materially wealthy Christian communities to partner with Christian communities that are often numerically and spiritually as vigorous as their own, but which are, by comparison, materially poor.⁴⁰

If the host community invites a visiting STM group to come and partner with their larger long-term goals, then such experiences can be beneficial for both the STM group and the host. The money that is contributed by the visiting group or from a number of groups over time may greatly advance the goals and objectives of the host. Also, a visiting STM group may be able to provide specialized skills and abilities that are absent from the host community. For example, a host community could require a unique type of medical training that may be absent in their region. This leads to another potential benefit for the host, as an STM group aids by “opening doors”⁴¹ for the host church/ministry into their larger community. At times when a host church/ministry is not favorably viewed by those in the larger community, a STM group may serve to construct some relational bridges into the larger community. If a host is seen by the

⁴⁰ Priest, Robert J. “Short-Term Missions as a New Paradigm”, 96.

⁴¹ Ibid. 97-98.

larger community as the ones who brought in a group of surgeons, engineers or even I.T. specialists to benefit the community at large, then it may alter the way the host ministry is viewed. This in essence demonstrates that the host ministry/church has a degree of social connectedness and social capital than can bring desired transformation to the community.

It is necessary for local church mission leaders to consider both the potential negatives/limitations and the potential positives of short-term mission experiences prior to choosing to introduce them or to continue them as an integral part of their church's overall mission strategy. One way to accomplish this is by answering a number of questions before sending any groups from a church to a distant location, whether domestic or international. These are listed below in no particular order.

Questions to consider prior to STM experiences:

1. Who extended the invitation for the trip?

One of the things I have discovered over the years is that partner ministries will very rarely say "no" to a request from the supporting ministry, especially concerning STMs. Perhaps their reluctance stems from a concern that if they were to say no to hosting a requested STM group from a supporting church, then it might jeopardize their financial support. However, it is important for the supporting churches to understand that an STM experience may not be helpful for the host ministry and may in fact cause them to have to set aside their ongoing work in order to accommodate a STM. It is a lot of work, in addition to their already full schedules, to prepare for a STM group (lodging, food, travel, projects and even sight-seeing excursions if requested by the STM group). Of course, there are ministries that greatly benefit from the presence of STM groups where hosting them actually fits into the overall strategy of the

ministry. What is important to consider is who extends the invitation. Is it the group looking to go or is it the host? The way some churches approach this is by asking their partner ministries to let them know if an STM group would be helpful for them at any point in the coming year. This provides space for the host ministry to then extend an invitation or to choose not to extend an invitation depending on what works best for them.⁴²

2. Is the STM experience connected to an existing partnership?

The most productive STM experiences will be ones linked with an ongoing existing partnership between a supporting church and a host community (ministry, church, organization).⁴³ This provides the greatest opportunity for ongoing relationships, thereby creating the greatest chance for an environment of mutual transformation and benefit to exist. If a church seeks to go to a different “mission” destination each year, then it is less likely that meaningful transformational relationships will form. This type of approach to STMs risks becoming a form of “missional tourism” rather than a well-cultivated approach to holistic mission.

3. Does the work or projects of the STM experience contribute to the overall ministry of the host?

⁴² This step is important even for local serve opportunities. The church where I serve used to hold a local serve day event each year on a Saturday during the Autumn. This typically would involve a half-day of service projects at a number of local non-profit ministries and organizations. Leading up to the day we would phone these organizations and inform them that we wanted to send a group of about ten individuals to come and “serve” on a specific date for a specific amount of time. We would ask them what they might have for us to do. The problem was that many of the organizations were not open on Saturdays and therefore needed to come into work on their day off in order to meet our request. Also, frequently the projects created for us to do did not truly “serve” their overall work but were obviously simply created to give us something to do. We then altered our approach by asking them what would best serve them moving forward. Interestingly, we have not been asked to participate in many “serving” opportunities on Saturdays but have been invited to help in a number of ways during the week when it provides the most support for the ministry.

⁴³ All of the churches interviewed for this project only send Short-Term Mission groups to work alongside of existing partner ministries. St. Luke’s UMC has been sending groups to “visit” some of their international partner ministries since 1992. None of the churches interviewed send groups on STMs to locations where they do not have an existing partnership. Carey Akin of Mt. Bethel UMC stated that they attempt to “fit in with what their partner ministries are already doing”. He noted that near the location of one of their partners was a Medical Center that had been closed for thirty years. The partner ministry invited Mt. Bethel to restore the center with them and together they were able to accomplish this goal.

The answer to this question emerges out of the relationship with the host community. It is important that the work of the STM group contributes to the ongoing work of the host and that it is not superfluous to their overall missional strategy. It should be the aim of STM groups to contribute to the overall goals of the host ministry helping them to achieve their established objectives.

4. Is the group prepared for what they will experience?

If not, then it is important to take the needed time⁴⁴ to prepare and equip the group via some form of training sessions in advance of the trip.⁴⁵

5. What are the limitations/weaknesses/strengths of each STM experience?

This question has been discussed in greater detail in the section above, however it is an important step prior to each STM experience to take the needed time to consider. By reflecting on these before departure, it will prepare the local church mission leader to accurately define the role the group will have during its time away.

Summary:

Short-Term Mission experiences are an important part of the missional work for many churches. It will be important for the local church mission leaders of these churches to take time to consider the role and impact that STMs have on the participants and on the host community. Local church mission leaders must strive to do all that they can to reduce any potential harm that might be caused as a result of an STM experience.

⁴⁴ St. Luke's UMC requires six months of training prior to any STM experience. McEachern UMC has each participant attend training in Cultural Intelligence and requires additional preparational reading.

⁴⁵ Refer to the Appendix for some recommended training resources for Short-Term Mission experiences.

Effective Practices Summary:

Those who provide leadership for local church mission ministries must consider several practical questions as they step into their role. Some will need to determine the best way for their particular congregation to *get started* in their efforts beyond the walls of their church. All will need to establish the most effective ways to *strategically approach* and *fund* their missional objectives. They will also need to figure out the most appropriate way in their setting to organize their *leadership structure* and determine their approach to *short-term mission experiences*. This chapter has introduced various responses to these questions from interviews with current local church mission leaders and from the author's experience as a local church mission leader. The "Effective Practices" chapter has therefore provided various approaches to the "nuts and bolts" of local church mission leadership.

CONCLUSION:

This is an exciting time to provide missional leadership for local churches. Over the last several decades there have been valuable discoveries concerning the positive and negative impact that missional efforts have had on local and international communities. As a result of all that has been learned, present and future local church mission leaders have the opportunity to be even more effective. Those who provide missional leadership within local congregations grow increasingly important as local churches continue to expand their involvement in the local and global communities. It is the local church mission leader who has the greatest influence on the purpose and direction of their church's missional engagement. The local church mission leader is the primary one who roots efforts in a well-founded theology of mission addressing the "why" of mission. They are also the ones who inform the congregation "how" best to carefully engage in mission. To this end, it is critical that they are aware of certain missiological principles that assist in the caring and compassionate extension of the church out into the world. Additionally, it is the local church mission leader who guides the church's strategic approach to mission, its mission ministry leadership structure, its funding model and its approach toward short-term mission experiences. It is therefore important that they remain informed of effective practices that other churches have utilized in their mission ministries.

It is apparent that more and more churches are emphasizing intentional organized missional efforts that extend their ministry beyond the boundaries of their setting. It is therefore increasingly important to ensure that those providing missional leadership for these efforts are well-prepared. A well-prepared local church mission leader has perhaps the most

vital role to play to ensure that those “sent” out from their church as participants in the “*missio Dei*” are sufficiently equipped to do so.

APPENDIX A: EDUCATIONAL & TRAINING RESOURCES:

The following books, online courses, study guides and organizations provide valuable training and educational resources for local church mission leaders. They have been utilized by the churches interviewed for this project to equip their congregations to healthily participate in efforts such as poverty alleviation, short-term mission experiences and general mission engagement.

1. *The Chalmers Center.*

The mission of the Chalmers Center is to “equip local churches to address the broken relationships at the root of material poverty, living out Jesus' Kingdom today.”¹ The Chalmers Center offers a number of training materials such as *Helping Without Hurting in Benevolence Ministry, From Dependence to Dignity* and *Helping Without Hurting in Short-Term Missions Leader’s Guide*. They also provide a number of online training courses primarily designed for local churches.

2. *Aha! Process, INC.*

The mission of Aha! Process, INC is to “enable individuals, institutions, and communities to stabilize and grow resources for all, particularly those in poverty.”² They accomplish this through a number of books such as *Bridges out of Poverty, Emotional Poverty* and *Research-Based Strategies: Narrowing the Achievement Gap for Under-Resourced Students*. In addition to their written material they offer online webinars, in-person workshops and have trained consultants available to assist in forming strategic plans.

3. *Significant Matters.*

The mission of Significant Matters is to “help churches and other faith-based organizations explore and create sustainable solutions through church missions.”³ They accomplish this through Missions 3.0 workshops, SAT Talks, webinars and by organizing peer learning communities.

4. *The Lupton Center.*

The Lupton Center exists to “help organizations understand the hidden forces that prevent lasting change in their communities empowering them to transform

¹ The Chalmers Center. <https://chalmers.org/about/> (accessed December 28, 2020).

² Aha! Process, INC. <https://www.ahaprocess.com/about/> (accessed December 28, 2020).

³ Significant Matters. <http://significantmatters.com/about-us-2/> (accessed December 28, 2020).

their work, so their work can transform their neighborhoods.”⁴ They offer online courses, seminars workshops and provide support via a number of consultants.

5. *Polis Institute: Dignity Serves Training six-session workshop.*

The principles of the Dignity-Serves course are “derived from Scripture and built on the foundation that because every person is created in the image of God, every person possesses dignity. The course is made available through host organizations and is taught by Polis-trained facilitators.”⁵

6. *Cultural Intelligence Center.*

The Cultural Intelligence Center provides very useful resources for increasing cultural awareness and adaptability. Cultural Intelligence (CQ) focuses on four capabilities that need to be developed in order to relate and work effectively with people from different backgrounds. Cultural Intelligence begins with CQ Drive—the curiosity and motivation needed to work well with others. Next is CQ Knowledge—understanding the kinds of differences that describe one group versus the next, without resorting to stereotyping specific cultures. Third is CQ Strategy—learning how to plan effectively in light of cultural differences. And finally, is CQ Action—being able to adapt behavior when the situation requires it. The Cultural Intelligence Center offers varying levels of training to better equip and prepare individuals and institutions to effectively function cross-culturally.⁶

7. *AI Commons (Appreciative Inquiry).*

“At its heart, Appreciative Inquiry is about the search for the best in people, their organizations, and the strengths-filled, opportunity-rich world around them. AI is not so much a shift in the methods and models of organizational change, but AI is a fundamental shift in the overall perspective taken throughout the entire change process to ‘see’ the wholeness of the human system and to “inquire” into that system’s strengths, possibilities, and successes.”⁷ AI Commons provides educational materials, online resources and global networking communities to those interested in utilizing Appreciative Inquiry.

⁴ The Lupton Center. <https://www.luptoncenter.org/> (accessed December 28, 2020).

⁵ Polis Institute. <https://polisinstitute.org/2014/06/dignityserves/> (accessed December 28, 2020).

⁶ Cultural Intelligence Center. <https://culturalq.com/about-cultural-intelligence/global-cq/> (accessed December 28, 2020).

⁷ AI Commons. <https://appreciativeinquiry.champlain.edu/learn/appreciative-inquiry-introduction/> (accessed December 28, 2020).

8. *TMS Global.*

In addition to sending missionaries to various international locations TMS Global functions to equip local churches for the work of missional engagement. “TMS Global exists to come alongside individuals and churches to discover and live out their unique missional call, both locally and globally. We offer training programs, coaching, and resources to help your church engage in local, national, and international outreach.”⁸

9. *Community Action Poverty Simulation (CAPS).*

This simulation helps those interested in working with and among the poor to better comprehend the scope of poverty for those who experience it. On their website they state that, “The Community Action Poverty Simulation bridges that gap from misconception to understanding. CAPS is an interactive immersion experience. It sensitizes community participants to the realities of poverty.”⁹ The goals of the simulation experience are to promote poverty awareness, increase understanding, inspire local change and transform perspectives.¹⁰

10. Livermore, David A. *Serving with Eyes Wide Open: Doing Short-Term Missions with Cultural Intelligence, Updated Edition.* Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013.

This book works to inform short-term mission participants on cross-cultural awareness prior to any short-term experiences.

11. *A Mission Journey: A Handbook for Volunteers.* Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2013.

This book is a tool for short-term mission team leaders and members to be better prepared and equipped for their mission experience. It addresses the why and how of mission. It examines mission theology, cultural sensitivity, spirituality, and peace & justice. It was written specifically for United Methodist short-term mission experiences and as such is particularly beneficial to Wesleyan Christians engaging in mission.

12. Adeney, Miriam. “The Myth of the Blank Slate: A Check List for Short-Term Missions” in *Effective Engagement in Short-Term Missions: Doing it Right!* Robert Priest, Ed. Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2008. This essay provides practical suggestions for those preparing to participate in a short-term mission experience.

⁸ TMS Global. <https://www.tms-global.org/churches> (accessed 28, 2020).

⁹ Community Action Poverty Simulation. <http://www.povertysimulation.net/about/> (accessed December 28, 2020).

¹⁰ Ibid.

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