

Lancaster Theological Seminary

**Connectional Spirituality: Small Church Pastors  
And the Future of The Church**

Lancaster Theological Seminary

**Connectional Spirituality: Small Church Pastors  
and The Future of the Church**

A Major Project Submitted to the Faculty  
in Candidacy for the Degree of  
Doctor of Ministry

by

**Kathy Harvey Nelson**

Connectional Spirituality: Small Church Pastors and the Future of the Church  
© 2019, Kathy Harvey Nelson

**Submitted by the author in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for a DMin degree  
and approved by:**

Marty Kuchma, Project Supervisor

Anne T. Thayer, Chair, Doctor of Ministry Committee

## ABSTRACT

This project will explore the significance of the spiritual lives of small church pastors. It is my goal to examine their spiritual lives by looking at the way they influence their congregations to live as followers of Christ. In addition, it is my contention that by engaging a deep practice of spiritual discipline a pastor's call is clarified and guided by the Holy Spirit into ways that produce a type of living that I am calling "connectional spirituality."

To do this the project utilizes a review of relevant literature and past trends of thought, interviews with fifteen small church pastors serving the Susquehanna Conference of The United Methodist Church and my personal experience as a small church pastor and spiritual director of small church pastors.

This study finds that pastors who engage regularly in spiritual practices find themselves leading their congregation to act as a type of mission outpost in their community. Through the interviews, I discovered that the more engaged a pastor was with spiritual practices; the more likely they were to lead in ways that lifted up those in the community surrounding the church as the ones God calls them to serve. This seems to be one very significant way in which small churches can be revitalized and become passionate, vital communities of Christ.

Through this, I was led to explore the importance of being a missional church and the ways that this type of connectional spirituality grows from both spiritual practice and being formed in the image of Christ, leading pastors and churches to embody connectedness in their community.

*This work is dedicated to the memory of my parents,  
Gene K. and Shirley J. Smeltzer.  
Throughout my life they've given me  
roots and wings.  
I'm grateful for their continuing  
love, guidance, and presence from above.*

## Acknowledgements

There are many who have made this Doctoral project possible. First to all at Lancaster Theological Seminary who have helped to shape my thoughts and writing I owe a debt of thanks. In particular I am grateful for the guidance, support and encouragement of my Project Supervisor, Rev. Dr. Martin Kuchma for his unflagging patience and constant positive engagement during the process.

In addition, I am grateful for Dr. Anne Thayer's initial encouragement to enter the Doctoral program and for her constant encouragement and support. To my colleagues in the Doctor of Ministry cohort: Revs. Tracy Brown, Linwood Smith, and Rev. Dr. Sandra Fees, eternal thanks for your friendship, conversations, support and insights. To Dean David Mellott for insight into the importance of spiritual practices and intentionality. And to the Library and Staff of Lancaster Seminary's Phillip Schaff Library for all of the research assistance and uplifting conversation.

Special thanks to the many people in my life who listened, encouraged and were always there at just the right moment: My Covenant Group – Revs. Brenda Marin, Tiffany Manning, Dot Thormaehlen, and Jane Harrison; friends and colleagues – Ron Swift, Shelly Wilson, Mona Otto, the Revs. Audrey Shirk, Beth Holz and Kim Cartwright and the Rev Drs. Russell Hart, Joan Maruskin and Kenneth Loyer. To both of my ministry settings: Salem United Methodist Church and The Center for Spiritual Formation for support and for helping to lay the theological groundwork and giving me a space to develop my understandings that took shape over the last four years. To Sugar Bowl's Tina and Dimitri for your friendship and food that kept body and soul together when the research ran long into the evening.

And finally, to my family. Without all of you, I am nothing. To my husband, Hillary W. Nelson for all of the time given to allow space for reading and writing, and for listening and offering feedback on my thoughts; to my children, Benjamin A. and Courtney J. Harvey, for thinking “mom can do it” even when I was pretty sure it wasn’t going to happen; and to my sweet parents who began this journey with me here on earth and now celebrate with me from heaven: you never doubted this would happen, and always encouraged and believed in me.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>V</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT RATIONALE .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>HISTORICAL CHALLENGES AND CURRENT TRENDS .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>METHODOLOGY - THE INTERVIEWS .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>HISTORY, TRADITION, AND POSSIBILITIES FOR TOMORROW .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>REVIEWING THE LITERATURE .....</b>	<b>55</b>
REVITALIZATION OR TRANSFORMATION: KINDRED SPIRITS .....	58
VARIED THEOLOGIES OF SPIRITUAL VITALITY .....	62
UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF SPIRITUAL PRACTICE .....	66
THE PRACTICE OF SPIRITUAL PRACTICES .....	69
MISSIONAL CHURCH: WHAT FLOWS FROM SPIRITUAL PRACTICE .....	72
<b>TODAY'S PASTORS SPEAK .....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>VOICES FROM TODAY'S MISSIONAL CHURCH LEND SUPPORT .....</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>HOW MIGHT WE UNDERSTAND WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED? .....</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>A VISION OF AN ALTERNATIVE FUTURE FOR THE CHURCH .....</b>	<b>118</b>
<b>AREAS TO BE CONSIDERED AND EXPLORED .....</b>	<b>122</b>
<b>APPENDICES .....</b>	<b>125</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY: .....</b>	<b>135</b>

## INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT RATIONALE

When I began this research, I was seeking to discover something that I thought I already knew: if one, particularly a pastor who was striving to follow God's call, was involved in a deep, loving, growing relationship with God, they would naturally be drawn into an active desire to follow God's will of loving and caring deeply for others. Translated into the life of a clergyperson, this would look like a pastor who loved their congregation and would teach them about the call to "love others as yourself," both in word and deed, thus encouraging the congregation to care about others "outside" their church.

What I discovered is something much more embodied, dare I say "incarnational," than I had imagined. I found the living out of this type of pastoral call to be something that I began to understand as and call "connectional spirituality." I would describe what I experienced when talking to the pastors in this way: because Christians understand God to be relational in terms of the Trinity, our call – to love God and neighbor – is understood as one of connected relationship. In this way love of neighbor flows from love for God.

This is made very clear in the teachings of Christ as he lifts up the importance of loving neighbor as oneself being on a par with loving God. When asked to cite the greatest commandment, Jesus' is quoted as saying in Matthew 22:37-40, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And a second *is equally* important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments." (CEV) So, not only does Jesus say loving one's neighbor is important, he makes it as important as loving God. Thus, caring for our brothers and sisters becomes of paramount importance, which is



where the pastors interviewed believed they understood God to be leading them in their lives and ministry.

In addition, as I explored this idea of connectional spirituality I had several conversations with Rev. Dr. Martin Kuchma. Throughout our discussion he found that Jesus' ministry could even show the pattern found in connectional spirituality. As I continued to explore this idea I was led to consider that Jesus' ministry as highlighted in the Gospels (especially in Luke 4) began with a time of retreat and spiritual deepening in the wilderness from which his ministry was then one of deep connection with the community around him – not just with those gathered in the synagogues. If we then consider the several times throughout scripture that we are told he “slipped away to pray or be alone” we see a cyclical pattern of intentional spiritual renewal, connection and then a return to ministry among those who most needed the touch of God's love.

For this work, I refer to connectional spirituality as loving others as a result of our relationship with God. In other words, when passionately committed to a personal relationship with God, the practice of faith draws one into a deeper experience of love and support of, for and by one's neighbors, one's community.

We may, at the outset, wonder why this is important. I discovered that this was best stated by Christopher A. Beeley when he described the bedrock of a pastor's call:

“Church leaders can take confidence in the fact that God empowers them with the grace and holiness they need to lead and serve others. But this does not happen magically, as in a vacuum. God enables pastoral leaders to guide people through the concrete means of holy scripture. At the center of vibrant church leadership is our life in God's Word and

Spirit, which in classical terms is also called “theology.” Theology and the spiritual study of scripture lie at the heart of inspiring and effective pastoral leadership, and pastoral leadership is essentially biblical and theological. Week in and week out, the most practical things that enables church leaders to minister well is our study of scripture and our theological rootedness.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus, this study presupposes the importance of a life rooted and grounded in the reading and study of scripture, prayer, and an intentional dedication to growing a life of faith that transforms one’s focus from self-interest and individualistic interest, to one of care for the other and the community. I will dig deeper into the idea of scripture as the basis of a pastor’s guidance and transformation as a leader later in an exploration of the spiritual practices that might be engaged.

The study also presupposes that the most important and foundational relationship for all human beings is the one that connects us to God. There are many who say that there is a part of us that seeks to be in relationship with God. Augustine, one of the early Bishops of the Church is remembered as stating it this way, “Our heart is restless, until it rests in you.” And throughout my life personally and professionally I’ve found this to be true, just as I’ve heard many pastors express a deep hunger and thirst for God as they’ve come for spiritual direction. In her book *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging our Lives for Spiritual Transformation*, Ruth Haley Barton states that the desire to draw closer to God is the foundation of who we are as she writes:

---

<sup>1</sup> Christopher A. Beeley, *Leading God’s People: Wisdom from the Early Church for Today* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 77-78.

“Your desire for more of God than you have right now, your longing for love, your need for deeper levels of spiritual transformation than you have experienced so far is the truest thing about you. You might think that your woundedness or your sinfulness is the truest thing about you or that your giftedness or your personality type or your job title or your identity as husband or wife, mother or father somehow defines you. But in reality, it is your desire for God and your capacity to reach for more of God than you have right now that is the deepest essence of who you are. There is a place within each one of us that is spiritual in nature, the place where God’s Spirit witnesses with our spirit about our truest identity. Here God’s Spirit dwells with our spirit, and here our truest desires make themselves known. From this place we cry out to God for deeper union with him and with others.”<sup>2</sup>

With this ideal of loving God leading us into a deeply committed love for our neighbor, it would seem that this is one of the best and easiest vocations one could imagine; a blessing just to be called to this high and noble task. However, the realities of life in ministry – leading a group of aging volunteers in mission and ministry, acting as spiritual guide to pilgrims on all stages of a spiritual journey, finding passion and excitement while completing administrative tasks, visiting with folk who are critically ill or dying, celebrating births, making sure funds are being used appropriately and the facility is in top-notch shape, to name a few – all leave a pastor drained of energy and often with little passion for prayer and meditation. As stated by Debora Jackson, “The complexity of these and other challenges make it easy for a pastor to lose

---

<sup>2</sup> Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2006) 24.

perspective.”<sup>3</sup> Often we allow ourselves to become so busy that we are overwhelmed by tasks and duties to the exclusion of developing our own spiritual life with God. We become so busy doing things for God that we forget to take time to be with God, to build our relationship. In any relationship we have, it takes an investment of time spent together, of listening to one another, of falling in love with each other; our relationship with God needs no less of us. If we are to be intentional in seeking to develop our own spiritual lives with God, there may be value in exploring a contemplative stance, one that demonstrates the significance of leading from a spirituality that places us attentively in the moment and open to discernment of God’s will for our own lives and the lives of those whom we serve. The importance of this type of stance is stated succinctly by Jackson when she writes, [Spirituality] “is the effort of seeking connection to that source beyond ourselves for guidance, clarity, or direction in order to renew our individual purpose.”<sup>4</sup> As pastors we seek to offer God’s guidance and direction in clear and easy-to-understand ways but just as importantly, we must seek to discover our own purpose as established by God, which strengthens our call and vocation. “Through spiritual engagement, an individual can realize a renewed sense of purpose, which provides perspective about how that purpose fits in the greater context, and potential insight regarding how that purpose might be realized.”<sup>5</sup> And Jackson agrees that one of the most important things for a pastoral leader is to take the time to engage in meditation and reflection and that it is often one of the biggest challenges faced by pastors,<sup>6</sup> and though her point is directed more toward general leadership

---

<sup>3</sup> Debora Jackson, *Spiritual Practices for Effective Leadership: 7 Rs of Sanctuary for Pastors* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2015), 2.

<sup>4</sup> Jackson, *Spiritual Practices for Effective Leadership*, 4.

<sup>5</sup> Jackson, *Spiritual Practices for Effective Leadership*, 4.

<sup>6</sup> Jackson, *Spiritual Practices for Effective Leadership*, 25.

for anyone serving in a vocation, I contend that time apart to engage meditation and reflection when done prayerfully and by directly seeking to spend time in the presence of God is not only important, it is vital to the type of connectional ministry to which pastors are called and which Christ taught us. Though this may take many different forms, as many as there are pastors in ministry, an intentional relationship with God cannot be understated.

My journey began, as many do, with my own discovery of a deep spirituality that grew from a life of being raised in a small, rural church. I had grown up hearing people pray and asking for prayer as they had needs to share or joys to celebrate. Those same people quoted scriptures that had made a difference in their lives and gave them the strength to face many challenges and struggles. I heard sermons that called me to remember Jesus as my Savior and Friend, and to seek to know him better as I grew from Sunday School child, to active youth, and finally to a deeply involved and committed adult. As an adult, my church and I survived the Church Growth Movement of the 1980's and 90's. I experienced the movement first as a committed lay person and finally as a pastoral assistant of a medium-sized congregation that was seeking to grow and develop, not only numerically, but also spiritually. And, finally, I went on to serve in small, rural church ministry as a pastor for 16 years. During my early years of ministry, I discovered my need for a sense of deeper spirituality as I found myself at the edge of burnout, and so I turned to a program of spiritual direction and eventually to my own spiritual direction practice that served my ministerial colleagues. As I heard their stories and shared their journeys, I began to sense the need to explore and witness to their struggles, their discoveries, and ultimately their renewed engagement within their call to ministry. Their journeys were often reflective of what I had experienced in ministry and helping them look for

where God was active in their lives and ministry became a passionate part of my own ministry and journey. My explorations of what I was beginning to understand as the importance of deep spirituality in the pastoral life began with an assumption:

If a pastor, particularly of a small church, is overwhelmed by their ministerial duties and many other daily tasks, he/she will experience burnout unless they balance their life with some form of deep, passionate, committed practice of spirituality. I began to call the reality of this type of struggle, “small church pastor syndrome.” Although Marvin Scott uses this term to mean “people who think in small ways guided by negativity, low self-esteem, insecurity, and the like,”<sup>7</sup> I am using it to describe the tendency of small church pastors to work harder and longer to do everything in a church: serve as spiritual leader, administrative assistant, trustee, building maintenance staff, and chief fundraiser. The pressures involved are often exacerbated by a congregation that does not understand itself to be called to personal and corporate spirituality or ministry beyond the walls of the church. When a pastor is involved in this type of ministerial setting, he/she tends to become overwhelmed and eventually loses their passion for ministry and sometimes, even for God. I believe this is part of the crisis the greater church faces and that it plays out in many unhealthy ways: pastoral indiscretion, mis-appropriation of funds, temptations to engage in addictive behaviors, and others.

As I worked within and observed the life of the small church pastor, I, too, was easily swept up by the pull of small church pastor syndrome. I found myself working harder and longer hours, not only as the spiritual leader of a sometimes-dispirited group, but also tending

---

<sup>7</sup> Marvin Scott, PhD., *25 Reasons Why Small Churches Aren't Growing* (USA: Xulon Press, 2006), 207.

to all of the church's administrative tasks. As I lived this life, I began to find that I was quickly ready to sacrifice my own spiritual life on the altar of small church pastor syndrome. I found it easy to think that because I was praying with people daily, reading scripture to others or as part of sermon preparation, it was enough; I took little time to engage with God on my own because I believed that I certainly was doing the important parts of devotion as I served. But soon I discovered a deep tiredness, a weariness of being with people, despite my strong tendency to extroversion. As I talked with other pastors serving in similar appointments within the Susquehanna Conference of the United Methodist Church, as well as pastors beyond the Conference, I found that they, too, often struggled with small church pastor syndrome.

When I became a Spiritual Director, I discovered that most of my clients were pastors who were serving small churches and struggling to develop an intentional, deep relationship with Christ while balancing their daily life as a pastor. Often these pastors came to spiritual direction as a last resort, sometimes even on the recommendation of their District Superintendent. They usually knew that something was missing from their lives and suspected it had something to do with having lost a deep connection with God. But they weren't sure how that had happened or why they weren't feeling closer to the God they were serving during their every waking moment.

Because of the conversations I had with these pastors and my own personal experience, I came to believe if a pastor has a deep, passionate, committed practice of spirituality, they would be more inclined to lead their congregation to also develop a deeply passionate, committed practice of spirituality.

I had discovered on my personal journey of spiritual healing that the more I spent time connecting with God, the more I was drawn back into serving others, and those others were not only inside my church, they were the hurting and marginalized outside the walls living right in the community where our church was located. The closer I drew to God, the more God kept sending me back out to walk with and learn from others. As it would happen I was not alone in this discovery.

It has also been my experience that though laity may assist with leadership, the congregation expects the pastor to be the resident theologian and the one to give spiritual guidance and example to the church. It is impossible to lead a group on a journey that you have not been on yourself when it comes to spirituality. This was made poignantly clear by a classmate at Lancaster Theological Seminary in Lancaster, PA, on May 22, 2017. While engaged in a verbal evaluation of our Spirituality for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century class, Rev. Gary Filson shared when talking about teaching others about spiritual practices, “I often feel like a salesman for a product I don’t use.” This is especially true of the pastor who may be suffering from small church pastor syndrome and who is exhausted and unsure of finding a way forward while serving churches that are often dispirited and in the midst of rapid decline. It is only in finding one’s way back to an intentionally deep connection with God that a pastor is able to bring spiritual guidance and leadership to the congregation with a sense of excitement and personal vitality. Spiritual formation, through engagement with scripture, prayer, journaling and various other disciplines, was what reignited my spiritual passion and saved me when I was engulfed by small church pastor syndrome. Though this is not the case for everyone, this was also the case for the pastors I interviewed.



Spiritual passion is one of the foundational wells from which a leader develops vision and understanding of who they are as pastoral leaders. Passionate Spirituality then, is a deep love for and devotion to living a life of relationship with Jesus Christ. One of the ways in which this spiritual passion develops over time happens as one commits to intentional engagement with spiritual disciplines: prayer, Bible study, worship and social justice. As Bill Easum, church growth specialist and consultant attests, “Over time experience has shown that churches become spiritually healthy in response to the modeled behavior of the leader(s).”<sup>8</sup> And there is much truth in Mark Olson’s observation when writing about church growth, that “very few, if any, organizations grow past their leaders.”<sup>9</sup> In addition, the church itself is in desperate need of passionately committed spiritual leaders if it is to continue to live into its call to bring the Gospel message to the world.

In his book *Spiritual formation as if the Church Mattered*, James C. Wilhoit names the development of spirituality as the primary reason for the existence of the church:

“Spiritual formation is *the* task of the church. Period. It represents neither an interesting, optional pursuit by the church nor an insignificant category in the job description of the body of Christ. Spiritual formation is at the heart of its whole purpose for existence. The church was formed to form. Our charge, given by Jesus himself, is to make disciples, baptize them, and teach these new disciples to obey his commands (Matt. 28:19-20). The witness worship, teaching and compassion that the church is to

---

<sup>8</sup> Bill Easum, *Second Resurrection: Leading Your Congregation to New Life* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 18.

<sup>9</sup> Mark A. Olson, *Moving Beyond Church Growth: An Alternative Vision for Congregations* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 42.

practice all require that Christians be spiritually formed. Although formation describes the central work of the church, and despite a plethora of resolutions, programs, and resources, the fact remains that spiritual formation has not been the priority in the North American church that it should be.”<sup>10</sup>

Given the above information, as I began this study I believed that the small church, led by a spiritual leader who has a deep, passionate relationship with God could and would become more vital in their context and find ways of living into the call to be God’s church in the world. I also believed that this vitality would look like service to the community in which the church is located as well as some interest in mission work in various other contexts. This is what my own experience had led me to expect at this point in my process. As I began my research and finally completed interviews with fifteen small church pastors, I discovered so much more that has enriched my understanding as well as my practice as a spiritual director of small church pastors.

In his work *Beyond Survival*, Cushman develops the idea of a church as the center of the community, outlining three practical ways in which this occurs:

- a) Spiritually: the church understands its role as agents for the redemption of the community;
- b) Emotion Support Center: the church sees itself as a place that offers care and support to those outside the church;

---

<sup>10</sup> James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008), 15-16.

- c) Center of Life: the church sees itself as a place of community activity, not only a place for church programs and events.<sup>11</sup>

For me, this is an important understanding if we want to develop churches that are alive and vital in their context, not just for the purpose of increasing the numbers and improving the financial picture but more importantly, because we have something vital to share with a world in need: the message that God loves us and wants everyone to live in loving relationships that will enhance the quality and abundance of life for all. This was also what I found to be a strongly guiding experience for the pastors interviewed.

This leads me to believe:

- 1) If a church functions as a vital congregation, they will grow, not always numerically, but in the depth of their faith and faithfulness. This will shape the congregation to look more like Christ as they seek to faithfully follow his call. In the language of the United Methodist church, a vital congregation/vital church is one that sees itself as a community of Christian believers who support one another and who engage the needs of their local community. A vital church brings hope and a sense of vision and mission in the community where they are located. In saying that a church is “vital” one is inferring that they are living into the definition of a missional church, which we will explore below.
- 2) The small church is important to the growth and development of vital ministries within the wider denominations. Indeed, I believe that the small church has the

---

<sup>11</sup> James E. Cushman, *Beyond Survival: Revitalizing the Small Church*(Parsons WVa: McClain Printing Company, 1981), 74.

possibility to help reshape the way that denominations define a successful, vital congregation. Most mainline denominations have many small churches scattered throughout their system. I believe that the re-energizing of these small churches would electrify the greater denominations.

- 3) If small churches were to become passionate about serving their communities, if they were to be less focused on maintenance of buildings and having enough people in the pews to meet financial needs and obligations, their energy and resources could be used in mission and ministry. I believe that part of what drives small churches to focus on the negatives, the constant financial needs and other issues of the church is the lack of encouragement in growing deeper in their connection to God as their primary call and task.
- 4) If small churches re-prioritize their energies and focus on spiritual growth and development, God can re-orient them and they can become more alive and vital. They will still be faced with financial realities and on-going needs and issues. However, they will face them knowing that they are a missional church that is led and guided by God allowing for greater success and creativity around these needs and issues, as well as the courage to make hard decisions knowing that they have discerned the way forward through prayer.
- 5) Most importantly, they will be serving side-by-side with the people in their community and the possibility then exists that someone from within the community may have an answer to some of the needs and issues that the church itself had never considered before. When churches open themselves to the

greater possibilities that exist because of God's guidance, there is a much larger group of people able to bring creative wisdom to the conversation. This type of collaborative ministry and sharing would also dissolve the insider/outsider types of thinking that the church can sometimes fall into when focusing on their neighbors in the community.

The importance of the vitality of small churches is imperative for the greater church, especially for the United Methodist denomination and others like it. Attention was dramatically drawn to this reality at the 2004 General Conference of the United Methodist Church where the campaign slogan of: "What is 52?" exposed the answer that, "...half of the denomination's congregations had 52 or fewer people in weekly worship attendance."<sup>12</sup> In light of this statistic it is imperative that we resource and support pastors who lead these congregations. Though there are many reasons for this decline, based on my experience and the research done for this project, I have discovered that many small church pastors struggle with the afore-mentioned small church pastor syndrome. One of the greatest dangers for the pastor suffering from small church pastor syndrome can become a loss of spiritual connection. If half of our churches are being served by clergy who struggle in their own spiritual lives, the entire denomination is then spiritually weakened. Imagine the possibilities for mission and ministry if we were to uplift pastors serving these churches, encourage their spiritual growth, offer tangible support and encouragement to the congregations, accept the creative ideas they come up with and give

---

<sup>12</sup> Bill Kemp, *Holy Places, Small Spaces: A Hopeful Future for the Small Membership Church* (Nashville :Discipleship Resources, 2005), 5.

them the wings they need to fly to new heights. I believe that this could make a huge impact on the world to the extent of seeing this as a new Great Awakening.

In April of 2017, *The Parish Paper* published an article that drove home the idea of how important individual small churches are to the future of the greater church. Toward the end of this article Cynthia Woolever makes her point by reminding us of Margret Mead's statement: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." Woolever states, "A parallel truth applies to congregations. Never doubt that small churches have changed the world and they will continue to do so."<sup>13</sup> This article is part of a general mailing received by all United Methodist Church pastors in the Susquehanna Conference. Reading it reinforces for me the importance of small church vitality for the betterment of the greater church.

And finally, as United Methodists, we are called to live into our statement of mission: "Making Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World."<sup>14</sup> The communities around our churches could be transformed by the church, strengthening the communities themselves as churches become missional, increasingly locally involved with less emphasis on member needs and more focus on the needs of the community. In order to do this, we must return to the basics of our faith, which, I believe, supports a deeply connected spiritual life for the clergy person especially as applies to these small church settings. We need to be reminded that the church as we know it today has, indeed, grown from this very type of gathering, a small

---

<sup>13</sup> Cynthia Woolever, *The Parish Paper, Small is Big Again: Reclaiming Small Church Ministry*, April 2017 (Volume 25, No 4).

<sup>14</sup> "United Methodist Mission Statement Revised," umc.org, <http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/united-methodist-mission-statement-revised>, (accessed May 8, 2017)

group of deeply committed, spiritually passionate people who knew they had something of great importance to share with a hurting world.

In short, as I began this project my focus was on the spiritual life of the pastor and how he/she function within their setting with the assumption that if they are spiritually strong, their congregation will be as well and the church will thrive, regardless of their small size. What I discovered was something that felt like more than I had been looking for. I discovered a faith that was driven for both the pastor and the congregation by what I am calling connectional spirituality as defined above.

As I explored the spiritual life of pastors, I found that most of the pastors I interviewed mentioned the importance of prayer practices, of taking time to be alone with God – whether that was spending time in a retreat format and setting or just walking in the woods – and of not only turning to God regularly but even more frequently and deeply when facing challenges or struggles in their lives or ministry. We will take a closer look below at some of the most common practices engaged by these pastors. However, they very quickly moved on to the way that their spirituality was lived out in their lives. Almost as though they could not separate the two, but rather because they were so connected with God they could not stop being connected with others, and that primarily the ones they were driven to connect with were those outside of the church. This was true across the board with the pastors who were interviewed and it came to be the focal point of my research. Yes, these pastors had a deep, passionate, intentional spiritual life, but the reality of that was the intense need to live that out by serving others, which seemed to flow naturally from their spiritual practices and connectional spirituality. This helped to add another stream to my understanding, that being the idea of the

Missional Church which, I discovered, has much to offer to churches who have begun to engage their communities in this connectional style of spirituality in what appear to be very organic ways.

### HISTORICAL CHALLENGES AND CURRENT TRENDS

As I began the research process, I read many books on the development of spirituality within the church, resources that talked about the importance of clergy living lives of deep spirituality. The Bible itself encourages lives of worship and contemplation. In Psalm 63:1 the Psalmist cries out: “O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.” In one of our most beloved Psalms we are reminded of the importance of refreshment as the Psalmist writes, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul” (Psalm 23:1-2). Another scriptural example of the importance of maintaining a vital connection with God is found in Matthew 4:4. It is from his retreat to the wilderness that Jesus tells us God’s Word is more important than food when he says, “People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” (ESV)

Historically, our traditions have understood clergy to be those who have lived lives responsive to the spirit. They were seen as the first spiritual people who were expected to change their lives and the way in which they lived in the world. Philip Sheldrake has defined this understanding of clergy who lived a spiritual life as those, “...within whom the Spirit of God dwelt or lived, or lived under the influence of the Spirit of God.”<sup>15</sup> So, we find that scripture

---

<sup>15</sup> Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality, A Brief History*. (West Sussex: UK, 2013), 2.



entreats us to a passionate spiritual life, and that history has always seen clergy as those who should seek to live a more deeply committed spiritual life. As the pietist movement was experienced, there were higher and higher standards set for clergy and much greater expectation placed on spirituality and connection to God.

As a United Methodist clergyperson, I have chosen to focus some of my research on John Wesley. As the founder of Methodism, he was committed to a disciplined spiritual life and believed that clergy in the movement should be as well. In a letter to one of his lay preachers he encouraged, “O, Begin! Fix some part of every day for private exercises . . . Whether you like it or not, read and pray daily. It is for your life; there is no other way; else you will be a trifler all your days. . . . Do justice to your own soul; give it time and means to grow. Do not starve yourself any longer.”<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, Wesley developed small groups while a student at Oxford University calling them societies. These societies came to be known as Methodist because of their strict adherence to ritual and practice. According to Lee Umphrey, Wesley and his societies met “...together to review the day and plan work for the next, visiting the sick and prisoners, catechizing children, relieving the poor and suffering, strict observance of the status of the University and of the Church and weekly communion were their chief characteristics.”<sup>17</sup> All of this was based on Wesley’s deeply held belief that when one called oneself a follower of Christ, he/she then committed themselves to lives of holiness and a seeking to live out the imitation of Christ in their daily lives. He believed the best way to do this was by means “...such as prayer, reading, meditation on the Scriptures, and frequent communion, which he [Wesley]

---

<sup>16</sup> Umphrey Lee, *John Wesley and Modern Religion*. (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1936), 107-8.

<sup>17</sup> Umphrey, *John Wesley and Modern Religion*, 215.

believed to be commanded in the Scriptures as interpreted by the early Church.”<sup>18</sup> In fact, one can extrapolate, based on his observance of the fasts and feasts of the Church, that Wesley began his reform movement based on an understanding of the importance of an active, intentional engagement with the then current understandings of spiritual practices.

Thus, we recognize that spiritual passion has a long history of importance in the Methodist tradition, particularly for individuals who lead and guide the church. Wesley himself is legendary for his involvement with social justice, personally visiting the sick and those in prison. He is also often quoted as saying, “The world is my parish,” demonstrating his belief that his commitment to faith and spiritual growth always led him out into the world that was so in need. There are many stories of his commitment to the marginalized of his society. He contributed to a school in Oxford that enabled the early Methodists there to educate and care for approximately twenty children. He gave much of his own personal resources to help those who lacked the basic necessities of life, as well as to debtors in the prisons and jail. It is said that he bought flax for the children in the workhouses to use, as well as food for families who could not afford to feed themselves. In all of this he was convinced that it would be wrong for him to enjoy the luxurious comforts of life if others around him were going without the necessities of life.<sup>19</sup> In these ways, Wesley exemplifies the type of living that I discovered to be important to those who heartily engage relationships within their communities through their understanding of connectional spirituality.

---

<sup>18</sup> Umphrey, *John Wesley and Modern Religion*, 219.

<sup>19</sup> Richard P. Heitzenrater, *The Poor and the People Called Methodists, 1729-1999* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 2002), 25-26.

But I believe it goes beyond Wesley to the heart of Christianity when considering that the Gospel message is the foundation for moving us from loving God to loving others, not in word only, but in deed. Wilhoit makes some bold statements in this regard, “The gospel changes us, and our responding is an outflow of a changed heart. We also learn that God changes us as we live our lives well and reach out in love and service to God and others.”<sup>20</sup> He also makes it plain that we are “pipes to carry [God’s] grace to others and not buckets content to hoard it. Grace comes to us, to go through us, to others.”<sup>21</sup> This is, indeed, what we discover as we hear the voices of pastors who are recognized for their spiritual devotion and practice, which they report as the motivator for sending them out beyond themselves, beyond their churches, and into the surrounding community.

As I read, I also began to understand that one of the ways in which we recognize church vitality is through a residual reaction to the Church Growth Movement of the 1980’s and 90’s, making it important to spend some time researching this time period and the aftermath.

For many years, the United Methodist denomination had depended on the Church Growth Movement to reenergize its congregations. This movement began among evangelicals in the late 1930’s and reached an apparent peak of success in the late 1980s through the early 2000s. In recent years, formerly revitalized congregations have experienced rapid, and in some cases, dramatic decline. Relevant literature and my own experience suggest that such decline was rooted in dependence upon a business model of leadership coupled with a lack of deep pastoral spirituality practiced with attention and intention. There is also some evidence that the

---

<sup>20</sup> James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008), 147.

<sup>21</sup> Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 147.

upsurge in attendance was significantly impacted as soon as the charismatic and personable pastor left the congregation and was replaced by another with a different style and personality.

When dealing with renewing UM churches, one cannot ignore Bill Easum's work. In the earlier years, Easum advocated change via structures based on a corporate model; however, his more recent work has focused on the importance of avoiding spiritual bankruptcy. Thus, I found a kindred spirit when reading his book *Second Resurrection*, where he states, "Most of my earlier books addressed mainly the final stage of turnaround without addressing the issue of spiritual bankruptcy and the need for resurrection. I always knew that revitalization was not the answer, but I was not as clear on the issue of spiritual bankruptcy and resurrection as I am today."<sup>22</sup> This assertion provides a good foundation for my research as he identifies spiritual bankruptcy as a significant problem crying out for transformation and vitality. I have discovered that Easum seems to have come to what is for many in our United Methodist denomination and, I suspect, most mainline denominations, a stunning conclusion: "What if the metaphors of reformation, renewal, and revitalization don't get to the heart of the problem? What if the situation is much worse than those words describe?"<sup>23</sup> This resource gives me a foundation for seeing that there is particular value in attending to the spiritual needs of the pastors of small churches. Such churches are often served by a pastor who has little or no support, either from the congregation itself or from the wider church, leaving them to choose between doing the administrative work of a pastor – ordering the life of the congregation as

---

<sup>22</sup> Bill Easum, *Second Resurrection: Leading Your Congregation to New Life* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 1.

<sup>23</sup> Easum, *Second Resurrection*, 3-4.

well as caring for the facility - or being a pastor who is equipped as a spiritual leader by the depth of their own connection to the God we say we serve.

Through this study I have found that it is often the leader who is deeply engaged in spiritual practices and has a commitment to intentional spiritual growth and practice who brings a church to a true, deep, and we hope, lasting revitalization. Revitalization was the impetus behind implementation of the Church Growth Movement and was a term used heavily at that time as a way of talking about churches that were growing numerically and programmatically. Revitalization did not usually take spiritual growth into consideration, or it gave a slight nod to the importance by naming the value of bible study for small groups. It meant, almost exclusively, numerical growth, small group and program growth, increased engagement in worship and mission. But, as with many of the ideas growing out of this movement, it only had life when buoyed by statistical numerical growth. Any spiritual growth or mission was strictly counted on the basis of numbers of people involved in small group ministry, not as something valuable in and of itself.

As we consider current trends in church growth and development, particularly as it appears in The United Methodist churches of Susquehanna Conference, with which I am most familiar, one finds that a number of the churches that had originally bloomed during the period of the Church Growth Movement have not been able to sustain their forward momentum, especially when the original pastor is reappointed to another church. We find one direct example in the writing of Jeffrey Patton and in doing follow-up research on the church as it exists today.

Patton was appointed to two small rural churches in north-central Pennsylvania, in 1986. Under Patton's leadership, his experiment in growing the church into "an effective mission-driven, vision-oriented, faith-based, permission-giving community that knows there is more to church life than taking up room in a pew"<sup>24</sup> seemed to be a success. The church grew, leadership became strong, there were more ministries than ever before. As Patton states, "By 1993, East Canton was on a roll ... with over fourteen small groups meeting each week, involving over 130 people."<sup>25</sup> During the early 1990's the church had been renovated and new space built. When the service of dedication was held it seemed like they had underestimated the needed space with the service holding a capacity crowd of over three hundred people. But in mid-year 1997, Patton was reappointed and within five years the church found that "Worship attendance at two services [fell to] under one hundred people"<sup>26</sup> with the average worship attendance reported in Susquehanna Conference's Vital Signs at the end of 2017 being forty-one and pastoral leadership being done by a part time pastor. For some of the other turnaround churches that began during this time, the story is similar.

As I interviewed clergy for this project, I found that the ideas they have for being the church – ideas which they identified as flowing from their relationship with God – always involved the community in which the church was located. They never named their method of leading the church as anything in particular; to a person they all just described the importance of living as Jesus has called us to live: serving those around us as though they are ourselves, our

---

<sup>24</sup> Jeff Patton, *If It Could Happen Here ... Turning the Small-Membership Church Around* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 15.

<sup>25</sup> Patton, *If It Could Happen Here*, 119.

<sup>26</sup> Patton, *If It Could Happen Here*, 121.

family. This seemed like a very important piece of the project to me, in fact, it became the one understanding that drew me and changed my thinking about the current and future church. As I continued to mine this idea, I discovered that what these pastors were describing was an idea that is often referred to as a Missional Church and also seemed to be driven by a very deep connectional spirituality that shapes the understanding of how one relates to the people around the church. By understanding the church as a welcoming space for the folk of the community, whether or not they are actively involved in the church, and seeing the church itself as connected to the life of the community around it, these pastors and congregations were creating a living definition of the Missional Church. A missional church recognizes God's call to enter the world in order to be living examples of transformation as it shares the love and grace of God. As defined by Alan Roxburgh, "A missional church is a community of God's people who live into the imagination that they are, by their very nature, God's missionary people living as a demonstration of what God plans to do in and for all of creation in Jesus Christ."<sup>27</sup>

As I explored the idea of Missional Church and my idea of connectional spirituality as described above, I found that what was happening was similar to both of them; indeed, included some elements of both, and yet expanded the depth and understanding of each. For me, this was the sweet spot, the place where the greater church can learn from the small membership church and possibly find its own turn-around, based not on church growth and numbers, but instead based on spiritual growth that transforms us into people who imitate Christ by loving others as ourselves in tangible ways.

---

<sup>27</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), xv.

This way of being church took the pressure off of congregations, asking them not to fill the pew, but instead asking them to reach out in love to help others and then trust God to do the rest of the work: the changing of hearts and lives. The people in the churches being led by these spiritually connected pastors were convinced that they are the hands and feet of God in the world, but God is ultimately responsible for the transformation that occurs in the hearts of the people in their community.

As I consider the possibilities that arise when recognizing what is happening in these churches and their surrounding communities, I ask you to examine the ways in which I arrived at this conclusion by looking at the Methodology I used as the basis for this project.

#### METHODOLOGY - The Interviews

As I began the interview portion of my project, I engaged the assistance of three District Superintendents (DS) from the Susquehanna Conference in choosing pastors for interviews: Rev. Beth Jones, Williamsport DS; Rev. Dr. Kathy Kind, Altoona DS; and Rev. Dr. Charles Salisbury, York DS. I gave them the following criteria for selection:

- 1) The pastor to be interviewed must be serving a church or churches with 50 or fewer in worship. This information is available through the Susquehanna Conference statistical reporting system called Vital Signs. Vital Signs is one of the ways that the denomination has chosen to help churches understand whether they are being faithful to the United Methodist charge to “Make Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World.” Every pastor is responsible for reporting these statistics weekly. However, the



DS is the one who is intimately knowledgeable of what is happening in the churches and whether the reported numbers are truly reflective of the reality of the church.

Within the denomination, churches that worship fewer than 50 are referred to as “small churches,” with a small church also being defined as one with less than 100 members on the roles. For the purpose of my study I looked at small churches which have 50 or fewer in worship attendance because this statistic gets closer to the reality of serving a small church as it deals with the actual people who are attending and thus contributing to the daily life and ministry of the church.

- 2) The pastor must be identified by the DS as one who demonstrates a deep sense of spiritual connection. Though this is a rather subjective measure, the DS’s involved shared some of the reasons they selected the pastors for involvement in this study. They said things like, “Pastor Isaiah oozes Jesus. It is evident from how he carries himself, listens, and responds that he is first rooted in an active and disciplined spiritual life.” Or, in speaking about Pastor Gloria, her DS said, “She lives a life of prayer. She is one that we have used in the district to teach others about prayer. The impression that I have had about Pastor Gloria is that she prioritizes her spiritual life over everything else.” Pastor Debbie is newer to ministry than some of the others and her DS shared that she knew her before she became a pastor: “The first time I heard Debbie speak she was a lay person who hadn't yet responded to a call to ministry. The way that she spoke made it very clear to me that she was rooted in Christ in such a way that doesn't happen by just showing up for worship on Sundays. She clearly had a daily practice of spiritual life. Then I watched Debbie and her husband care for their pastor who was having

health issues. The way that she engaged in that and consistently prayed for her pastor made it very clear to me that she was a person of prayer.” These were the impressions, the feelings, the observed behaviors that led the DS’s to lift up these pastors as those who have an active, intentional, engaged spiritual life.

- 3) The pastors selected should also be seen as transformational leaders. On May 1, 2008, the United Methodist Church adopted the following slogan as their statement of mission: “Making Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World.”<sup>28</sup> Following adoption by the General Conference, this statement was added to the Book of Discipline. From that point on the United Methodist Church began to use “transformation” not only to mean positive change in the world, but also spiritual growth within congregations. Though transformation of the world is the goal of the mission statement, the denomination has focused on transformation of the leadership of the church first. Transformation of the pastor is key, especially in small church settings where the pastor is the primary spiritual leader as well as the administrator of all that happens within the congregation. In larger settings, the pastor is expected to lead the transformation of the other staff and leadership within the congregation who then lead the church toward transformative living. In the small church, this role rests primarily with the pastor and the DS is the one who measures the pastors’ commitment to a process of transformation.

---

<sup>28</sup> “United Methodist Mission Statement Revised,” umc.org, <http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/united-methodist-mission-statement-revised>, (accessed May 8, 2017).

I selected both the Williamsport and Altoona Districts because, as reported in our Conference Journal, they have the highest percentage of churches worshipping fewer than 50 people in a congregation. I added the York District in order to capture some suburban or urban churches as most of the small membership churches in the Williamsport and Altoona Districts are in rural areas. This created an interesting selection of candidates for my interview pool. The interviews were conducted during December of 2017 during a three-week period. Most were conducted in the pastors' homes, though two were conducted in public settings and one was completed in a church office for the convenience of the pastors involved.

The interviews were recorded, tagged with numbers to identify each interview and transcribed at a later time. Following the transcription process, I reviewed the information looking for points of similarity and difference as well as choosing the best way to tell their stories. As I did this review it became clear that there was a distinctive idea about what it means to be the church for these pastors. In preparing the information and stories, I used a system of naming the pastors alphabetically in order to protect their identity.

In broad strokes, I found some overlapping ideas among the small church pastors I interviewed that seemed to be important to all of them about the way they lead their congregations:

- All of them speak of the importance of being in their community instead of in their church office. This ranged from one who's office is located in a community center to most who spend some time every day at various locations in their community. One church felt it was of great importance to have their pastor seen in the community and decided to purchase a parsonage in the center of their town rather than have the

parsonage located nearer to the church building. One pastor who came to a rural setting from a previous appointment to a city church was excited to be able to go out into the community to spend time with the local farmers learning to connect with the land and the people who love it. Another was honored to be asked to participate in the dedication of a local bridge as a memorial to an important member of the community. All of these examples demonstrate the kind connectional spirituality that appeared throughout the interviews.

- All find their relationship with God to be deepened by their relationship with others, both inside and outside their churches. Every pastor talked about how much they learned about God as they shared with the neighbors outside the church. This, again, demonstrates that type of connectional spirituality that leads people to not only serve others but to relate to them in respectful ways that then allows learning to occur on both sides of the service. One pastor even expressed the belief that if the church were in trouble, the neighbors in the community would do whatever they could to help out.
- All have a very missional and yet inclusive and relational mindset as regards the community in which their churches are located. The pastors interviewed saw the community around the church as their mission field. They spoke briefly of sending money or sending teams of people to other areas or countries to do mission. But they spoke more often and with great passion about the mission and ministry that their churches engaged in right in their own community. They saw their community as their first priority with one pastor mentioning the portion of scripture found in Acts 1:8, "... you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of

the earth.” (ESV) This pastor felt the importance of caring for Jerusalem and growing outward from there and likened it to the community in which the church is centered and then the state and then the world. She even stated how much harder it can be to engage in mission and ministry among those who know you well, compared with the relative ease of sending money or spending a week among strangers. She said “It’s easier to hide who you are for a week, but when folk know you, well, they know all about you – the good, the bad, and the ugly.”

This understanding of the community as the first mission field is where the depth of connective spirituality is played out. Throughout my research I found a consistent attitude and understanding about what it means to be a church that chooses to follow Jesus. The pastors I interviewed all had different ways of demonstrating this but every one of those ways had one thing in common that I have named connective spirituality. As shown here, a person or church that is living out their call to be disciples of Christ often does so by developing a very deep-rooted understanding of the people in the community around the church. They seem to develop an attitude toward those in need within their community that allows them to think of the ones they serve in terms of relationship that is similar to familial relationship. They did not see their neighbors as outside the family of the church, but rather as brothers and sisters who are as deserving of care and love as their fellow church members, family and friends.

I believe this is that tangible living-out of Jesus’ call to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:39). To accept, love and care for others, for these pastors, churches and for me, is the first thing I hear in this scripture, but we can do that in ways

that are not loving and kind. We can meet needs and offer ministry while still feeling that the person receiving is “less than” or meeting their need out of a sense of feeling sorry for them. I don’t believe that either of those ways are meeting the deeper intent of Jesus’ call.

Thus, it was heartening to discover that these small church pastors were leading their congregations to not only serve those in need, but to also welcome them as partners in ministry. This was demonstrated time after time as pastors talked about people from the community who offered to help the church if it was in need and to assist the church folk in ministry to others. In this way I found these small church pastors and their congregations participating in a type of connectional spirituality that needs to be lifted up and celebrated.

It, also, brings to light one of the challenges of this type of focus. Though there was an awareness of the importance of being in ministry to all the world, it requires an intentional balance to reach out beyond the community in some vital way. For many of these small churches within the United Methodist connection, the best way to maintain a connection to Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth is to utilize the avenues available through the Conference and wider church, avenues that allow them to fully participate in mission and ministry beyond their communities, throughout the state, country and world.

- All have very deep, though not necessarily rigid prayer lives. Whenever something happens that is challenging or potentially difficult, their first thought is to “go to God in prayer.” I heard this from every pastor interviewed. Prayer was how they started their

day, even if it meant rising early; it was how they ended their day; and it was what nourished them when the days got long and hard. Those who practiced meditative forms of prayer reported that when faced with a stressful situation, they took a couple of deep, calming breaths, and whispered a breath prayer – “be with me Jesus,” “guide me Lord” – before they did anything else. These pastors seemed to treat prayer as their first line of support and their shelter in times of difficulty.

- All see God as part of their daily activity, seeking to be aware of where God showed up each day. All chose to spend some part of the end of their day in a time of reflection on what had happened and how they had functioned, looking for where God was involved in the situations they had faced. They used this information to build a bank of trust – they stated that they could trust God to show up for them when life was hard because God had shown up for them over and over again every day. They often journal their reflections and hold these writings as sacred and something that they can go back to in order to renew their strength and their trust in God’s presence.
- All are open to people outside their church becoming involved in what is often seen as the “ministry of the church.” These pastors had a great generosity of spirit. They were excited to have folk outside the church share in ministry wherever and whenever they could. Just because someone was not a church member or even a regular attender of the church did not mean that they couldn’t participate in assisting with a church project, event or activity. One example given was of a work crew that was going to be doing small repairs in several homes in the community. A few days before the event, which had been published on fliers throughout the town, there were three community

volunteers who contacted the pastor to ask if some extra hands were needed. The pastor's response was a resounding "yes" and on the day of the service, these men joined with the men from the church and they worked together, ate lunch together, shared stories and laughter together as they served their neighbors. Though these men have not become members or attenders of the church, the church has now called on them and invited them to be part of their "Helping Hands" ministry, which they have done several times. The pastor says they love these guys and pray for them, trusting that God is at work in their hearts and lives.

These were the similarities that I noted from the interviews. What follows are the stories that I felt best exemplify the practices of these pastors and their congregations.

As previously stated, I entered this process thinking that I knew what to expect. The pastors who were interviewed did give me some of the examples I expected that included service within their communities in ways reflective of a missional church. They also shared spiritual practices that were important to them and stories of times when the practices were the only things that helped them maintain their own faith. However, in listening to their stories, I found my perceptions, notions and ideas of what it means to be a missional church broadened and deepened. I was drawn into stories of local ministries that touched the core of our common humanity. As you will discover with me when we review some of these stories, there truly is much for us to learn from spiritually passionate pastors of small congregations who are guided by the Holy Spirit into service to their community and leading in ways that help their church to respond in like manner.



Through the completion of this project, I have used qualitative research that demonstrates my conviction that there are pastors who are living a passionate, vital spirituality that impacts the way that they lead their churches and live out their faith. Many denominations, and certainly The United Methodist Church, have focused almost solely on attendance numbers and financial health as the greatest indicators of vitality for a church. However, have we done so at a cost? Have we sacrificed growing to be more like Christ as we live out our call in loving, caring communities called church and serve the people in our geographical communities both in the church and beyond as though they are ourselves to our desire to develop a healthy economic picture that is painted only by those who are inside the church? This is a possibility that we need to examine as we consider the future of the church.

#### HISTORY, TRADITION, AND POSSIBILITIES FOR TOMORROW

The Christian tradition has much to say about spirituality and the important role it plays in equipping pastors for a life of set-apart ministry. Beginning with the time just after Christ, there was an insistence that those who told the stories of the faith be eye-witnesses of Christ's ministries; this set them apart as spiritual ones who not only bore witness to Christ's earthly ministry, but by the power of the Holy Spirit they, too, became ones who preached, baptized, and performed miracles on behalf of the people. In time, there were others who were accepted as Apostles and teachers, those who would continue the witness and actions of the Gospel so that others might come to believe.

One might wonder about the effect that this development had on the community's understanding of spiritual people. As eye-witnesses were no longer the ones who were

preaching and teaching, it became more important to develop some way of authenticating and validating those who were teaching and preaching the faith. In reading the New Testament canon of scripture, one immediately discovers that there were opinions and disputes early in the development of the Jesus movement that resulted in decisions made and people chosen to carry on the teaching of the faith, including much disagreement among the first disciples about how to interpret and understand the resurrection, baptism, communion, and the communal aspect of faithful living. As time passed, the question of spirituality and the appropriateness of those who would teach and preach continued to hold a prominent place in the body of the faithful.

Many of the early church fathers and mothers questioned whether anyone could lead Christ's people if they themselves were not actively pursuing a life shaped and transformed by Christ. This was often the very question about life that drove them into the desert or monastery in order that they could seek an uninterrupted journey into deep relationship with God. In fact, Christopher Beeley, in his in-depth work *Leading God's People: Wisdom from the Early Church for Today*, looks at this very idea and cites over and over again writings of the early fathers and mothers that state just this: one cannot presume to lead folk to or in the name of Christ if one does not know and follow Christ. He stresses, "Only those who are being transformed by the very precepts that they teach are even aware of the meaning of their own words."<sup>29</sup> This leads me to believe that part of the reason one sees such a deep connection to the community in the pastors who are seeking a vital connection with Christ today is because Christ calls us to

---

<sup>29</sup> Christopher A. Beeley, *Leading God's People: Wisdom from the Early Church for Today* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 32.

community and these pastors are being transformed by what they teach and preach; they not only know the meaning of their own words, but they practice them. In living a Christ-like life, seeking to love and care for the community around them, as Christ exhorted his followers, these pastors extend the grace of God in very real and tangible ways, ways that bring us back to the early church and the way in which the believers worshiped together and shared all of life in open communion with one another.

We would be remiss if we did not also recognize that community was not always or for everyone, to be found among the regular, daily, work-a-day lives of people. For some religious, like the Cistercians, community life and caring was to be found within a cloistered existence. They believed that living out Christ's call for them was one of seeking poverty, solitude and simplicity. The Cistercians sought to live out their lives in total submission to *The Rule of St. Benedict* in some very specific ways. According to Pennington, the foundation of their spiritual understanding, "...was the cultivation of charity in a life structured according to the order of St. Benedict's *Rule*. The founders set for themselves an ideal of poverty, to be "poor with the poor Christ" with a remarkable simplicity. Solitude and effective separation from the world were important to them."<sup>30</sup>

Very early in the development of the Christian faith, people's lives were impacted and changed because of the deep relationships growing from a kind of passionate caring and understanding. As explained by John Zizioulas, "Spirituality had to do with acquiring new relationships and through them a new identity, since identities, whether biological, social, or

---

<sup>30</sup> Basil Pennington, "The Early Christian Community," in *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 207-208.

“spiritual,” always emerge from relationships.”<sup>31</sup> This confirmed my growing understanding of what has been and continues to happen in many small membership churches where relationships lived out at connectional spirituality drive the mission and ministry of the congregation. If a spiritually passionate pastor leads such a group, there is a strong probability of the congregation becoming a missional church within the community where it is located and basing its mission and ministry on a deep connectional spirituality.

As Bernard McGinn asserts about the religious world of the twelfth century, “For all the new sense of nature and humanity found in the twelfth century and notwithstanding the note of “secularity” that hesitatingly broke through at times, the era remained a profoundly religious one in which the major motivating forces were inextricably bound up with spirituality.”<sup>32</sup> It was during this time that Western Christianity had its very early roots in the contributions of “Anselm of Canterbury and the circle associated with him, the Cistercian monastic reform and its great spiritual writers, and the canonical movement, especially as it gave rise to the spiritual theology of the Victorines... In recent scholarship much attention has been paid to the twelfth century as a turning point in the history of many of the practices that shaped the daily lives of believers.”<sup>33</sup> Though these aren’t the only spiritually significant things that were happening during the twelfth century, they are certainly some of the ones that made a great impact on spirituality as we came to know and understand it in the Western Christian tradition. Many scholars today are still working to more fully understand this very fertile time in the

---

<sup>31</sup> John D. Zizioulas, “The Early Christian Community,” in *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 29.

<sup>32</sup> Bernard McGinn, The Religious World of the Twelfth Century, *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 194.

<sup>33</sup> Bernard McGinn, *Christian Spirituality*, 195.

development of Western Christian spirituality as they examine multiple areas of interest: the impact of the Crusades and the literature of the day which impacted medieval piety, the many accounts of miracles, as well as the development of the idea of Purgatory, all of which has helped to shape our spiritual understandings.<sup>34</sup> In addition, “Monasticism played a decisive role in the evolution” of prayer and prayer practices during this time.<sup>35</sup> It is from this time period that we see solidification of the contemplative way of reading and meditating on scripture that is used heavily by many pastors today called *Lectio Divina*. In addition, it is during this time period that there is very informal development of what we have come to think of as spiritual direction or spiritual guidance.<sup>36</sup> Thus many of the current practices engaged by the small church pastors whom I interviewed had their development during the very earliest times of our Christian tradition.

The search for holiness and perfection of the spiritual life continued throughout the years and eventually led to the reforms of the mid-1500s to mid-1600s. This brought about a new interest in a more personal type of spirituality. No longer was the priest or spiritual leader the only one who could pray or read scripture. In the Methodist tradition in England this resulted in an upsurge of lay ministers who were educated outside of seminaries and sent out to lead congregations. Often, they were responsible for their own spiritual growth and development, which they accomplished through the reading of scripture, contemplation and journaling, as well as prayer. The writings, with an emphasis on practical application and piety,

---

<sup>34</sup> Bernard McGinn, *Christian Spirituality*, 195.

<sup>35</sup> Jean Leclercq, “Prayer and Contemplation: Western,” in *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 415.

<sup>36</sup> (Sr.) Donald Corcoran, “Spiritual Guidance,” in *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 444.

and the theological teachings of both John and Charles Wesley also had great impact on the lay preachers and teachers of the movement. During this time as many different denominations came into being groups of people were thinking through the traditions and teachings of the church in an attempt to redefine their understanding of theology and its meaning in their lives. Through their efforts new ideas of living a Christian life were explored. Under the guidance and leadership of dedicated clergy and priests the established faith also explored what it meant to be the Church in the world and how clergy would understand their role within it. This is the period of time that scholars have come to define as Christendom, a time when the Church flourished and was able to teach people what spirituality looked like and how to understand the role and place of both the clergy and the Church. It was a period during which the Church grew strong and with strength found itself being pulled deeply into the working of society as well as the power and authority that came with the church being held in high esteem, and further away from its early roots. This seems to be one pivot point where society begins to exert pressure on the church which ultimately blossoms in the church of modernity finding itself choosing leaders who were better CEO's than they were spiritual guides and shepherds.

And then came the twentieth century, one that is most often seen as "the ecumenical century," and where there are "diverse shifts taking place that are even now reconfiguring the Christian world."<sup>37</sup> As is implied in Saliers' essay, there are many forces that are currently shaping our understanding of spirituality. As we have entered a time of self-help with great emphasis being placed on people finding their own meaning and purpose in life, we have

---

<sup>37</sup> Don E. Saliers, "Christian Spirituality in an Ecumenical Age," in *Christian Spirituality: Post Reformation and Modern*, eds. Louise Dupre and Don E. Saliers (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 520.

moved further from the idea that God is the One who leads us toward the ultimate understanding of who we are, why we're here and what it is we're called to do. However, for the small church pastors who were interviewed, they found these answers in spiritual practices that are not academic, not steeped in any particular tradition of note, and are not used for any reason other than the fact that what each one has chosen as their "go to" practice brings them into a deep, vital, renewing connection with the God that they want to follow and serve.

As Bernard McGinn reminds us and as the surveyed pastors would agree, "The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments form the basis for all Christian spirituality. No aspect of the life of Christian religion can be understood apart from them."<sup>38</sup> With this knowledge of the high value placed on scripture, one finds that "... the twelfth century was a crucial watershed in the history of many of the spiritual practices that nourished Christian piety for centuries."<sup>39</sup> And the out-growth of this understanding of both community, Gospel and living was love: "The way to God has to pass through the relationship with the neighbor. Love is the only healthy basis of Christian spirituality."<sup>40</sup> Small church pastors find this to be true of the way they lead their congregations. The pastor must respect and love their congregation in ways that honor the call of Christ. When this happens, the people come to know their fellowship as one of safety and caring. The people begin to respond to their community with the same sense of Christ-like love, becoming a missional congregation. Time after time I heard stories of ways that small churches were reaching out into their communities, meeting the very real needs of those

---

<sup>38</sup> Bernard McGinn, Introduction to, *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Crossroad, 1985), xviii.

<sup>39</sup> McGinn, *Christian Spirituality*, xxi.

<sup>40</sup> Zizioulas, *Christian Spirituality*, 37.

with whom they share life. One pastor, Pastor Ellen, shared that her congregation has become so tied to their community that they no longer want to house her office in the church, but rather, it is in the town's Community Center, along with the Fire Department, a Physical Therapy Office and other community agencies. This congregation, under the spiritual leadership of Pastor Ellen has come to believe that the best way for them to live out their Christian Spirituality is by loving their neighbors in tangible ways. This is a demonstration of Christian piety in action, modeling love in daily, practical ways.

And yet, the "modern church" of the later twentieth century, often referred to as the Christendom model of church, found itself being called away from this basic connectional understanding of Christian Spirituality and instead found itself deeply immersed in the Church Growth Movement, turning pastors into CEO's who were encouraged to lead their church to grow by way of administration and ministry menus that provided options to tempt every palate and worship that focused on individual likes and entertainment value rather than on the change wrought through God's grace. According to Billy Kangas, writer for Patheos, church growth is understood to be a movement that has grown out of the evangelical church of the late 1930's and centers its understanding on a church that has been revitalized by using cultural marketing methods as a basis for the mission and ministry of the church.<sup>41</sup> As I use this term in my writing, I have expanded it to include the movement that grew from these beginnings to be accepted by mainline churches, especially the United Methodist denomination in an effort to

---

<sup>41</sup> Billy Kangas, "What is Church Growth," Patheos.org, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/billykangas/2011/10/what-is-church-growth.html>, (accessed May 11, 2017).



reenergize declining churches. This movement in the former Central Pennsylvania Conference (as of 2010, the Susquehanna Conference) of the United Methodist Church was primarily represented by Bill Easum and Paul Borden both of whom presented numerous educational events throughout the conference and mentored selected young, dynamic pastors who worked their process in order to increase attendance and programming in their churches. Though this wasn't a terrible strategy, and in some cases was wildly successful for a time, it began to fall apart, especially when the lead pastor would leave for a new position, taking his – most often – CEO ability and charismatic leadership style away, and leaving the system with a vacuum that would be filled by a new pastor with very different gifts and graces.

One dramatic example of this scenario is found in Jeff Patton's book, *If It Could Happen Here: turning the small membership church around*. Patton was appointed to East Canton United Methodist Church in North Central Pennsylvania's Central PA Conference of The United Methodist Church in the late 1980's when the church had 227 names on the roll and 55 in average worship attendance each week. This church was seen as a declining church. During this period of the Church Growth Movement, a few of these types of churches were targeted and appointed pastors who had trained with Bill Easum to be "turnaround pastors." During this time there were a number of pastors who worked with the Easum/Bandy company to be trained as turnaround pastoral leaders, following a CEO model for ministry. These pastors were equipped to go into a small church and "turn it around" so it would grow numerically and in ways that were seen as markers of a successful church. Thus, Jeff came to the East Canton United Methodist Church and by 1993, they were on a roll. According to him, "We knew why we were here. We were going to reach our mission, *that all might know Jesus*. We were committed to

going forward. We were in the process of renovation and building. The responsibilities of ministry were in the hands of gifted laypeople. Our worship was upbeat, warm, expectant, filled with a sense of God with us. More people were in worship than ever before. It was fun to be there. Over fourteen small groups were meeting each week, involving over 130 people.”<sup>42</sup> This was the goal of the Church Growth Movement – to increase worship attendance and have everyone involved in small groups and thus ministries that would benefit others. At the time, this was considered the pinnacle of success for a church. Over time understandings of measures of success would change, though the focus on large membership churches remains strong.

At the height of success, East Canton celebrated the dedication of its new sanctuary where in Patton’s words, “you guessed it – we did not build large enough. We were packed with over three hundred in worship that Sunday afternoon.”<sup>43</sup> Then on July 1, 1997, Patton was reappointed and in a succession of events, as has happened with many “turnaround churches,” East Canton’s story began to change, people left, leaders came and went, and in 2017 East Canton was being served by a part time pastor with an average worship attendance of 37.

Though this may sound like a bleak, “end of hope” story, I believe the exact opposite could be true. Based on my own experiences and the voices of other small church pastors, I am convinced that East Canton could be at its best to become a beacon of Christ-likeness and Gospel ministry in their setting. Many churches, as attested to by the Missional Church Movement, are focused on ministry within their community and being a life-changing presence

---

<sup>42</sup> Jeff Patton, *If It Could Happen Here: turning the small membership church around* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002) 119.

<sup>43</sup> Patton, *If It Could Happen Here*, 119.

where they are located. I believe this is the place of greatest hope for small churches like East Canton.

If East Canton can work through the challenges that arise when a sudden decline is experienced and if they can catch a vision of being the church for the community in which they are located, they are poised to experience some very powerful and life-changing ministry.

In an interesting development, one of the pastors interviewed, who demonstrated a deeply connected and developed sense of spiritual passion, Pastor Malinda, retired from full time ministry July 1, 2018. Within one month she was asked to serve a part time appointment to East Canton United Methodist Church. As this seemed to be a positive move for this congregation that had experienced the Church Growth Movement of the 1980s and 1990s and then returned to what may be a more organic size for them in this community, I decided to re-interview Pastor Malinda as she begins to serve as their pastor.

On October 15, 2018, I spoke with her on the phone, asking her to share her first impressions of the congregation and community and what she's feeling about being the pastor of this church after serving there for three months. She first shared a bit of the history of the congregation following the Church Growth Movement initiative. She says the church experienced several pastoral changes, one of which lasted only a year and a half and ended with the death of the pastor. Over a period of years, this strongly lay-led congregation began to see attrition of many of their members, particularly their most active leaders. Pastor Malinda points to several factors for this decline. She states that there are two large non-denominal churches in the area where many of the youth chose to become involved as their friends were attending there. This took several young, vital families out of the East Canton congregation.

One internal struggle is that the Church Growth Movement encouraged an informal liturgical style of worship and almost a distrust of liturgy and creedal statements. Following some of the natural attrition, a pastor was appointed to serve East Canton for whom liturgy and creeds were vital parts of worship. This led to even greater decline and to an on-going desire of the remaining congregants to more fully engage worship that is less liturgical in nature. In addition, Pastor Malinda identifies what she calls “the cultive personality of a pastor” – describing the charismatic character of many Church Growth pastors who were extremely successful and whose churches saw rapid decline after they moved on to other appointments – as one of the harmful aspects of this time period at East Canton.

She also described one of the best aspects of the Church Growth Movement that has been left at East Canton as “wonderful worship that is strongly lay-led.” She describes worship in this way: “There is a small time of prayer and praise prior to worship with the liturgist leading during the service. Prayers of the people are led by the people who are selected by the liturgist. During worship, the primary involvement of the pastor is to preach the Word, everything else is truly the work of the people of the church.” She shares that the people of East Canton are strong people of faith and prayer; however, there is an administrative vacuum and most of the giving that is done does not involve hands-on ministry in the community. She also shared that there is a palpable feeling of distrust of authority and anything that appears to be centralized organization.

Pastor Malinda is feeling strongly called to help this congregation discover God’s people in the community around the church. She has begun to preach about the importance of this church in light of the needs of the community and has been able to make some connections in

the community that are helping her to discover the needs that are present there. All of this is what, over time, Pastor Malinda believes will help East Canton become a transformed congregation as they connect in direct, hands-on fashion with those needs found right outside their walls. This is all work that will take time, making this an area ripe for future study. What is most striking is Pastor Malinda's tireless dedication to her spiritual practices that continue to lead her out into the community, making true for her John Wesley's famous quote, "the world is my parish." It is only in being a pastor called to love God's people both inside and outside of the church that Pastor Malinda feels the most authentic fulfillment of her call.

Pastor Malinda lives out of a deep relationship with Christ as she ministers among her people at East Canton. In doing so she demonstrates what Christopher Beeley points out, "What ultimately moves people into a deeper life in Christ is not personal charm, social connections, or managerial expertise, no matter how useful they may seem in the short term. Instead it is the real and palpable holiness of a leader steeped in the grace of Christ. What makes us authentic and compelling leaders is a kind of spiritual magnetism that comes not from our natural gifts alone, but from the power of God."<sup>44</sup> This supports what I found in the entire interviewed group of pastors as they engaged their community in compelling and authentic ways, filled with the spirit of God.

In addition, it is my opinion that part of the struggle for churches who apply the Church Growth model is that they are missing a vital piece of ministry that can only become primary when one draws spiritually closer to Christ. Or, as Beeley states, "The most valuable asset for

---

<sup>44</sup> Christopher A. Beeley, *Leading God's People: Wisdom from the Early Church for Today* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 28-29.

pastoral ministry is one's own spirituality."<sup>45</sup> As a pastor engages a vital, intentional spiritual faith practice as their first and most important duty, he/she usually become drawn to serving the least, the last and the lost, not because it seems like something good to do, but because one feels compelled, called to this space and way of living as an authentic way to live out their witness to Jesus Christ. This way of living authentically is different for different pastors, but if one is engaged in some form of spiritual connection with God, God reveals to that pastor the best way to serve. The more one engages spiritual practices and time set apart with God, the more one seeks to strive to please God in all that they do. This type of duty, if one chooses to call it that, is one, not of meeting a requirement, but one of joy in living fully as the person God calls them to be. Because God's call always comes with blessing that is given in order that we might be a blessing to others, this correlates with Jesus' references to having an abundant life when one seeks to be in relationship with God and to follow Christ. (In John 10:10, Jesus states, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.") This cyclical way of living permeates the entirety of Scripture from Old Testament to New, leading us to believe that this might be one way of living that allows us to live authentically and true to God's call.

Before we move on from the consideration of growing churches, I would be remiss if I did not mention that though the Church Growth Movement is still an important part of The United Methodist ethos today, it has changed its focus. Looking back, The Church Growth Movement of the 1980s and 1990s was very church-focused, rather than focused on people outside the church – unless that focus was to move them from outside to inside. Though the goal of growth was always to make more disciples, the unstated reason seemed most often to

---

<sup>45</sup> Christopher A. Beeley, *Leading God's People*, 29-30.

be in order to have a big church with lots of money and people who felt good about themselves and the many things they could do to help those outside the church in ways that church members believed were needed and important, all while being better positioned to support the financial demands of a large institution. This attitude is often seen in the first world church of any denomination and is greatly impacted by our societal understandings of how we offer service to those in need; which is often done with the understanding that “they need what we have,” instead of with an attitude of mutuality which allows space for others to be lifted up and encouraged as we come alongside them to learn not only what they need, but to learn from them ideas that impact and change our lives as well. Thus, in our shared learning we become ultimately stronger as a people, better for having shared together and wiser for having listened to one another. I believe that part of the struggle of The Church Growth Movement rested in its very worldly CEO model. This type of leadership sets up a dichotomy with the Jesus-economy of faith and the community. Jesus calls us to love and care for one another in community. It is this piece that has become important for today’s churches that are seeking to grow both in the number of disciples and in becoming a missional church within the community where they are planted. Some still participate in a more CEO model of leadership but with an added emphasis on the pastor as spiritual leader and the community as part of the lived reality of the church’s ministry.

This style is most easily seen in the writings of Bill McConnell. Bill is a minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and has worked with small and mid-size congregations in the Ohio and Kentucky area. He has been seen as a transformational pastor, leading congregations in both numerical and spiritual growth. In his book, *Renew Your Congregation:*

*Healing the Sick, Raising the Dead*, he states that, “The church has lost sight of the most important thing we have to offer the world: The Gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God,”<sup>46</sup> and that “Growing congregations have a clear sense that God is active within them and is using them to change lives.”<sup>47</sup> This hints at the change in focus from the church growth movement, with the focus not being on a top-down CEO-driven competitive spirit, but rather the spirit that grows from the touch of the Holy Spirit leading a congregation to care first about others and the message of love they have to share. It can also lead to a very different, more humble approach to serving others. Throughout his ministry, McConnell has begun a process of renewal in the church with a six-week bible study about what it means to be the church of God called to share the Gospel message and love of Christ with the marginalized. It is from this viewpoint that leaders are developed, changes made and the congregation begins to find its purpose in the call of God. McConnell puts it this way, “The goal...is to get them so committed to being like Jesus that they’re willing to sacrifice what they love to reach those whom God loves.”<sup>48</sup> This type of commitment is best led by a pastor who is actively pursuing their own life of relationship with God and also committed to discerning God’s will for their people, rather than striving to build up the congregation in ways that are self-serving and a striving for personal gain of status and merit. This is a process that has been designed with spiritual formation of the congregation as the primary emphasis of church growth. As the people in the church become stronger, by drawing closer to the God who calls them to ministry and mission, the sharing and caring flows

---

<sup>46</sup> William T. McConnell, *Renew Your Congregation: Healing the Sick, Raising the Dead* (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2007), 9.

<sup>47</sup> McConnell, *Renew Your Congregation*, 11.

<sup>48</sup> McConnell, *Renew Your Congregation*, 22.



naturally to others with whom they share their love for God and God's world. As the church allows God to lead, they loosen the reigns of ownership and authority. When the church functions from a place of ownership and authority, they are often driven to become aggressive and power hungry. As the church draws closer to God, they instead become servants of God who choose love over power, faithful service over societal success.

I believe that this kind of refocusing of the church – who it is, who it is called to be – is the lynchpin for life and growth of the entire church and I believe that the small church is the location where this can most likely happen. In a conversation with a friend and ministry partner, Ron Swift, he said, “What might it be like if the resurrection of The United Methodist Church comes, not by the large churches, but through the small ones?” In that statement I heard the voice of God speaking clearly about the importance and value of the small church that is located within a community they love. If the greater church can begin to catch a vision of the effect these churches can and do have within their communities and begin to value them rather than see them as dying entities in need of hospice care, I believe there could be a revolution of faith across denominations and throughout the country that would be bigger than the Second Great Awakening. When speaking of the importance of the church's call, Mark Olsen says it this way, “...this people, created by God and formed into a community, has a mission. They are sent to be witnesses to God's unending love for all creation...God called a people, and he gathered them into a community. This community has a mission: it exists for others.”<sup>49</sup> If this is true, then the church, regardless of size, has a place of deep rootedness

---

<sup>49</sup> Mark A. Olson, *Moving Beyond Church Growth: An Alternative Vision for Congregations* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 119.

within their community and they are uniquely connected to the community to not only share the Gospel with others, but to hear the Gospel witness in the voice of their family, friends and neighbors.

When we understand this at a foundational level, we come face-to-face with the idea of church as a Missional Movement. In the Christendom model mentioned above, we are, according to Robert Elkington, author of *Missional Imagination*, looking at a model of church where congregations see themselves as consumers and observers of faith, rather than the Missional model which finds congregations striving to “...grow into Christ-likeness to shine as a community within their community.”<sup>50</sup> Elkington sees the church “...not as a place for people to come to for themselves, but a living organism designed by God to accomplish mission.”<sup>51</sup> Most authors who are engaging the Missional Church Movement believe that the former church growth models lead to churches in crisis. Guder, one of the leading voices in the Missional Church Movement, shares that in addition to a cultural crisis, “...churches face a crisis of their own. They manifest an increasing dis-ease with their heritage of a functional Christendom and forms of church life shaped by modern notions of voluntary association and rational organization.”<sup>52</sup> Elkington also stresses, as do many of the small church pastors with whom I spoke, the urgent need for churches to claim this community-oriented, missional idea of who they are as they serve God. He believes that churches in the Western world find themselves in crisis and exile today as they face an increasingly secular society, which can be challenging for

---

<sup>50</sup> Robert Elkington, *Missional Imagination: Revisioning the Church in the West* (Hamburg: Anchor, 2014), 123.

<sup>51</sup> Robert Elkington, *Missional Imagination*, 124.

<sup>52</sup> Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 77.

many, and can totally destroy others.<sup>53</sup> Elkington sees our mission to share the love and witness of God with those in the immediate community as the “task at hand,” as do the small church pastors interviewed whose lives are strongly connected to and led by their personal spiritual practices.<sup>54</sup> And as these small church pastors have learned, it’s not enough for the pastor to be transformed and radically changed by God’s plan for a more missional model of church; they must somehow be able to impart that message to the congregation through their preaching and teaching and through the ways that they lead their congregations. I agree with Guder’s assessment, “...there is a need for reinventing or rediscovering the church in this new kind of world.”<sup>55</sup> In a world that is ever more individualistic and divisive, it is time for the church that has heard the Gospel call to community and shalom to shine a beacon of light for all to see.

In the sixth chapter of Guder’s book, in a section drafted by Inagrace T. Dietterich entitled, “Missional Community: Cultivating Communities of the Holy Spirit,” we’re told, “Missional communities are called to represent the compassion, justice, and peace of the reign of God. The distinctive characteristic of such communities is that the Holy Spirit creates and sustains them. Their identity (who they are), their character (how they are), their motivation (why they are), and their vocation (what they do) are theological, and thus missional. This is, they are not formed solely by human intentions and efforts, individual or collective, but instead by God’s empowering presence.”<sup>56</sup> According to Dietterich, the most important part of allowing the Holy Spirit to guide in this way, is immediately opening oneself to a different definition of

---

<sup>53</sup> Robert Elkington, *Missional Imagination*, 132.

<sup>54</sup> Robert Elkington, *Missional Imagination*, 138.

<sup>55</sup> Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church*, 77.

<sup>56</sup> Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church*, 142.

community. Community becomes more important than the individual and therefore, the life given by the Spirit is life for all. She reminds us, “Contemporary categories, presuppositions, and experiences have largely blinded us to the radical nature of the biblical sense of community that the Spirit brings.”<sup>57</sup> This is what the pastors who were interviewed described when talking about the church they serve and the community in which they are located. They describe a ministry that is foundationally built on the guidance of the Holy Spirit that comes to them as they regularly and with intentionality, practice spending time with God and listening for God’s leading. They in turn preach and teach in ways that bring their congregations into contact with this self-same life-changing Spirit of God. As churches open themselves to being guided by the Spirit, so they begin to become connected to and bonded with the people in their community in new ways, in the way of connectional spirituality. This way mimics kinship and breaks down barriers of difference that often exist when people think in terms of the neighbor being “other” or different than themselves.

Another consideration as we think about the future of the church is found when we read some of the work of Dr. Jean Twenge. Dr. Twenge is bringing attention to the continuing decline of religion in America today among the new generation of folk who are being called iGen (born 1995-2012). She states that, “the number of Americans who pray, believe in God, and see the Bible as divinely inspired reached all-time lows in 2014. The religious practices people perform behind closed doors – or even just inside our heads – are now on the decline as well. Even in

---

<sup>57</sup> Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church*, 145.

their private moments, fewer Americans are religious.”<sup>58</sup> Backed by solid social studies, the findings for the church seem disconcerting as she makes her point clearly, “Overall, the changes among young adults were the most stark. Nearly a third of Millennials (born 1980-1994) in 2014 were secular not just in foregoing religious affiliation, but in never attending services, saying they are not a religious person, and not believing in God. A fourth say they never pray. The change also appeared in the youngest generation in the survey: those born after the early 1990s, whom I call iGen. Because this data reaches back so many decades, we know that the Millennials and iGen are not forsaking religion because they are young – they are markedly less religious than GenX’ers and Boomers were when they were young.”<sup>59</sup>

Similar findings are also reported in various surveys conducted by the Pew Research Foundation, as noted in a current study reported June 13, 2018, where they say, “young adults are *more* likely to be religiously *unaffiliated*. This is especially true in North America, where in both the U.S. and Canada younger people are less likely to claim a religious identity.”<sup>60</sup> The study goes on to further state that young adults are much less likely than ever before to be

---

<sup>58</sup> Jean M. Twenge, “The Decline in Religion Comes Home.” Psychology Today on line. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/our-changing-culture/201603/the-decline-in-religion-comes-home> (Accessed January 14, 2019).

<sup>59</sup> Jean M. Twenge, “The Decline in Religion Comes Home.” Psychology Today on line. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/our-changing-culture/201603/the-decline-in-religion-comes-home> (Accessed January 14, 2019).

<sup>60</sup> Pew Research Study, Religion and Public Life. “Young Adults Around the World are Less Religious by Several Measures.” <http://www.pewforum.org/2018/06/13/young-adults-around-the-world-are-less-religious-by-several-measures/> (Accessed January 16, 2019).

absent from any kind of formal worship and are less inclined to consider any forms of personal prayer practice in their daily living.<sup>61</sup>

Though this information sounds like the worst of news for the church, I believe that the way of faithful and authentic living done by the pastors I interviewed offers some creative possibilities for the future church. As congregations enter their communities with no agenda other than loving and serving others as Christ did, I believe they will discover a generation of young people who are there ready to work with them to help meet the needs of those we are called to love and serve. As the church stands side-by-side with these young people, with no human expectation of conversion and church membership to get in the way, there can be space to allow God's spirit to live and move. This is a place where true connectional spirituality can help the church create a new world of peace and love for all.

There are several pastors who have shared stories with me about how a new awakening, a radical transformation and rediscovery is happening in their churches and communities and how they are being a new kind of church in the world, a church living lives of connectional spirituality.

### REVIEWING THE LITERATURE

My literature review shows resources that have most influenced my thinking about how pastors in small church settings can sustain a deep, intentional spiritual life, which can lead to more effective leadership. It also follows the trajectory of the church as it has struggled to find its focus and calling today. I found several resources that were helpful in developing an

---

<sup>61</sup> Pew Research Study, Religion and Public Life. "Young Adults Around the World are Less Religious by Several Measures." <http://www.pewforum.org/2018/06/13/young-adults-around-the-world-are-less-religious-by-several-measures/> (Accessed January 16, 2019).

understanding of the importance of spiritual vitality when studying small church pastors and the ways in which they serve their congregations and communities.

Because this seems to be the latest shift in thinking and creates a vital contrast of ideas about equipping churches to fulfill their mission of being Christ to the world prior to the Missional Church Movement, I felt it important for us to grasp the short comings of the Church Growth Movement and then to develop a working understanding of the Missional Church Movement. However, only thinking in terms of church models would leave us missing the vital and first part of the process and that is the spirituality of the pastoral leader which we will also take a look at below.

My Literature Review is designed to take us through the ending of the Church Growth Movement by looking at some current sources that include some of the ideas of the Movement, but begin to move it toward the need for spiritual vitality, to look at some good resources for growing spiritually and understanding the importance of spiritual practices, and finally, to provide a brief introduction to the Missional Church Movement that gained traction in the early 2000s.

In engaging the resources, I have identified two gaps in the processes that have been proposed in the past: one is the importance of transformation of small churches and the resources available, the second is the importance of the small church pastor's commitment to developing an intentional, passionate spiritual life despite the constant demands of the parish which often result in small church pastor syndrome.

The first gap seems to occur in resources which often assume a middle to large church setting, thus decreasing their effectiveness for small church pastors to engage in ways that

could assist and support transformation. Though this seemed to be a lack of resourcing for the small church pastors, they have found ways of coping by depending more fully on their own personal faith growth and development and by deepening their personal relationship with Christ through prayer and spiritual disciplines. They then use their own personal passion to help them lead and guide their church into deeper connection with Christ and their neighbors.

Due to the gap in resourcing small church pastors there are many who report feeling defeated before they begin and often floundering when trying to find something that might work for them. This is something reported to me often by the small church pastors who come to me for spiritual direction. I find that I am often confronted by pastors who are at the breaking point in ministry. They no longer have great passion for the vocation and in some cases have begun to step beyond the boundaries of their call, tempted to create relationships that are unhealthy at a minimum and immoral or illegal in some extreme cases. In this regard, the pastors interviewed during this study have much to share with others who are serving in small churches about ways to engage spiritual practices with intention and regularity. I have come to believe that this is not just a good practice but it is a vital piece of pastoral ministry that helps pastors to stay focused, encouraged, and stand strong in the face of all of the temptations of working in close, intimate settings with people.

The second gap, which became the main focus of this study, became apparent over a period of years as pastors attempted church growth without an intentional focus on spirituality, but instead followed the once popular CEO model of church growth. With titles such as *Practicing Greatness: 7 Disciplines of Extraordinary Spiritual Leaders*, *Building Leaders: Blueprints for Developing Leadership at Every Level of Your Church*, and *The 21 Laws of*



*Leadership: Follow Them and People will Follow You*, offered as resources to help a pastor become equipped to revitalize their congregation, the small church pastor who often serves alone in a less than full time capacity, more-and-more working at secular jobs as bi-vocational pastors to supplement their income, found themselves unable to join the vital church pastor make-over offered to them by the Church Growth Movement as the key to success in ministry. This again contributed to the general disheartened feeling held by many small church pastors. In the wake of the lack of sustainability in these models there are more writings that focus on the importance of the spiritual life of pastors as the starting point for leading transformation within small churches, as well as pointing the way toward connection with the community surrounding the church as the place to begin to live out a life of following the call of Christ.

#### Revitalization or Transformation: Kindred Spirits

As we begin to think about revitalization and transformation, there are several terms we should consider. What does it mean for a church to be renewed? There are some church growth experts who talk about redemption and resurrection when engaging the conversation. I believe that the ideas found in each of the terms overlap in what they are describing. For most people who love and care for the church and are called to lead it as pastors, their desire is to see the church grow in numbers, certainly, but also in the depth of faith shown by those who engage with the church. Though that is hard to measure, one hopes that there would be evidence of a commitment to living a life of integrity, following the greatest command according to Christ, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind... You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37 & 39, CEV) So all of those terms – revitalization, transformation, redemption and resurrection – have within them the idea of living a Christ-like, God-centered, other-focused life. Taking them

individually, revitalization has meant a church that is growing numerically and in outreach; transformation been used to describe a church that is no longer in decline but is serving God in ways that attract others and offers a stable membership and financial base while reaching out into the community; redemption and resurrection tends to point to a church that is no longer dying but beginning to stabilize and recognize its call to mission and ministry. Experts often use one or another of the terms to support their ideas: whether the most important thing is to cultivate leaders who are good administrators, or to increase the numbers of people involved in mission and ministry within the church, or whether to set a high value on membership and the ways in which folk live out their faith commitments through the church, or to reach out into the community to love and serve.

For the balance of this project, I will be focused primarily on church growth as it impacts the church and community in terms of service and mission to the community. I believe that revitalization and transformation are indeed kindred spirits and as such encourage their cultivation. I, also, believe that one does not find lasting revitalization without transformation and that this is the one area that has plagued the CEO model of church growth causing many to lose traction following a time of great success.

One of the first resources that I engaged after starting to think about the importance of small church revitalization and the difference it could make in our greater church was the book, *Holy Places, Small Spaces: A Hopeful Future for the Small Membership Church*. Bill Kemp, who has been a pastor and is now a church revitalization leader in the Eastern PA Conference of The United Methodist Church, helps us to see the importance of small church transformation. This resource reinforces the importance of small membership churches and their role both in the

United Methodist denomination and others, as well as the importance of a pastor's passion for God and for ministry in the small church setting. It also points out that there are a great number of small churches within the United Methodist denomination. Kemp stresses the importance of a deep spiritual life for clergy as he notes the same problem that I have within our denomination's efforts at revitalization of churches, "...mainline denominational organizations, which, regardless of their polity or theology, have focused for the last sixty years on lifting the professional standards of their clergy rather than on enhancing the spiritual passion and leadership capabilities of their laity."<sup>62</sup> This statement goes to the heart of what seems to have been missing in some of the earlier church growth models. With his focus on small membership churches, Kemp's is a resource that has been helpful when considering the importance of intentional, on-going spirituality for leaders of small churches and the fruit that is seen in the vitality of their churches. Though the resource is helpful when looking at the benefit for churches whose pastor practices a deep spiritual life, he does not address this need specifically in his writing. I believe that my writing addresses what I see as an essential piece of the puzzle as we consider the possibilities for strength and revitalization within our small churches.

In addition to Bill Easum's work mentioned earlier, another well-known and popular strategy for church revitalization was led by Paul Borden. With books like *Hit the Bullseye: How Denominations Can Aim the Congregation At the Mission Field*, *Direct Hit: Aiming Real Leaders at the Mission Field*, and *Make or Break Your Church in 365 Days: A Daily Guide to Leading Effective Change*, pastors were encouraged to consider that, "Principles relating to leadership,

---

<sup>62</sup> Bill Kemp, *Holy Places, Small Spaces: A Hopeful Future for the Small Membership Church* (Nashville :Discipleship Resources, 2005), 6.

organizational structure and behavior, culture, and how humans behave individually and in groups are as true as those truths upon which we build our theology.”<sup>63</sup> This is another of the CEO models of leadership that arose out of the church growth movement, focused more fully on a business model for revitalizing churches than on the importance of the spiritual growth and development of the pastor, church leaders and congregations, this model was promoted throughout the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in the Susquehanna Conference. For pastors of small churches this strategy was not at all helpful as it focused primarily on churches with at least 100 active participants, developing leaders within the group who could assist in the realignment of the mission, and aimed the focus of the church most fully on those outside the church primarily for the ways in which they could benefit those inside the church and the organization it supports.

Though the desire was for deep change within the church, for a transformative way of being disciples of Jesus Christ, this model focused on size and numbers, thus leaving the small membership church pastor frustrated and struggling to see themselves and their church as a possible place of life and vitality. Not only was support for the small church pastor difficult to find in these types of resources, there were often statements that suggested these churches are negative drains on already vanishing resources.

There were others at this time who were also beginning to write resources that acknowledged the spiritual lack of some of the early revitalization models. These presented

---

<sup>63</sup> Paul D. Borden, *Hit the Bullseye: How Denominations Can Aim the Congregation At the Mission Field* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 13-14.

other theologies of transformation and started to challenge the ideas that were prevalent for about 20 years.

### Varied Theologies of Spiritual Vitality

For both an exploration of the importance of spirituality and a look at how a process of revitalization of a small church might be done when one has Christ as the focus, one of my sources, as mentioned above, was *Renew Your Congregation: Healing the Sick, Raising the Dead*, by Rev. William T. McConnell. An active pastor in the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ, he serves presently as Intentional Interim Minister at Norwood Christian Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. As an active pastor, he has used many of the processes he discusses in his book as he has led and guided several congregations into a more active and vital ministry.

He begins his process of revitalization with Bible Study and looking at how and why God calls the church into being. He makes a bold statement of his belief about church revitalization being the work of God, "Congregations that have turned around have experienced a spiritual renewal. Everything else comes from that. Nothing happens without that."<sup>64</sup> With this in mind he then goes on to present the process that he has used successfully over the years in various congregations. Though his experience is mainly in churches of more than 100 in active attendance, his process of growth is built on the realization that revitalization of a church all begins with and flows from a relationship with God. For this reason, a small church pastor might be able to use this resource to encourage a process of transformation within their own small church setting.

---

<sup>64</sup> McConnell, *Renew Your Congregation*, 11.

In his work, *Moving Beyond Church Growth: An Alternative Vision for Congregations*, Mark Olson states clearly that the vitality of a church comes not from programs or strategies but from a foundational understanding that the church was created by God in order to serve the world. Though he does not talk directly about spiritual passion, he does speak from an understanding that all vitality of the church flows from worship and liturgy that equip the congregation to be attentive to God and neighbor, "...the church must wait, continually centered in its story and its attentiveness to the world. It must continue to attend to itself and its core foundations. This is done primarily through worship and liturgy. For it is in worship and liturgy, which redirect the congregation's attention to God and neighbor, that the church is most authentically itself and thus most profoundly open."<sup>65</sup> I share Olson's conviction concerning worship and the implications for a congregation; however, I believe there is more which has to do, first, with the spiritual passion of the pastoral leader and the ways in which that passion is appropriated by the congregation. A pastoral leader needs to be deeply connected with God before he/she leads worship, and writes liturgy that can be a vehicle for transformation. Thus this resource would be a good support for the clergyperson who is already intentional about their own spiritual growth and development but it does not offer basic assistance to develop a relationship with God. Rather it presupposes that relationship is already established.

In *Thriving Churches in the Twenty-first Century: 10 Life-Giving Systems for Vibrant Ministry*, I found that the first section on being a thriving church in the twenty-first century is

---

<sup>65</sup> Mark A. Olson, *Moving Beyond Church Growth: An Alternative Vision for Congregations* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 54.

devoted to spiritual renewal of both pastor and congregation and the use of spiritual disciplines. For these authors, all other work of leadership flows from development of spiritual passion. However, the authors see this as a spiritual power that becomes unleashed as the systems of the church become healthier, “...a church’s life-giving systems becoming healthy and effective has a ripple effect on the rest of the system. The synergism creates unstoppable spiritual energy. God’s Spirit is at work. The Power is restored!”<sup>66</sup> It seems that here the authors are arguing that attending to the healthy functioning of church systems will bring about divine action. This model is, for me and based on what I have found by my research, counterintuitive. From what I have found, one begins with connection to the divine spark and as that grows, and God’s Spirit is at work within the congregation, the church becomes more other-centered, more mission-driven, more engaged in its community. Though this could just seem like semantics, I believe it is much more than that. As human beings, we are quick to assume ourselves as the locus of activity and when we are seeking spiritual transformation I believe there is a certain danger in thinking that God’s power needs to be restored because we become healthy; I fully believe we cannot become healthy until we have come to a place where we recognize the power of God that is already and always at work around us.

In James Cushman’s, *Beyond Survival: Revitalizing the Small Church*, the author sees the small membership church as one that primarily exists to support the community in which it is planted. The book focuses on the importance of relationships and their success and prominence in the small church. He notes that “...the small church is based primarily upon

---

<sup>66</sup> Gary L. McIntosh and R. Daniel Reeves, *Thriving Churches in the Twenty-first Century: 10 Life-Giving Systems for Vibrant Ministry*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 2006.), 18.

human relationships ... in most cases kinship relationships.”<sup>67</sup> Cushman sees relationship as being the driving force of the small church’s involvement in a community, “...the small church generally has a different primary reason for being than does a large church...The church exists to undergird the community...a relational organism, rather than an organization.”<sup>68</sup> This speaks directly to the connectional spirituality that I found to be prevalent in the congregations of the pastors I interviewed. Though not implicitly stated, this type of understanding of relational connection seems to be a key ingredient in the Missional Church Movement and as such contributes greatly to the understanding of the ways in which small churches live out their faith and faithfulness. One small point of departure with Cushman’s argument is that what I found in the connectional spirituality of the small churches involved in this study is that the relationship was not just one of actual kinship. The connectional spirituality that I identified in these churches went beyond kinship and created kinship among those who were merely neighbors or friends. Kinship for these pastors and congregations exists in terms of connectional spirituality that creates brothers and sisters in Christ.

In one section of the book, Cushman spends time on the ways in which faith changed in the United States with the advent of a surge of capitalism. He sees this as the time when the church abandoned its commitment to the way of Jesus – which, for me, supports the idea of the loss of our spiritual passion and identity and the loss of our connection with our neighbors. As a pastor drifts away from deep spirituality, they attempt to offer spirituality from a dry well to their congregation and everyone begins to forget the call to be Christ in the world in which

---

<sup>67</sup> James E. Cushman, *Beyond Survival: Revitalizing the Small Church*, (Parsons, West Virginia: McClain Printing Company, 1981), 3.

<sup>68</sup> Cushman, *Beyond Survival*, 6.



they live. This book stresses sociological factors as part of the ongoing development of small churches, this at a time when we need to reconnect with our spiritual passion in order to revitalize pastors and churches in our society. Toward the end of the work Cushman sees spirituality as the primary practical way in which the small church can become the center of the community as both an agent of sharing redemption and helping people to develop a theology of life that will give them purpose and meaning. I believe this makes this resource extremely important for us today as many people struggle to find meaning and purpose for their lives. This is something vital that the small church offers to the community when they are deeply engaged in its well-being. Cushman leans heavily on individual action which creates a place where God can be recognized. I see this as the action that happens when we commit to the intentional engagement of spiritual practices.

I believe that as pastors become aware of God's action through spiritual practices they are better equipped to lead the church to a place of transformation. This was borne out time after time by the stories that were shared during the interview process.

#### [Understanding the Importance of Spiritual Practice](#)

Flora Slosson Wuellner, in her book, *Feed My Shepherds*, explores the importance of pastors developing a deep spirituality. This resource is very helpful as one explores the methodology for developing spiritual passion. I have found her idea of spiritual desolation to be important to my exploration with pastors who are currently serving in small churches,

“For most of us in Christian leadership, the pervasive tiredness is not usually the result of a series of climactic crises. For most of us, it accumulates so gradually over months and years that we do not recognize it...Spiritual exhaustion may manifest itself as restlessness; compulsive overworking; irritability; numbing of emotional response;

mood swings; compulsive and escapist eating, drinking, reading, exercise, television watching. It can cause heavy prolonged sleep or restless broken sleep. We may experience unusual amounts of daydreaming, difficulty in concentration, intense longings for solitude or an equally intense need to be with others. Feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness often accompany spiritual exhaustion. Eventually the body's immunity weakens. I have noticed that when I begin to feel inappropriately anxious or nervous, it is for me anyway an unfailing sign of deep inner tiredness.”<sup>69</sup>

I was able to share with some of the pastors interviewed about times when they experienced exactly what Wuellner addresses here. Most of the pastors have found spiritual practices that call them back into relationship with God. This resource has been useful as I examined the reported lived experiences of the pastors interviewed. It also describes the stories of many of my spiritual direction clients as they struggle to reconnect with the joy of serving God in ministry. This idea of feeding the shepherds is a basic and vital consideration when we are looking at the spiritual growth and passion of pastors who serve small churches.

Ruth Halley Barton is known today as one of the foremost writers on development of spiritual passion and spiritually passionate leaders. In her book, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*, she develops an argument about the importance of our soul, the very center of our being, based on Matthew 16:26 – “And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?” She reminds us of the importance of this text in light of those who would lead in the church: “If he [Jesus] were talking to us as Christian leaders today, he might point out that it is possible to gain the world of ministry

---

<sup>69</sup> Flora Slosson Wuellner, *Feed My Shepherds*, (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1998), 110.

success and lose your own soul in the midst of it all. He might remind us that it is possible to find your soul, after so much seeking, only to lose it again.”<sup>70</sup> This understanding of the importance of on-going, intentional spiritual work offers a good foundation for pastors who are struggling to name the desolation they sometimes feel as they struggle in small church pastorates that are often draining to them emotionally, physically and spiritually. It is particularly helpful as she focuses on leadership and developing ourselves as leaders whose depth of spirit is built first and foremost on God.

In her book *Leaving Church: a memoir of faith*, Barbara Brown Taylor shows us someone who struggles with her ability to remain connected to a life of spiritual practice, growth and development while serving as a local church pastor. She explores, by sharing her own personal journey, the many questions and doubts that seem to haunt one who is seeking to engage with and share understandings of the Divine with a congregation. She shares her newly developed understanding of finding God in new places: through disappointment to hope, and ultimately in renewal. As she explored her own call and her personal spirituality, she made many discoveries as she was seeking to understand her own development of and struggle with compassion fatigue. She came to understand, “that the call to serve God is first and last the call to be fully human.”<sup>71</sup> This resource helps us to grasp a deep understanding of the importance of developing an intentional, deeply connected practice of spirituality that will help us to remain focused and strong as we lead others.

---

<sup>70</sup> Ruth Halley Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2008), 13.

<sup>71</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, *Leaving Church: A Memoir of Faith*. (San Francisco, Harper Collins, 2006), xi.

### The Practice of Spiritual Practices

In his book, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in our Busy Lives*, Wayne Muller develops a theology of Sabbath and the deep need for rest and renewal in our daily lives. As he states, “...we have lost the rhythm between work and rest.”<sup>72</sup> He sees this as an outcome of our cultural milieu, “Our culture invariably supposes that action and accomplishment are better than rest, that doing something – anything- is better than doing nothing.”<sup>73</sup> As part of his argument, he demonstrates our great need for Sabbath refreshment and, based on an early Jewish understandings of Sabbath, expands the ways in which it is practiced and understood. He offers understandings of practices from several religious traditions though his focus is primarily within Christianity.

This resource is one that can be readily and easily used by pastors of small churches to inform their practice of Sabbath-keeping which is often neglected and skipped due to a limited understanding of ways to engage the practice. Muller helps us to see that Sabbath is something that both flows from and informs our daily lives, not something artificial and extra that needs to be added to our already busy existence in order to connect with God.

Marva Dawn’s writing in her book *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting* has given a wonderfully creative voice to the importance of a Protestant commitment to the Jewish practice of Sabbath-keeping. In her dedication she especially mentions those for whom this book can be good news:

---

<sup>72</sup> Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in our Busy Lives*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1999), 1.

<sup>73</sup> Muller, *Sabbath*, 1.

“...those who chase after fulfillment and need to understand their deepest yearnings and to hear the silence; those who have lost their ability to play because of the materialism and technologization of our society, who need beauty and gaiety and delight; those who have lost their passion and need to get in touch with feelings; those who are alone and need emotional nourishment; those who live in community and need solitude ... those who want to be God’s instruments, enabled and empowered by the Spirit to be world changers and Sabbath healers.” <sup>74</sup>

This resource is helpful as we weave together a narrative of tradition, experience and current understandings of spiritual growth and development. One cannot over emphasize the importance of Sabbath rest and renewal when seeking to be pastoral leaders and Dawn’s resource encourages us to not only acknowledge the importance but take steps to engage the practice for ourselves. This fuels our spirits and empowers us to lead from a spiritually connected center.

As a practical guide April Yamasaki’s, *Sacred Pauses: Spiritual Practices for Personal Renewal*, offers disciplines and exercises that assist in the development of a passionate spiritual life. It also seeks to help folk understand that the work of the spiritual life is unique to each of us and that no one practices wrongly, “Spiritual discipline, spiritual practice, spiritual exercise. These phrases are often used interchangeably, but, for the most part, I focus on spiritual practice – not primarily for correcting something wrong, not with the expectation that I will do it perfectly according to some objective standard, but as something I am learning to do, and

---

<sup>74</sup> Marva Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: ceasing, resting, embracing, feasting*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), v.

that anyone can do.”<sup>75</sup> As we consider the idea of spiritual practices we should also pause to remember that not every spiritual practice is for everyone and that there are times when we can allow a spiritual practice to become a stumbling block to the very presence of God we seek to find.

However, I believe that Yamasaki’s stress on the fact that everyone can learn to practice spiritual disciplines and seek personal renewal is very important. My thesis supports this as I argue for not only the importance of spiritual practice and personal renewal, but also for the fact that there are those who are doing it, which encourages us to believe that all pastors can practice a life of vibrant spirituality. In addition, there are as many unique practices and ways of connecting with God as there are folk who practice. As we hear from the pastors in this study, we will be given glimpses of their personal spiritual practices and will find that they are many and quite varied in the way in which the pastors approach them. What is less varied is the commitment of the pastors to engaging the practices regularly. This is fully supported by Yamasaki’s work as she focuses on the daily inclusion of practices that fit into one’s lifestyle and schedule. Sometimes pastors are under the misunderstanding that adding spiritual practices to their lives is just one more thing to add to an already overtaxed life. However, this resource allows us to see and consider many ways to bring our awareness to things we are already doing that can help us to notice God’s presence with us in order that we might offer a time of thankfulness. Sometimes merely adjusting our perspective can open a space for awareness of God, which changes the way that we perceive a situation and react to it.

---

<sup>75</sup> April Yamasaki, *Sacred Pauses: Spiritual Practices for Personal Renewal*, (Kitchener, Ontario: Herald Press, 2013), 14.

### Missional Church: What Flows from Spiritual Practice

In his position as editor of the book *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, Darrell L. Guder gives us a broad look at the early Missional Church Movement and the understandings that grew from some of Leslie Newbigin's ideas. His goal in editing this work was to help established churches see that "A radical shift is taking place in the way our society sees the church's presence and the way that society assigns it a place in the scheme of things."<sup>76</sup> The work leads us through ways of understanding North American Culture, the Church in North America, what it means in the Reign of God to be Called and Sent, how as Apostles in the World the Church is able to Cultivate a Holy Spirit Community, and finally how this Community called Church becomes a Community of Missional Connectedness serving locally from many locations and denominations.<sup>77</sup> There is much to be learned from this work upon which a foundation of missional leadership can begin. As a leader seeks to understand his/her call and role he/she discovers the foundational principle that, "as the Scriptures demonstrate, fundamental change in any body of people requires leaders capable of transforming its life and being transformed themselves."<sup>78</sup> This supports the idea of pastors who have engaged spiritual practices and are deeply committed to an intentional life of faith development, thus finding themselves transformed as spiritual leaders. Then in leading their congregations, pastors who have been transformed lead in a very different manner, focusing on others over self.

---

<sup>76</sup> Darrell L. Guder, Ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 15.

<sup>77</sup> Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church*, v.

<sup>78</sup> Darrell L. Guder, Ed., Alan J. Roxburgh, "Missional Leadership: Equipping God's People for Mission," 183.

In addition to learning the ways in which individual leaders function differently within a Missional Church context, one is also introduced to the idea that God is really the one who has crafted the societies within which these leaders and congregations find themselves. Thus, people who follow God's call are led to engage the culture and community in ways that are pleasing to God. Those ways happen to be ways that result in humble service to the community and a vision of a community that is as close as family because when we hear and follow God's leading, we find ourselves focused on others and offering love and care beyond ourselves and our own needs. This idea leads us back to many places in Scripture including Matthew 12:48 where we hear Jesus ask, "Who is my mother and who is my brother," followed by the answer in verse 49 where he points to his disciples and says, "Here is my mother, here is my brother." As participants in the Missional Church begin to see their context as their neighbors and friends in the community, so it begins to understand them to be brothers and sisters with whom the church more readily shares its resources, love and caring.

An additional resource, Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk's *The Missional Leader*, digs deeper into the understanding of what it means to be a pastor who leads from a foundational perspective of being a missional leader and how that foundation is built. The fact that missional leaders have high levels of maturity and integrity lies at the heart of this work. They point out that, though congregations matter, "they need leaders with the skills to cultivate an environment in which the Spirit-given presence of God's future may emerge among the people of God."<sup>79</sup> Oftentimes, the authors describe our cultural context as new, something that has

---

<sup>79</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 9.



never existed before, and on many levels this may be true in terms of technology and the fast-paced modern society we live in. However, I believe that many of the ways that people respond today are similar to the ways in which people have responded to change and a lack of cohesiveness in their society over time, whether living in first Century Palestine, Medieval Europe, or 21<sup>st</sup> Century America. In this regard, I believe that many pastors who are intentional in their spiritual development seem to stumble onto the idea of being a missional church without really thinking in those terms. It is resources like this one that give a pastor some foundational support and can add structure to the development of their personal leadership style. In what seems to be a push-back against the Church Growth Movement of the 1980s we hear Roxburgh saying, “a congregation is not a business...The congregation comprises the people of God, called to be formed into a unique social community whose life together is the sign, witness, and foretaste of what God is doing in and for all of creation.”<sup>80</sup>

I believe that the transformational pastors encountered during this project have certainly grasped the social community aspect of the church and also believe that what they are doing in leading their congregations is pointing toward the important work of God that is not only for a few but for all of creation. This resource is excellent for small church pastors who are looking to add some depth of understanding to what they are already doing as it offers some language and description of living the missional pastor lifestyle.

All of the voices writing on the Missional Movement extend an understanding beyond the scope of this project’s research by moving the discussion to a theological understanding of how God has shaped society, and thus the missional church is merely meeting God where God

---

<sup>80</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader*, 14.

is waiting to have folk join in the healing and restoration of the creation. Though I find this to be both intriguing and, seemingly, the natural culmination of living a transformed life, it is something for future research and beyond the scope of this project.

Finally, in *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church*, I have examined the importance of understanding the Missional Church Movement as one with deep roots in evangelism. The topics covered in this collection of essays are invaluable for developing an appreciation of the importance of the Missional Church Movement. The authors of the essays are striving to draw attention to the need for a fresh look at evangelism – what it is as well as what it looks like in practice. They understand evangelism as something that flows from the call of Christ, thus is very theological in nature but practical in implementation. The ideas are varied, with numerous theories that are still new and, I believe, are being tested by many of the pastors and small churches who, out of their deep, passionate commitment to follow the call of Christ, reach out to their communities to connect in real and tangible ways. It was in hearing their stories that I began to hear the reality of evangelism in our current world. An evangelism that is merely understood to be: “caring for our neighbors.” An evangelism that does not expect something in return. An evangelism that invests in people because God calls us to live out our lives of faith in ways that extend grace and welcome to others.

Chilcote and Warner offer “six propositions concerning evangelism” that may be useful to small churches:

- 1) Evangelism is a vital part of something larger than itself ... it is the essence – the heart – of all Christian mission.
- 2) Evangelism is a process, more than it is an event.

- 3) Evangelism is concerned with discipling people in Christ. The primary purpose of evangelism is not growing churches or recruiting members.
- 4) Evangelism is oriented toward the reign of God, ... the realization of God's reign in human life ... initiating persons into an alternative community of God's people who give themselves for the life of the world as its proper end. We (in the church) embrace a "holistic" vision of evangelism that affirms both personal salvation and social justice.
- 5) Evangelism is a missional practice of the whole people of God. Evangelism is not simply an activity; it is a set of practices – a habituated way of being in community.
- 6) Evangelism is contextual ... the culture of the practitioner shapes the practice of evangelism and the culture of those evangelized determines the nature of the relationship and the practice."<sup>81</sup>

This understanding of evangelism opens new, less aggressive ways of sharing the love and mercy of God with others. No longer is evangelism considered a "convert or die" proposition, rather it is done for the express purpose of sharing the love of a loving God with those in need. In the past, evangelism lost much of its emphasis because it was used primarily as a means of gaining or keeping power in the hands of those inside the church. This method of evangelism that flows from a place of connective spirituality is more about sharing not only love but also sharing power which is what has happened as communities

---

<sup>81</sup> Paul W. Chilcote and Lacey C. Warner, *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), xxvi.

are served by the church rather than the church helping the community by giving it what the church believes it needs.

#### TODAY'S PASTORS SPEAK

According to Patrick Hartin, Christian Spirituality can be defined as, “The search to integrate life through the transforming experience of encountering God in Christ. This experience animates and gives life meaning and direction.”<sup>82</sup> Our understanding is deepened and becomes reality as we engage practices designed to increase our awareness of the presence of God or Christ. People commit to practices in order to intentionally draw closer to God, which leads to a transformed life exemplified by engagement with Scripture, prayer, meditation and other spiritual disciplines. This should result in a desire to love and serve others in ways that Christians might describe as “being more Christ-like,” in other words, striving to follow the model for life set forth by Jesus as described in scripture, which in turn gives the meaning and direction to life described by Hartin. I believe that this is what drives many people today, a search for meaning, direction, and purpose in their lives. I agree with Hartin, that this is found as one is transformed by an encounter with God in Christ. This is what our churches seek to offer to our hurting world.

Or as noted by Bruce and Katherine Epperly, “In the pluralistic, high-tech postmodern world in which we live, seekers and congregants alike yearn for spiritual leaders who not only believe something but also have an ongoing experience of the holy that inspires them to share the

---

<sup>82</sup> Patrick J. Hartin, *Exploring the Spirituality of the Gospels* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2011), 6.

good news with others by deed and inspiration and by doctrine and words.”<sup>83</sup> It is the premise of this paper that pastors who actively and regularly engage spiritual practices lead their congregations in ways that support them in living out their faith in acts of service and connection within their local community. These practices, as reported by the pastors interviewed, are many and varied but all are acts that are engaged in order to transform one’s ability to follow a whole, moral and intentional life of caring and service. The pastors reported feeling incomplete and at a loss if their day did not begin with time spent alone with God, whether just a few minutes or an hour, the amount of time varied, but the intention of starting the day with God was consistently maintained. In the Christian tradition, this includes activities like: prayer, fasting, worship, scripture study, almsgiving, silence and service. We will examine the practices most often engaged by pastors in the interview group as I define those practices below.

But it is not only engaging spiritual practices that is important it is also regular intentionality of engagement that adds strength to the pastors’ practices. As demonstrated by the interviewed pastors, they engage the practices on a very regular and intentional basis. When engaging spiritual practices in this way, they are engaging a type of passionate spirituality that I define as a deep love for and devotion to living a life of relationship with and connection to Jesus Christ. This spiritual passion develops over time as one commits to intentionally practicing spiritual disciplines such as prayer and meditation, Bible study, worship and social justice. Spiritual passion is the well from which a leader develops vision and an understanding of who

---

<sup>83</sup> Bruce G. Epperly and Katherine Gould Epperly, *Tending to the Holy: The Practice of the Presence of God in Ministry* (Herndon, Virginia: The Alban Institute, 2009), 67.

they are in relation to their role within their call to church leadership. It was discovered in these interviews that it also translates to a pastor and congregation that practice connectional spirituality in a way that seems natural, easy and almost second-nature to them.

What are the practices that the pastors reported engaging? They were many and varied, although all of them involved reading scripture, prayer and meditation at some point of their practice. From there, these pastors adapted the practices to fit their lives. For all, reading scripture played a part in their daily devotional practice. Most found the ancient art of *Lectio Divina* to be an important part of their lives. *Lectio Divina* consists of the slow reading of scripture, allowing the text to speak a word into the practitioner's life and then offering a response. For the pastors interviewed, this response was everything from journaling, to praying the scripture back to God, to taking a walk in a quiet wood while meditating on the words they had read, to running or walking on a treadmill or in a labyrinth – again with the words and thoughts raised by the scripture as their companion. For some they found that their scripture reading is deepened when they do it in the context of a devotional segment. Thus, they would choose a devotional book – everything from L'Engle's *Glimpses of Grace*, to Merton's *Book of Hours*, to Job's *40 Days With Wesley*. They would read the scripture and the associated devotional thought and then spend time journaling or walking or meditating.

Another practice that was engaged by two of the pastors was more image-driven. They would begin with scripture and then during their meditation they would purposely think of images that illustrated the point they felt called to that day by the scripture. They both reported that the images that came to them were most often of people they knew or situations within their church or community. They both stated that their devotional time always led them

back into connection with a need they were aware of or in some cases had suspected but weren't sure about until following up on the idea after they finished their devotions.

One pastor reported the importance of fasting and journaling in her ministry. She stated that she always fasts on Sunday mornings before worship and has done so for twenty-one years. She finds that this gives her a more clear and focused spirit as she leads worship. She also reports that she always writes her prayers as a letter to God, beginning with "Dear God" because that helps her to stay focused on who she's in conversation with and reminds her that she not only has things to ask for but things for which she is thankful. For her, this time with God is like spending time with a dear and close friend for whom she has great respect and from whom she has learned much of great value.

One might wonder if this is really all that important. Does it truly impact the way that a pastor leads in their congregation? Not only do I believe this to be true, but so do the Epperlys as they write, "...lively, effective, and spiritually centered ministry is the result of a pastor's ongoing commitment to deepen her or his experience of God through intentionally practicing the presence of God throughout the many responsibilities of ministry."<sup>84</sup> I would go one step further, based on my research, and say that not only does the presence of God found in regular daily practice deepen a pastor's commitment to ministry, but it shapes the pastor's ministry more than anything else. It's one thing to be a deeply committed Administrator, it's quite another to be a person who is deeply committed to the well-being of others which is where the pastors report their spiritual practices always take them. This is certainly reflected in the

---

<sup>84</sup> Bruce G. Epperly & Katherine Gould Epperly., *Tending to the Holy: The Practice of the Presence of God in Ministry* (Herndon, Virginia: The Alban Institute, 2009), 3.

Epperlys' further writing as they state, "...a pastor's ability to experience and share God's guiding, sustaining, and inspiring presence is related to the quality of her or his spiritual life. Practicing the presence of God in ministry is a lively partnership that must be nurtured and developed like any other intimate relationship. As spiritual leaders of their congregations, pastors are, first and foremost, called to tend the holy in their own lives."<sup>85</sup> The pastors interviewed would say a resounding "Amen!"

So, what might one hear when talking with a small church pastor? There are many things expressed: there is always more work to be done than hours in a day, people expect the pastor to be able to do it all – preach, pray, keep the furnace running, answer the phones, print the bulletins, visit the sick, baptize the children, marry the young adults, and bury the dead. A pastor's work is truly never done. While this is often what I have heard from colleagues, I only occasionally heard stories of deep, intentional engagement with faith practices and I began to wonder about that aspect of a pastor's life. I became curious about the thing that seemed to me to be the most important part of the call being the one that few pastors seemed connected to or to spend much time with.

In order to explore this, I specifically asked District Superintendents to identify pastors that they could say engaged a deep, intentional faith practice in their lives. At this point, I had an expectation of what I would hear from the pastors who were thus engaged. As I developed the questions I would ask them, I chose to seek stories that would demonstrate the ways that their faith practices informed their ministry. I believed I would hear stories of their practices – what worked and what didn't – and examples of churches who were encouraged to live out

---

<sup>85</sup> Bruce G. & Katherine Gould Epperly, *Tending to the Holy*, 3.



God's call to minister to those outside of the faith community, offering and sharing their blessings with others. This meant, I expected, churches who were serving meals to the homeless, providing a clothing and food bank ministry, maybe some prison visitation or, if they were truly engaged in serving, a few who would have gone on a mission trip here or there. To this point, these are the things that my experience had taught me to expect. What I didn't expect was the depth of mission and service right within their local community, as well as the attitude of serving that was a driving force in the lives of the pastors and that was part of the ethos of their congregations. The latter made me consider how we actually serve people in ministry – not so much what we do, but how we think about ourselves and the people we are serving. The pastors interviewed spoke very naturally of the service being done as something that was the work of all, both the servants and those who were being served. This natural rhythm seemed to flow from a certain understanding on the part of the church folk that those they were serving were valuable and had worth and standing in God's eyes and thus within the community. This became one of the pivot points of my project.

For many years the church has struggled with the way it engages people when participating in mission trips. Many of us from the developed, privileged first world want to help, to offer love and support to others in need. With this very Christ-driven, commendable desire, we often find ourselves ministering *to* others rather than *with* them. This can occur whether we are traveling to another country or whether we are serving at our local food bank. We seem to almost naturally develop an attitude that quickly becomes *us* offering something to *them* that will bring great value to what we see as their value-lacking lives. When participating in ministry in this way, we are not *serving as equals* as Christ commanded, but rather are

creating a greater divide. This becomes very important as a learning in this project, as the type of ministry I found flowing from the churches of pastors who deeply and intentionally engaged spiritual faith practices was very different, not necessarily in practice, but in attitude. Even if they were participating in what we think of as typical ministries of the church – food and clothing banks, home repairs, free dinners or breakfasts for the community, to name a few – the way these people served was as though they were offering a love gift to a dear family member. The churches led by these pastors engaged mission and ministry with an attitude of service and humility that looked more Christ-like than human-driven.

I also found some differences between the ways that pastors of rural churches served their congregations and created a missional ethos and the ways that pastors of suburban churches led their congregation in ministry. The pastors of the suburban churches that were interviewed led their churches to mission and ministry as well, and also sought to develop a Christ-like understanding of the value and worth of the people being served; however, they reported stories of people doing mission and ministry to others that often led to a “feel good” type of response with the church members talking about how good they felt about helping the “less fortunate.” Because this was not the focus of my project, I will not explore this topic here but will set that aside for future exploration.

As a group, the pastors I interviewed were diverse. Two men, thirteen women; ages ranged from 28 through 64 with most in the mid-range of 45-55. The paths to ministry were varied. Some had entered ministry at an early age, right out of college and seminary; others were second career pastors who had left a position of secular employment to follow God’s call on their lives. One was an immigrant, having become a pastor prior to coming to the United

States, and living out the call to ministry here despite the difficult challenges of racial and cultural prejudice. Some were married; others were single. Some had grown up in a church, others were newer to faith prior to being called as a pastor. Those who claimed church in their early years were not always United Methodist, some were former United Church of Christ, Lutheran, Baptist and Episcopal. But the one common denominator was a practice of spirituality that seemed to almost drive them to a spirituality of deep connection, or what I have called connectional spirituality.

Before we hear from the pastors, we would do well to understand that there are many types of practices that are valued by them. Most of the practices they engage are familiar, all are simple, and yet when our lives are busy they are often the first thing that we set aside in order to complete other tasks. We find it hard to engage a time of listening prayer when there are visits to be made to shut-ins, meetings to be attended, phone calls to be made, and sermons to be written. When these routine, daily demands dominate our life, we begin to lose our focus and our relationship with God falls prey to brief prayers said while running to the next task. We rarely take the time to listen for the still small voice of God. However, the pastors interviewed found that their relationship with God was so important as a ground of their lives and ministry that they are intentional about setting aside scheduled time to be available to God's presence.

While talking with small church pastors, I found that the practice of Sabbath time is vital to their understanding of being with God and renewing their spirits. Having heard their stories, I find that they believe that actually doing something is most important. It is the doing of the practice, not the selection of the "right" practice that draws them to renewal. Which highlights

the importance of regular, committed engagement with spiritual practices over sporadic practice or no practice at all. We know that the most important part of being a pastor is having a deeply connected relationship with the God who has called us. We know that Jesus often engaged in times of prayer, not just during Sabbath worship, but several times throughout the gospels we read that “he slipped away to pray.” (Luke 5:16; Luke 6:12; Matthew 14:23; Mark 1:35; Mark 6:46, to name a few) In this way we have an example of how important it is to spend time apart in order to be alone with God. As we participate in spiritual practices designed specifically to bring us into the presence of God, we are open to receiving guidance and inspiration from God through the interaction of the Holy Spirit. Jackson reminds us of this process when she says, “Taken together, spiritual disciplines not only speak to the act of intentionally bringing our lived spirituality into a conscious realm in order to encounter God, but they also transform us to realize growth and understanding.”<sup>86</sup> In many ways this reminds me of a pastor friend and colleague who used to express the importance of spiritual practices in terms of “eating your Wheaties” every day – you don’t remember every bowl you’ve ever eaten, but they keep you strong and nourished in order to function well and do your best work. Jackson reminds us of the way Marjorie Thompson in her book *Soul Feast* talks about the importance of spiritual practices in terms of gardening: “Just as use of the best spade or hoe does not alone promise a good crop, the application of spiritual disciplines does not in itself guarantee spiritual maturation. However, the spiritual disciplines *can* foster and facilitate unobstructed, healthy growth. Spiritual disciplines make us receptive to God’s love, which in

---

<sup>86</sup> Debora Jackson, *Spiritual Practices for Effective Leadership: 7 Rs of Sanctuary for Pastors* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2015), 41.

turn yields fruit in our lives. Moreover, spiritual practices help us to make space for God in our world.”<sup>87</sup> It is in the making of space that we are open so that God can mold and shape us to new understandings of the world and the situations that we face every day.

I would also state that the practice of spiritual disciplines not only assists us to grow and change in our personal lives, or in discovery of our own meaning and purpose in life, but it also moves us to a place where our minds are transformed, our thoughts are reshaped, as noted in scripture that we might “have the mind of Christ.” (Philippians 2:5) It is this that I have noticed as I’ve listened to the pastors’ stories, it is this that seems to drive them into a functioning connectional spirituality that deeply touches the communities in which they serve.

We know that our lives are better as we stay intentionally connected with God and many have certainly built a good case for spiritual practices, growth and transformation; and yet. And yet, spiritual practice is something that most pastors say they need to learn more about and develop as a more regular, intentional part of their lives. To that end, Appendix A contains a review of a few of the practices that helped the interviewed pastors as they engage important practices in order to remain spiritually connected.

The practices listed in the Appendix below are just a few of the spiritual disciplines available to pastors as they decide what will help them remain connected to the God they are serving. There are many others. One of the most complete, basic resources that can be and is used by many of the pastors interviewed by this project is Richard Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline*. This resource offers a basic understanding of spiritual disciplines, the theology behind them, reasons for engaging them, and simple encouragement to do so. I recommend it

---

<sup>87</sup> Debora Jackson, *Spiritual Practices for Effective Leadership*, 41-2.

to all of those who come to me for spiritual direction and often use it as a basic resource as people begin to engage the process of seeking God and growing in deeper relationship. There are others, many of which have been mentioned throughout this work, which can also assist one who is ready to enter into a period of intentional deepening and spiritual growth.

But even with all of the best knowledge of spiritual practices, I believe one of the most important aspects mentioned over and over by the pastors interviewed was being sure to make some kind of regular, intentional commitment to doing something about their relationship with God. As I considered the importance of this, I was drawn to remember an idea shared with me by my own personal spiritual director that was very helpful in the development of my own committed practice. That is to develop a personal Rule of Life by which my life is guided. We might choose to plan all areas of our lives, from when we vacation to when we do laundry; and yet, our commitment to God is something that we seldom plan, other than attendance at worship. As Ruth Haley Barton states, “if we look closely at the way we live day to day, we may well notice that our approach to spiritual transformation is much more random and haphazard than our approach to finances, home improvements and weight loss!”<sup>88</sup>

To develop a Rule of Life for spiritual practice and formation takes time and the practice of many practices to learn which will offer the best connection to and relationship with God and that fits within your lifestyle. As the pastors in this study would remind us, the important thing is not how well you do a practice, but the intent with which you participate in it and the regularity of the practicing. It is these that are the foundation for developing a Rule of Life. As

---

<sup>88</sup> Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2006) 146.

with anything that we do, practicing the practices will only happen if we have a great desire to live in deep connection with God. So, the foundational question as Barton reminds us is, “How bad do I want it? Am I willing to rearrange my life for what my heart most wants?”<sup>89</sup> From there we can begin to build our practices, our Rule of Life, just as the pastors interviewed have done.

As we hear our pastors, we’ll begin with the voice of Pastor Ellen whose office is actually in the local Community Center where the fire company, a health office, and physical therapy practice are located. She states, “Lots of times people stop by my office to ask for prayer – I have a prayer wall in my office and I pray as much for the people in the community as I do for the people in my church.” She feels that God has called her as a community pastor because of the many experiences in her life that have deepened her understanding and her close walk with God. Pastor Ellen says, “When I accepted that God could use the hot mess that I am I had a shift in my ministry. From that point on, when I went back to my churches, I was able to preach from my heart, with all of my pain, all of my joy, all of myself. I felt the fire of God in my heart and everything I went through was to prepare me to be the community pastor I am in this place.” It seems that Pastor Ellen felt that being genuine and real was foundational to her ability to meet both God and her people with a sense of integrity. Once she was honest before God, she found that God began to lead her into places where her own experiences had led, thus she felt better prepared to hear the voices of others in her community.

So, what does that look like for this pastor and her congregation? “We have a lot of ministries to help our community. We started a Celebrate Recovery program to assist not only

---

<sup>89</sup> Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms*, 151.

people coming out of Rehab, but also to support their families. In May we'll start our third year of the program. We have a group that meets at the church and one that meets at Mountain Laurel, a local rehab facility. It's become the largest recovery group they have at the facility. We've trained people at another church and they took the program to a facility in their area. We have many people who come who not only aren't church members, but they're very angry with God. Often people who come are not only recovering from addiction but also are grieving many losses. People grieve in different ways. I've walked with several families from town who have lost loved ones and have watched people who never come to church reconnect with the faith from their childhood."

But she's not alone in feeling like her passionate, intentional faith has called her and her church into the community, there are others who have experienced the same kind of connections in their location. Pastor Debbie shares the importance of her spiritual life, "I believe that sharing my own desire for prayer and spiritual practices with the congregation is vitally important and makes a difference both in my ministry among them and in their lives and ministry to the community. To be a disciple is to desire to love Christ more than anything else. In order to do that one must be seeking a closer relationship." In an example from John Wesley's playbook, she states that their town is their parish as she told me about a few exciting ministries that happened in 2017.

An idea came to Pastor Debbie to have a community talent night with a meal. Instead of having it in the church, they decided to have it in the local firehall, which is the town's community center. (None of the churches she serves are large enough to do anything special so they always hold things in the firehall) There were over 70 people in attendance, in a



community of 700, who shared their talents (music and drama) and broke bread together as a family with no divisions between the people of the town and the people of the church – talent was offered equally as was the provision of food. During this time Pastor Debbie had the opportunity to meet people from the community she had not yet gotten to know, some of whom were former members of the church. For her this was a great time of making connections between the church and the community as she began to see herself as pastor to all of them. Following this, when the church did a Trunk or Treat night at the local ball field, people from the community came, decorated and opened their trunks to share in giving treats to the children, of which there were more than 65. The people of the church also put together bags of food and paper products and gave them out at the Trunk or Treat night. The bags had some contact information in case people who picked up a bag needed more help. They had two people who called for additional help because of this simple act of generosity. Following this, there were people from the community who called Pastor Debbie in order to offer food donations for the next time the church had a need. Pastor Debbie's experiences highlights the reciprocity that occurs very naturally when a church's actions are guided by connectional spirituality; indeed, the interactions are a definition of the word that shows us by action what I have defined in words.

For Pastor Fred, who reports being newer to the church and theology than most pastors – he was not raised in the church but was raised in a family that suffered with the challenges of drug addiction and after a struggle with addiction himself, that was overcome by hearing a call from a God he hardly knew, at the age of 24 he began to explore a call to become a pastor. He says his entire ministry rests on Scripture and a daily reminder that it's all in God's hands: "I try

to let the Scripture do the talking whenever it's possible. Nothing can be done without asking God for guidance. I just nod and smile because at the end of the day, the ministry belongs to God." He reports doing a daily examination of his life, always seeking to see the God moments, even if the day went awry. So how does this deep connection with God on a daily basis play out in Pastor Fred's life and ministry, here's what he says, "I've been doing a prison ministry in Tioga County Prison. The Sunday School kids write messages in Bibles that I purchase and take with me to donate at the prison. It's important to help children learn how important it is to relate to the world. Many of these rural parents are fearful of allowing their kids to explore the more urban areas of the county. But I've been praying that God will move, push and challenge us as a church to connect outside our walls."

One can easily see how God is bringing all of the pieces of Pastor Fred's life together. As he spends time every day in prayer and scripture reading and then each evening examining his life, God has been pulling together his experiences, his love for God and God's people into a bigger picture of a church reaching beyond its fearfulness, beyond its walls in order to share the love of Christ with those outside the church. He has developed a ministry of taking his youth into a nearby bigger city to help with urban restoration projects and by doing so has helped them and their parents expand the idea about who is valuable to God and who we might work alongside of in order to bring transformation and love in new ways.

His congregation, like others in these small, rural areas wanted their pastor to be part of their town, a true part of the community, not just the pastor of their church. He reports, "Though our church is outside of town, when the church bought a new parsonage they wanted it in town so that their pastor could be part of the community. " So he spends time every day

outside his church: walking to the post office and engaging in conversations with the town people, eating his lunch at the local diner, and even taking time to chat with the locals while mowing the parsonage yard.

Pastor Connie also identifies her relationship with God as the primary thing that drives her into her community. She loves her work at the church – worship and fellowship – but she says the bigger question is, “How can we live with those in our community. I need to know myself and have a deep relationship with God if I want to be able to really reach out to the community. Being in right relationship with God and myself is of greatest importance.” With those words we hear very clearly that it is her deep, intentional relationship with God that spurs her connectional spirituality and draws her into the greater community.

She also addressed the busyness of the small church pastor being as one of the things that can take away a passion for spiritual growth, that and not being well-resourced when it comes to spiritual formation as a pastor: “If you’re too busy you can’t be connected, with God or others. We get pulled in so many different ways and the spiritual formation part for a long time hasn’t been on top of the list. I’ve heard ‘leadership,’ I’ve heard ‘be ready for Sunday,’ ‘be a good preacher,’ but we never hear about the most important part and that’s where you are spiritually. For me the hard part is being busy but trying to remember how important spirituality really is in my life as a pastor. You do that on a retreat for a couple of days, but on a regular basis no one helps you know how to start.” This statement touched on the heart of what I have heard over and over again from pastors in spiritual direction: lack of time; lack of know-how when it comes to spiritual practices; and lack of regular, intentional, consistent commitment. This set of challenges seems to plague most pastors today.

Pastor Barb also agrees with both the importance of having a relationship with God and the difficulties presented by the life of a pastor: “We encourage people to soul care and yet we allow all of that other stuff to take away our own personal soul care time. It’s this busy, crazy life we live as pastors.” She had struggled in a church that was more focused on her ability to run the church copier and produce the bulletins and newsletters than they were on her spiritual leadership gifts. She reports that this began to change for her as she preached and led studies that focused on the importance of having a deeply committed relationship with God. It seems that some of these pastors have found a way to help their churches understand the importance and value of having a pastor who is deeply connected with God. As a pastor becomes convinced that God must be a first and foundational priority in their life of ministry and as they share this in ways that the congregation can hear, understand and appreciate, things begin to change within the church itself and its not long before people are connecting to those outside the church.

For one church in a small community, a Nativity set became a ministry to the community. The church didn’t have an outdoor Nativity set and decided to purchase a small one to sit outside on their lawn. However, as the discussion unfolded, the community became the focal point of the purchase. Pastor Hannah tells the story this way: “Our town of Pine Creek is very small, there’s no community center or local focal point, just some houses, a small local store, and two churches. Our church is right on the main road, we get a lot of traffic by it and people park in our lot to fish and kayak, which we welcome. We talked about putting out a nativity set this year – just thinking about something small. We’re a small church and we want to be good stewards of our resources. One man brought a suggestion of two sets that were

really big, made for the elements at a cost of \$5,000-6,000. After talking together, the church council decided if they wanted to do this for their community they wanted to do it right. They began to think about what better place than the church to be the focal point for the community, so this became something that began to feel like a gift to the community. The council chose the one for \$5,000 and decided that they would purchase the set plus an additional camel. There was a need for a manger which was an additional \$2000. Then they needed a shed to store it in. All told this project turned out to be about \$10,000. All because we don't exist for ourselves, we exist for others and this was seen as a gift to the community. When we dedicated the nativity, we sent out a mailing to everyone in the community to come to the dedication and dinner given by the church. In a church of 40 active people, we hosted a dedication service outside and a full dinner inside for about 85 people; half of whom were from the community! God spent \$10,000 and brought our little community together to dedicate a nativity celebrating the birth of our Lord." For this community, the light of Christ shown in the form of a nativity set. And one wonders how many bonds were made at the dedication and dinner and how many folks realize that this church in their town, according to Pastor Hannah, is willing to invest more than money in their decisions to love and care for their community. Pastor Hannah indicated that this is just a beginning as the church council has decided to meet to continue to explore ideas of ways they can help and serve the community.

In hearing these stories, one might wonder why this idea of the importance of the community stands out for these pastors. There are several reasons, some of which were expressed over and over again. Pastor Hannah said, "I make it a point to talk with God every day, to look for God every day. I'm not always as tuned in as I should be. The journey we're on

is an individual journey but we're called to be disciples, so when you find people on the path, take them with you." Taking others with you on the spiritual journey is certainly something that drives most of the pastors I interviewed. And though the journey doesn't always lead people into the church, they feel it is important to share the love of Christ and to do that by sharing whatever you have, wherever you are – not for gain, but because that's what Christ calls them to do. But that's not the only reason cited for serving within the community. Pastor Debbie had a lot to say and many dreams of what the church can truly be if it follows Christ's call, which inevitably leads right back into the middle of our communities:

"The church is a living, breathing organism. Yes, the church is an institution, it's a human institution, but at the heart is Jesus Christ, and even if the whole system we know as church collapses, what will be left is the heart-beat of Jesus Christ and that's what is "church" for me! That's what will save "the church" no matter what form it takes. The church is 10-12 people coming together in a group to pray together, to be missionaries, to reach out into their community. Basically, what the early church was about. We need to do away with these buildings that are sucking down our resources and strive to really be the church, putting our resources, our time, our energies at work in the world. The small church is truly a small group within themselves. Sometimes the fellowship in a small church is a continuation of the worship where the people share food and drink, talk about the breaking of the Word of God that they heard, they share the needs they know of within the community, they talk about ministry, what they can do, who's in the hospital, if someone's homebound, do they need meals brought in. Isn't this the roots of Methodism? We need to help our denomination transcend beyond the

formal structures to the heart of our faith, to allow the flow of the Spirit to come out naturally and lead us to where God wants us to go.” To which one can only echo, “Amen!”

It appears that Pastor Debbie has given a lot of thought to her theology of church and how that plays out in her community. As I heard her talk about the church, it was easy to catch her excitement and enthusiasm. It was also challenging to think of ways to encourage a group of people to be so committed to mission in their community that they would be willing to divest themselves of their buildings and all of the trappings of religion that we have come to hold near and dear to our hearts. This seems like a big challenge and almost a stumbling block to doing ministry in this very connectional way. Until one remembers scripture and thinks about that idea of Christ crucified being a stumbling block for those who do not believe. (1 Corinthians 1:23) Maybe as we develop a greater passion for Christ things that once seemed important, things that may have caused us to pause and struggle will be turned into something that no longer seems insurmountable. As I’ve heard these pastors talk about their churches reaching out in so many ways, I have come to believe that not only is this possible but it is happening in the lives of spiritually dedicated pastors and their congregations.

It is hard to dispute that this could be an exciting vision for the future of not only The United Methodist Church but for all churches who seek to live out the call of Christ in the world. It seems like Pastor Debbie has the idea that the revitalization of the greater church is what we should be about, but not in order to add numbers to the membership rolls. Rather, she sees the reason to be vital and alive as a way to live out the call of Christ to serve the least, the last and the lost. As Pastor Debbie describes it, she has come to understand this as the “heart of our faith” as she has prayed and sought God’s leading in her life and ministry. The more she

practices the spiritual disciplines, which she says is always deepest when she adds a time of fasting, the more God leads her outside the church to those in her small community who are hurting.

There is much wisdom to be shared and it has been my intention to pool some of the best that is presented by a few pastors in the field today in order to understand the journey that is passionate spirituality and which leads to deeper bonds with others through connectional spirituality. As I have built a narrative of lived practice and the intersections with theology, tradition and current writing about spiritual practice and formation, it is my desire that folk be reassured that the most important thing is to engage in practices, not how they do it, or what they call it, or how they think of it, but that they do it.

The remainder of my writing will illustrate the importance of sustaining a life of passionate spirituality while serving as a clergyperson, especially if serving a small membership church in a part-time or bi-vocational capacity; but, more importantly, the way in which churches, pastors and communities are transformed through faithful practices of ministry.

And so, let us listen to just one more story about one more faith community that is living into the call to be a Missional Church. For this church, the question raised by their pastor was “Who Is My Neighbor?” Pastor Martha chose to push this idea forward in a unique way when the opportunity was offered by the congregation themselves. Their story goes like this:

In this small community many of the people from the local congregation go to the one diner in town after their worship on Sundays. One of the church members came up with the idea of having church at the diner instead of waiting to fellowship together after the service. This seemed like a good idea because the owner of the diner, though not a member of the



church, was a friend and “neighbor” to many in the congregation. This church member approached the owner of the diner and they decided it could work. So, at the next board meeting, the idea was lifted and the decision was made to move forward with having worship outside the physical walls of the church and instead worship right there in the diner in the midst of the community. Pastor Martha was asked about how many she was expecting to attend and estimated about 20-25, preparing for that number and hoping for the best. On the day of the service, something amazing happened, beginning when Pastor Martha arrived at the diner to find someone eating breakfast there and expecting to leave before “some church folk” arrived to hold worship. In chatting with the man, Pastor Martha discovered that he was a member of another local church but hadn’t attended in a long time. She then introduced herself as the pastor of the church that was going to be holding worship at the diner and invited the gentleman to join in if he wished.

As folk began to gather, the gentleman disappeared, only to reappear during the worship, standing in the back, but listening and looking like a part of the congregation. Oh, and that congregation turned out to be more than 40, rather than the expected 20-25. Together the folk who gathered were challenged to consider their neighborhood, those sitting right there with them, and even those not physically present in that space, but certainly around them in the community, including an immigrant population in the area. Just where does one “draw the line” when considering “Who Is My Neighbor?” And the challenge was extended to consider how and where we meet our neighbors; how we offer the love of Christ; how we show our community that we care for them and love them.

Afterwards people stayed to talk to one another, worshippers and diner patrons alike – all of whom were neighbors from the community – sharing their love for good diner food and their caring and concern for one another. One of the congregants made their way to Pastor Martha and said, “This was a wonderful thing, to get outside the church walls and to really be part of our community.” Pastor Martha sees this as the hand of God at work, calling these people to a new place, a new beginning, a new expression of what faith in this small community might look like. What’s next? She says that this will be the start of thinking about how they worship and where they worship; thinking about new ways to be in their community as participants rather than disconnected observers. The church is struggling with an old building needing many repairs and maintenance. Costs of facility care, utility payments and other responsibilities of property ownership keep the church struggling financially. Pastor Martha sees this move into the community as a beginning of something that God is doing to offer a new hope, a new future for this small church.

Not only do I wish them well, but I strongly encourage them and others to continue to rethink their ideas about church. Ideas that say we gather together in this building at this time each week and we expect our worship to look like this and we want our pastor to take care of us and our church facility.

Rather might these churches be encouraged to think new thoughts, to dream new dreams?

- Might the church begin to imagine themselves differently?
- Might they begin to see themselves as God sees them: people who are called to be living examples of God’s love to their neighbors in need?

- Might they be encouraged to continue to reach out into their communities in ways that are meaningful to the folk who live there?
- Might they become so bold that they choose to always worship outside their traditional space?
- Might they become so adventurous that they try styles of worship that take them to places where folk can gather together around food, fellowship, coffee or other refreshment, finding that God is right there in the midst of them and has something of value to add to their daily lives?
- Might we say that this thing we call church is really a connectional community of God that is bold, alive and strong because all are part of the family and share in the support, love and care that will allow each member to flourish.

I believe we might if we stay connected to God and find ourselves reaching out in a spiritual of connectional spirituality to others who, just like us, have much to share as we walk through life in this world together.

To this story, the Epperlys would say “well done,” as we hear them speak of the importance of our spiritual connection with God in guiding the way we embody our life in ministry, “Our beliefs and affirmations truly do matter. They shape our responses to ordinary as well as unexpected events in ministry. Our beliefs provide the lenses through which we see God’s presence in everyday life and in moments of crisis.”<sup>90</sup> And they remind us that, “the promise of God’s presence is at the heart of faithful, creative, healthy, and life-transforming ministry. God

---

<sup>90</sup> Bruce G. Epperly and Katherine Gould Epperly, *Tending to the Holy: The Practice of the Presence of God in Ministry* (Herndon, Virginia: The Alban Institute, 2009), 183.

is present, inspiring, challenging, and comforting us in each moment of pastoral ministry. Each of the routine and necessary tasks of ministry can be a window through which we and our congregants experience God's lively, transforming presence."<sup>91</sup>

This is the testimony of some of today's small church pastors. A testimony that can serve to ignite a fire, a reawakening in our theological landscape. For a long time, pastors have felt tired, exhausted, drained of energy and spirit. As I heard the interviewed pastors speak, I heard great passion and energy and deep spirit. I heard excitement about serving churches that many pastors would not consider worthy of their time and talent. I heard joy in sharing life and love with communities that are struggling with the loss of economic viability and are seeking to find their way in a new cultural landscape that seems to have left them behind. I heard the hope of God that can turn churches into mission outposts, average worshippers into dedicated Christ followers, and communities into places where people find connection, safety, and joy in helping one another stand strong.

#### VOICES FROM TODAY'S MISSIONAL CHURCH LEND SUPPORT

When one begins to look at the ways spiritually inspired small church pastors are functioning as pastors to the geographic community in which their congregation is located, one has to consider the Missional Church Movement and some of the voices that speak about what the Missional Church looks like and how it functions in the world. According to J. Todd Billings' article in *Christianity Today*, the idea of Missional Church was first introduced broadly in 1998 by Darrell Guder in his work *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North*

---

<sup>91</sup> Bruce G. Epperly and Katherine Gould Epperly, *Tending to the Holy*, 184.

*America*.<sup>92</sup> It was about this time that the church began to realize its own need and some began to talk in terms of needing to send missionaries to the church in North America rather than sending missionaries overseas. In his work, Guder tells us that “The real issues in the current crisis of the Christian church are spiritual and theological” and not something that can be resolved through church growth methods and with problem solving skills.<sup>93</sup> He also believes that the state of our society today is one of post-Christendom moving to post-Christian, “...and in many ways, anti-Christian.”<sup>94</sup> Where he sees the shift happening is in something he calls “theocentric reconceptualization of Christian mission,”<sup>95</sup> which is exactly what these small church pastors are living out. Just as Guder suggests in his understanding of Missional Church, the pastors interviewed for this study, grounded as they are in spiritual practices and devoted to living faithful lives of discipleship, describe the ways in which they are living and leading their congregations as ways whereby they invite the people of the church to join them in a journey that is one of a missional understanding of church. A journey that begins by serving the community where the church is located and continues from there. And though much of the focus of the Missional Church movement is with this local mission mindset, I believe it is only the beginning because Jesus’ call was first local (to Jerusalem) then moving outward to other towns and cities (to Judea and Samaria), and eventually globally (and to the ends of the earth). The United Methodist Church’s connectional system is uniquely situated for smaller churches to fulfill the movement outward through various ministries and missions of which a church can

---

<sup>92</sup> J. Todd Billing, “What Makes a Church Missional.” *Christianity Today*, March 5, 2008, 56.

<sup>93</sup> Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 3.

<sup>94</sup> Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church*, 3.

<sup>95</sup> Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church*, 4.

become involved either in hands-on Volunteers-in-Mission projects (work teams that form to share in short-term hands-on ministry projects around the world) or through giving to the Advance Special (monies donated that funnel through the General Board of Ministry to projects around the world that receive grants to support their ministry).

This understanding of what it means to be the church and especially the church in mission as called by Jesus Christ means that mission is not just something the church does because it is fun or nice to do, but instead because they believe mission is "...the result of God's initiative, rooted in God's purposes to restore and heal creation."<sup>96</sup> This deep theological understanding of what it means to be the church and how the church impacts the world is important in a culture that seems to be more individualistic and self-centered than ever before. This is evident, for example, in studies that show that younger generations are less involved in church and even less likely to believe in God. It also points out the importance to those who would live as followers of Christ, that what we do, decisions we make, how we choose to live with and interact with each other and all of the world has great stakes in healing creation.

As a church begins to function with this sense of a missional understanding they then begin to serve their local area in ways that are reminiscent of the early, first Century church. Too often churches find themselves functioning as a cultural church, laden with stereotypical expectations, weighed down by its own traditions as well as the expectations of today's society. They have not yet made the move to "hold all things in common" (Acts 4:32, "All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had." ESV) but they do openly give from what they have in order to

---

<sup>96</sup> Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church*, 4.

love, support and care for their community. The people are then not only allowed but encouraged to become a radically inclusive community. Suddenly, the people in the community surrounding the church are no longer seen as the outsider or the other, but they come to be seen as sisters and brothers, as family on the same journey of life. As Guder reminds us, we can then see that “...God’s mission is calling and sending us, the church of Jesus Christ, to be a missionary church in our own societies, in the cultures in which we find ourselves.”<sup>97</sup>

If that seems to be radical and different it may be because our understanding of church is one that has come to us through the legacy of Christendom and the cultural understandings of what church should look like in the West. In our society and in many of our churches, we have become very individualistic and self-concerned. However, in these places scattered throughout the Susquehanna Conference, and I suspect throughout many denominations across the United States, “...local congregations are beginning to see their own context as their mission.”<sup>98</sup> Guder goes on to describe the challenge for churches who are choosing to live in missional ways. He states that often these churches don’t see themselves as doing something new or different, they have simply begun to live out their understanding of the call of Jesus. I believe this happens as the church’s pastor becomes more intentional about developing a deep, passionate relationship with God above all other duties of the pastoral life and then allows that to guide their leadership of the congregation. Through the interview process I found that the pastors understood what they were doing to be in direct response to their relationship with God

---

<sup>97</sup> Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church*, 5.

<sup>98</sup> Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church*, 7.

through Christ and that this is not something bold or new but rather something that is simple, and indeed quite ancient that can make life better for everyone.

If a pastor takes the transformation of his/her heart seriously, they find themselves deeply drawn into a life of transformation. Though they are a part of the culture, they see everything, including the culture in which they find themselves, as functioning under God's control. Thus, their very location, their community and all the needs within it are part of God's creation for which they are called to care. And "...because the church is incarnational, it also knows that it will always be called to express the gospel within the terms, styles, and perspectives of its social context."<sup>99</sup> This is true for many small church pastors who find themselves responding to needs within their community. And as communities find themselves challenged to survive with fewer options for improved quality of life they, too, respond to one another's needs.

I believe that the Missional Church Movement has truly begun to consider spirituality as the foundation for faith communities, regardless of size. The Missional Church Movement seems to have a deep understanding of what it means for the church to live out Christ's call to mission and ministry by being "...witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8) For these churches, their local community is their Jerusalem. As they join in activities that support mission and ministry in other parts of the United States and the world through their denominational connections, they move into the next circle and extend their reach into Judea and Samaria. For these churches, the real work begins with tangible service right in their own backyards, with the people they see in the grocery store or at the gas

---

<sup>99</sup> Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church*, 14.



station, with people who live next door or those they hear about at the Barber Shop before growing further as they reach out beyond their community.

All of us encounter people who are seeking to find meaning and purpose in their lives. Some struggle with basic needs, or some are looking for people who will talk with them, acknowledge their existence, and hear their stories. For the small church the way in which they first live out their call as a missional church is to recognize all of this within their community and then respond by caring for these tangible, present, immediate needs. Their community is the place where they find fields ripe for harvest, ripe with people who are starving to hear that they are loved by God and to feel God's love expressed by people who look at them with love and care and who are willing to not only hear about the hard places of life, but to step right into them and walk awhile.

#### HOW MIGHT WE UNDERSTAND WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED?

How do we understand what these small church pastors are telling us about their churches? Their voices ring strongly with the ideas that the way for the small church pastor to survive and thrive is found in committed, intentional connection with God and that somehow the survival and success of the small church is for them to become a vital part of the communities in which they are located. But it is also not about simple survival of the church, it is about serving the least, the lost and the lonely in the community. It is about living into Jesus' call from a sense of connectional spirituality built on a passionate and intentional relationship with God. For these pastors a small church is to be vital and alive, which only happens when they are intentionally and closely a part of the geographic community around them. They believe life will not be found within the four walls of a church building. It will not be found at the yearly revival

meeting. It will not be found sitting in a Sunday School class or small group meeting. So where is the life-giving spirit found within these small churches?

- It is found in service to their communities.
- It is found in a pastors' office in the local community center where people can just drop by to talk with the pastor or ask for prayer.
- It is found in the lightbulb changed for a lady who has never been inside the church.
- It is found on the trip to the doctor as a church member transports a community member on a shared journey for medical care.
- It is found by those Celebrating their Recovery together as they rebuild their family and share in meaningful conversation with church folk that they never knew cared about them.
- It is found in the gathering of a community around a meal together to celebrate the musical gifts of the community or a nativity set that proudly belongs to the entire community – given to them as a result of the decisions made in the local church.
- It is found in the needs and wants and struggles of community neighbors who may never financially support or attend anything the church does as a religious practice.
- It is found on the road as they walk the journey of life together, just like Jesus walked the journey of life with the folk of Nazareth, Capernaum, Bethany, and Jerusalem.

We hear the voices of these pastors every time we are willing to step outside of thinking that binds us to church budgets and buildings that require unaffordable amounts of maintenance and instead find ourselves face-to-face with those we would call lepers and sinners, the marginalized in our own communities. We find it when we look into their eyes and recognize ourselves or maybe even see the Christ we serve. We discover it when we hear their

voices as we respond to the call of mission and ministry that has come down to us from the beginning of time – a mission and ministry that is as old as Creation, given by a God who created us for relationship and stewardship.

The call to mission and ministry continues throughout Scripture and was clarified when Jesus said, “I came not to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it” (Matthew 5:17), the very Law given by God that commands us to be in love with God and in love with one another (Exodus 20:3-17).

With the coming of the Holy Spirit Jesus promised that his followers would be prepared to be his witnesses around the world, that they might witness to this truth: that to be faithful people of God means to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and our neighbors as ourselves. (Matthew 22:37-39) There is an old Hebrew saying, “Let there be such oneness between us that when one cries the other tastes salt.” This speaks to the way in which we are called to love our neighbors. These small church pastors speak about the communities around their church in the same way, as though they cannot abide the pain that others live with and if there is but one small way in which the church can meet and alleviate that pain, it must be done. Done not as a begrudging duty, nor as though doing a favor for a needy but less desirable unfortunate, but as a gift offered with gratitude and love to the One who first loved us.

I encountered an explanation of this idea in Wilhoit’s book, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, as he talked about the fact that Christians are “Formed to Serve, Formed by Serving,” meaning that “Service predisposes a person to learn.”<sup>100</sup> This was precisely the shift in

---

<sup>100</sup> James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008), 149.

attitude of those serving in mission and ministry that I found to be profoundly different than that which I had experienced often throughout my life and ministry. Service is done out of a true sense of connection driven by deep spiritual transformation, a living definition of connectional spirituality as exemplified by Christ's ministry on earth.

It seems that these small church pastors and the congregations they serve – as demonstrated by the congregation that insisted their pastor's office be in the community center and the church for whom the purchase of a nativity set could only be seen as a gift to their community – see themselves as deeply, intimately connected to their community and the needs found there. Though there is some actual biological kinship, even when there is not a biological connection the desire to serve people still overrides the typical tendency to remain uninvolved. There is much work to be done in this area of research that could prove helpful to the church as we make a transition from a modern, institutional church, to a post-modern, relational one that interestingly enough, reflects the descriptions of the early church that we read throughout the book of Acts.

Lest we think that these pastors and churches exist in and are creating some kind of unrealistic utopia, be assured this is not the case. Many of them are located within communities whose better days are behind them and they do not know what lies ahead. There are still those who live in poverty and fear. There are many of the same issues that are faced by most communities: crime, drug- and alcohol-addiction related struggles, neighbors who are unable to get along, fear of economic collapse in the face of failing or disappeared industry. But there are these churches and these people for whom a small pocket of hope has opened in their neighborhood and they continue to explore the possibilities with cautious optimism.

All that we've heard and learned is not important if we don't begin to think in different ways about the future of our greater church in general and of small membership churches in particular. It is clear as we hear the stories that there is something worth exploring and encouraging that is happening in these places. There is something that we might learn from and share with others. And it is certainly worth our time and investment to resource the pastors who serve in these small churches. It would behoove the greater church to invest time and money in the development of small church pastors in ways that would be of significant value to them, their churches and their communities.

As I have reflected on all that I've learned, a few things are clear: that church history shows us that the spirituality of clergy has always been a priority within our faith traditions; that our denominations have tried many programs in order to increase church growth with varying levels of success; that one of the best investments we can make in the small membership church is in the clergy and the growth and development of their spirituality; that small churches have a lot to share with us and with the world, if we only listen. As a result, I've come to understand it is all in vain if we simply think of this as something that is nice to know but not important enough to invest our time and energy in. I have also noticed a few things that bear more examination and research.

For further research, I suggest an exploration of the differences and similarities among the small rural church setting, the small suburban church setting and the small urban church setting. Though all would have some things in common, I suspect there would be things that are unique to each small church setting, as not all small churches are alike.

Additionally, we could learn more about how a life-giving transition might happen if one was to spend more time in the mission-focused small church like the ones I encountered in this study, working with them, living with them and developing a deeper understanding of them and the ways in which they may be a catalyst for a great awakening within the context of the greater church. My project only scratched the surface of hearing the stories of these types of churches that seem to function as true Christian neighbors to their communities. There is much more depth to be researched and much more to learn about implementation within the community.

I believe that much more could be learned and in greater depth if one was to spend time interviewing the laity of these types of congregations. Valuable information could be discovered as one finds out how and what the pastors are teaching their congregations. Talking with the laity, one could learn much about how to share the importance of spiritual vitality and how it fits into the daily life of the average person who makes deep spirituality an intentional part of their lives. It is at this point where the “rubber meets the road” in ministry, that a study should be made of the faith that drives the commitment of the laity as well as that of the pastor. Their story needs to be told.

I also wonder about the current gap between those who identify with a religious community and those who say they are “spiritual but not religious.” I wonder if the latter group is trying to express their desire to know God as One who is greater than we humans, to find a way to live out love and kindness to others, while not wanting to get entrapped in the seemingly-political and administrative tensions of organized religion. If this is the case, might not the idea of small,

truly missional churches be of greater appeal to this group? There is some indication within the literature but as this is outside of the scope of this project, I have not engaged this deeply.

As for making use of what I've discovered, those within the systems of the greater church need to begin to encourage the small congregation to see themselves as a resurrection station – a place where new life can be found in new ways; dare we say, that these “old wineskins” can provide the way for “new wines” that will hold generations of new faith communities. (Mark 2:22) In other words, can we begin to talk about small churches as a gift to the greater church, rather than a drain on the system that we're only waiting to pass away so that something new might grow from the roots?

I don't know anyone who truly welcomes the announcement that they are dying, yet the small church is aware that there are those who are just awaiting their end so that others can make use of their available resources in new ways. How can we help the small church who is property-rich but ministry poor discover within themselves the ability to be transformed into a resurrection of the church by investing themselves fully in the possibility of new life? If a small church can catch a vision of themselves as a group gathered to worship in a community center, a fire hall, a local coffee shop, or even in the homes of members, and could then sell their property and invest the money back into their community in ways that would offer Christ to those who don't yet know him, could this not be a different way of thinking about the importance of our small churches and what they bring to the denomination and the world? If the small church is understood to be the resurrection of the denomination and is treated with respect for its wisdom and capabilities, might the small church become a more willing participant in ministry that benefits the kingdom of God?

In the lives of the pastors I interviewed, this passion for the community, and the church as an integral part of it, has already begun. Because the pastors have deeply engaged practices of spirituality, they have a great heart for their local community and the needs found there. As these pastors have ministered among their congregations and have served and taught them from their own well of faith, the congregations themselves have become engaged more deeply in more direct ways with those in their community who are in need. This has led to increased awareness of the needs within the community and a particular understanding of how the neighbor is part of the beloved community of the church. And most times it has wiped out the tendency that many churches have to love their neighbor strictly to get them into a church pew. Rather, these churches are truly caring about their neighbors and the deep, life needs found within their community. They then find ways to reach out to touch their neighbors with tangible acts of love which completes the connectional spirituality circle which then continues to flow – back to spiritual connection and outward in loving, respectful and inclusive service. This often happens within the context of a meeting where someone raises the situation that have just discovered and they begin to pray and reflect on ways they have available to meet the need. In every instance, the ideas that had been raised for reaching out into the community came about in a seemingly spontaneous fashion, were taken immediately to God in prayer and, if not immediately, within a short span of time, plans were made to reach out. In addition, the service was done, not expecting to see the recipient in church next week and not resenting the ministry extended as something that was not appreciated enough. The rewards sought and received by these congregations came in the form of increased joy in the presence of the God



they served by their actions and involvement. If anything, the pastors described a kind of expectant joy that leaned into the possibility of engaging in a similar way in the future.

As I spoke with these small church pastors during their interviews, I became aware of this very deep desire to fulfill their calling by serving the community around them. Hearing story after story filled with pride, not for their church, but for the way in which their church engages the community and has a vision for justice that brings good to the community, I began to understand these pastors' calls differently. Before talking with them, I assumed that having a passionate spirituality would play out in pastors who were better able to balance their work and personal life stressors, pastors who helped their church hear Christ's call to serve those outside the church, pastors who were able to find a place of peace and quiet where they could spend time alone with God in order to be refreshed and renewed for ministry. I did find all of those things, but what was more striking is the attitude toward and depth of service that helped me to really envision what it means to be a missional church and a spiritually passionate leader. This attitude and way of serving spoke to me of the connection that these pastors described as part of their process of spiritual formation, thus the term *connectional spirituality* as something worthy of engagement and emulation.

When I heard stories of fellowship meals and concerts that weren't given *to* the community but rather were shared in fully *by* the community, I heard something that ran deeper into Pastor Debbie's soul. I heard about a serving that was done with a sense of love, respect and genuine caring for an equal – not serving that was offered to meet a need that's different from one's own.

When I heard a story from Pastor Isaiah about introducing a community to the joys of foods from another culture, the story I heard was one where the congregation and community engaged in an experience together in order to share blessings – one receiving the blessing of learning about food and culture that they had never encountered and the other having their difference not only accepted or tolerated but lifted up, celebrated and shared through a lived experience together.

When I heard a story of Pastor Hannah's church purchasing a Nativity set not just for their church, but for their community and then the community coming out in support of its dedication to share a holy moment of worship and the fellowship of a meal together, I heard the depths of the soul touched by the Christ Child whenever we come together in love, accepting each other where we are and for what we can be in the moment.

When Pastor Ellen talked about the people who drop by her office for prayer or to let her know of a need they discovered in the community and the development of multiple Celebrate Recovery groups assisting families in her community, I heard the heart of a church pastor who offers love and caring from her own place of woundedness that has been touched and healed by God. As this church serves in many ways within their community they have begun to share their own stories of brokenness with others and have found ways to invite the Presence of God into conversations naturally and without evangelistic fervor or pressure.

While I talked with these pastors, this deep sense of a spiritual connection with God became very obvious, but not overtly so in most cases. However, there were some who could not resist telling stories about their deep connection with God and how much engaging spiritual practices means to them and has brought focus to their life and ministry. Pastor Malinda is so

deeply connected that she says she doesn't really know how to share without sharing about spending time with God. She describes her vital spiritual connection this way:

“When things are very tense or difficult I don’t drop things, instead I add spiritual disciplines. For 21 years I’ve fasted every Sunday morning. It helps me feel an extra sense of God’s presence. I journal my prayers, so writing is primarily my way of praying. I just use cheap composition notebooks and I write prayers to God every day. I’ve been doing that for 19 years. On average I write 2-3 pages a day, I date it and I address it “dear God.” I feel like as I write, God reads, so I write it out! I do it 4 or 5 days a week. I’m not an organized or methodical person so my prayer might happen in the morning, or afternoon, or sometimes I’ve looked at my clock at night and said, ‘God, it’s still today!’”

Pastor Malinda credits all of what she does as being built on her foundational spiritual relationship with God, stressing, “Relationship with God is very important. Geographically we’re isolated, so God becomes even more vital for us. Whatever we’re doing as pastors so much of it’s in our heads, we need to stay in touch with God to keep our hearts tuned in. When I do that, I’m always called out to help someone else.”

Pastor Jane leads two small churches who have chosen to see themselves as one church in two locations. She says they alternate Sunday worship services – one week at one church, the next at the other – and she reports seeing the same kind of missional church attitude among them: “When you’re here and have established roots you belong as part of the community, they take care of each other. That type of connectedness and the awareness that folk have when you say someone’s a neighbor doesn’t mean they just live close to you, it means

that when they're ill you check in on them, if they have a need for food, someone shows up with a meal, or buys groceries for them and it's not organized, it happens spontaneously. I've found it comes out of the people's faith, who they see themselves to be as disciples of Christ and how they live that out." And how does that happen for a congregation? Pastor Jane says it's all about her relationship with God through Jesus as she gives us an image of her own spiritual journey:

"The work of spiritual development and vitality is like clothes drying on the line: I have some responsibility for that – I wash and hang the clothes outside – but part of it is only God's work – just like the wind and the sunshine. It is God's invitation to remember that I can rest in the loving care of God to take me wherever I need to be in my spiritual journey. There's only so much we can do, we need to do the practices, to spend time in the presence of God; there's always the temptation to think that what we're doing is important when what's important is to just be in God's presence and let God do the work."

The way she lives out her faith every day of is the greatest importance to Pastor Jane and to her life in ministry as pastor of two small congregations, "Several times throughout my life I've had to take a hard look at how I'm living out my faith life and whether or not I'm working on my relationship with God because the way I live affects others around me." This seems to be a vital link for all of the pastors I interviewed. They are fully convinced that the way they engage their relationship with God shows in the way they live. The closer, more frequent engagement, the more they are moved back out into service to others.

So, what does this say about the future of the greater church? I believe it says a lot and that there is much that these small churches nestled in tiny communities have to teach us. I believe it teaches us that the future of the wider church is intimately connected to the value placed on the small churches within it. I believe that the wider church has a need to turn its focus toward spiritual formation, both by example and by investing its resources in ministries and events that lead pastors toward deeper connection with God and help them to discover best practices to lead their churches on a journey of formation as well. I believe that the wider church has much to learn and, in many ways, will only become strong as it is able to strengthen those that are currently viewed as weakest. I believe we can all learn much from Jesus' teaching about first and last, weakness and strength (Matthew 20:16; 2 Corinthians 12:9-10). It is often the case that the way of God seems counterintuitive to that of the world; our past ideas of church growth strategies seems to be another instance of our reality not being in deep alignment with the kingdom realities of God.

#### A VISION OF AN ALTERNATIVE FUTURE FOR THE CHURCH

- 1) Small churches could be encouraged to not only move the pastor's office into a community center, but to move their worship there as well, vacating and divesting their cumbersome church buildings and investing in mission and ministry with their community. (More on this is found in number five below) This idea would seem radically difficult for many but for some it may be the radical freedom they need in order to more fully engage in ministry to their community. A number of the pastors interviewed are leaning into this kind of future for their congregation and, I suspect, the longer they are with a congregation, the more

likely it will become that they will begin to share this vision with their church. It is one model that would offer freedom from the tyranny of property ownership and management, as well as freedom from the hierarchy of religious organization as the entire system would be flattened and streamlined and would certainly look different to those outside the organization of church, offering a less imposing, authoritative appearance. The energy in small churches often is consumed by struggles to pay bills and keep the facility maintained. Either renting a community center or having small groups worshipping in homes would reduce or eliminate this and allow more energy and funding for mission and ministry. This seems to be the intentional direction in which some of the pastors interviewed are moving. However, in order for this to become an attractive model, work would need to be done to assist people in working through their connections to buildings and traditions in order to begin to be able to discuss the option of relinquishing their buildings and property.

- 2) A more first-century church model with small groups worshipping in homes or community centers, served by lay ministers with a supervising elder who would do the administrative tasks, freeing the small church pastor to lead and inspire ministry and mission within their community. In the United Methodist tradition this may look much like the early organization of the Circuit Rider. This would assist with the shortage of pastors that the United Methodist Church and many denominations face today. Possibly an even greater challenge at this point would be for the denominations themselves to take a hard look at the administrative

requirements for pastors. We live in a world where we collect and compare statistics and manipulate data in order to justify many things. Maybe the work of a missional church does not need the same kinds of justification; maybe the justification of spiritual formation and serving is enough. Maybe the entire structure of organized religion as we currently know it needs a new vision of what it means to be the church in mission and ministry.

- 3) In a time when there are fewer people answering the call to Ordained ministry, the ideas learned here could help the wider denomination fill the need for spiritual leadership of the church. In a system where the most important part of leadership is first and foremost spiritual formation, an entire congregation being led by a passionately spiritual pastor could be mobilized for ministry within their community much more quickly if they were smaller in number. Ministry is not done by committee after board approval, but it is raised within the congregation as a need and those who have the gifts, time and resources to meet the need do so. This is not to negate the importance of education and training for pastoral leaders. However, taking a hard look at what we require of clergy leaders and crafting new ways of meeting those requirements is vital for denominations, seminaries and church boards and agencies.
- 4) In order to equip pastors to lead small churches from a deep spiritual center, the pastor has to be given the resourcing, especially of time, in order to expand their spiritual relationship with God. This would mean that the pastor could not be a counselor, a facility manager, an administrator, and the church's office staff. This

would also mean that the pastor's first role and responsibility is to connect with God in order to be the spirit person equipped to lead and guide their congregation.

In addition, there is a need for spiritual formation resources that are easily and readily available. (Resources that could begin with something as simple as those suggested in Appendix A of this project) Encouragement to engage a Spiritual Director should also be given, not in a punitive way or as a perceived punishment but as a positive and important resource for a pastor to engage. This positive encouragement could come in the form of partial reimbursement for sessions with a director or just in the value placed on the time set aside for such a relationship. This also means that laity would need to be resourced in ways that would allow them to assume some of the duties of church organization and leadership. This could open new avenues of discipleship for folk who have not been encouraged to use their gifts and graces in ministry, allowing more people to offer service to their church and community.

- 5) The whole idea of needing church structures – buildings, parking lots, grounds, etc. – may be more a construct of modernity than any true need of the church. The mission and ministry of the church does not happen within structures, but outside of them, as seen over and over in the pastoral interviews done for this study. In a time when there are numerous buildings that are not used every day of the week, space sharing may be a much better option for a church. Or maybe church sharing – a church that supports multiple church denominations or small



churches within its organizational structure: several denominations sharing the structure and resourcing; the church sharing its space with other groups throughout the week, all of whom contribute to the costs of maintenance and upkeep. Or, as mentioned above, maybe the time has come to abandon the modern model of church and return to the model of the early church or create a new community model.

#### AREAS TO BE CONSIDERED AND EXPLORED

- 1) Doing a similar study with interviews of the lay folk who are involved in these congregations to hear the story of their church and community in their voices.
- 2) Doing a study with pastors of larger churches or more suburban congregations. Though I interviewed a few suburban pastors, the sampling was not large enough to develop a good basis for the ministry that is happening within this group. I did encounter a somewhat different attitude toward ministry within their communities than I did with the small, rural church pastors. These small, suburban church pastors shared with me more of what I had been expecting to hear, making me wonder if there is also not something to be learned about the ethos of small churches in a different type of setting.
- 3) How does the type of community effect the ability for a church and/or pastor to really develop a connectional spirituality? (Rural vs. Suburban vs. Urban) Each of these communities would experience connectional spirituality differently, depending on their cultural setting. This would also be true for different ethnic

groups as well as different age levels. All would have something to add to a discussion of connectional spirituality.

- 4) A closer study should be made of connectional or participatory spirituality in order to explore the ways that these spiritualities might inform a religious body with the outcome being a stronger, more vital faith community that truly loves their neighbors as themselves. As noted in the current study the way that the church relates to the community in which it is located is almost a secondary type of kinship. This would lend itself to not only theological study, but to family systems theory and psychological interest as well.
- 5) A study of the idea presented by the Missional Church Movement that God is waiting on the church to join in the healing and restoration of creation. This would make an interesting and helpful theological study if we were to consider what this might mean in terms of how the church of the future may preach and teach a very different way of relating to creation, each other and our understanding of God and humanity's place within the work of faith.
- 6) An interesting study could be undertaken about the character of clergy who deeply engage spiritual practice. In my reading I encountered much about the ways that folk are led to live when choosing a deeply spiritual life. Characteristics like having a good reputation for being honest and a person of integrity, demonstrating generosity of spirit, providing gracious and open hospitality, maintaining a calm demeanor in the face of difficulty, striving to live with a sense of financial integrity, striving for moderation in all areas of life, living – as much

as possible – in right relationships with others. A study of these virtues could be very interesting, particularly in these times when it seems that much of society is transitioning to new understandings of these types of values and socialization skills.

- 7) In three to five years a study of East Canton United Methodist Church could be helpful in understanding the impact of the Missional Church Movement in a congregation that had experienced success during the Church Growth Movement and then a decline. This congregation remained strong and faithful, despite a significant decline in membership between 2000 and 2016. The congregation is now being served by one of the pastors identified and surveyed for this study as one with a vital spiritual life and the ability and desire to equip a church for deep spiritual transformation which leads to connectional spirituality. Though I have included some of her very early ideas and thoughts, a study of this congregation and what occurs in the next years could be enlightening.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### Interview Questions for Small Church Pastors:

Interviews of 15 small church pastors from the Altoona, Williamsport, and York Districts of Susquehanna Conference of The United Methodist Church:

- 1) Tell me about a time in your life or ministry when you experienced a deep spiritual inner shift and growth.
- 2) How does God play a role in making it through challenging times in your ministry?
- 3) Tell me about the last time you encountered God.
- 4) What draws you to church?
- 5) A ministerial colleague of mine once said of spiritual formation, “I feel like a Salesman trying to sell something I don’t use.” Can you imagine that being true?
- 6) If you were given the unrestricted time you need to tend to your soul, what would you do with the time?

## Appendix B

### CONSENT FORM

#### Doctor of Ministry – Major Project Lancaster Theological Seminary

Hello, I am a student in the Doctor of Ministry Program. I am conducting interviews for my dissertation project. My project involves gathering information on the importance of sustaining a spiritual life, especially for small church pastors.

Your participation is voluntary. Should you choose to take part in this project, you are encouraged to respond freely and openly. There are no “right” answers except the ones you offer. You may stop the interview at any time, without penalty. I will be compiling this information for use only as part of my doctoral project and will not share this data with a third party.

I will be taking notes on our conversation and recording it with an audio recording device. Regardless, whatever you say will be kept confidential. Your real name will not be used in my reporting on this project and actual voice recordings will not be used in class. All voice data and any hand-written notes will be kept either in a password protected computer or in a locked file in my home office. At the conclusion of my project preparation, all recordings and notes will be destroyed by me. You are asked to sign this consent form in duplicate, one copy to be retained by me and one copy is for your own use.

There are no direct benefits for those who participate in this project. And there are not foreseeable risks or discomfort resulting from your participation.

Should you have questions, comments, or concerns of any kind, you can contact me personally at 717-968-4847 or by email at [knelson@lancasterseminary.edu](mailto:knelson@lancasterseminary.edu). You may also contact my project supervisor, Rev. Dr. Marty Kuchma at [mkuchma@lancasterseminary.edu](mailto:mkuchma@lancasterseminary.edu) or by phone at 410-596-3590 or the Chair of the Doctor of Ministry Committee, Dr. Anne Thayer at [athayer@lancasterseminary.edu](mailto:athayer@lancasterseminary.edu) or 717-290-8721.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Franklin & Marshall Institutional Review Board. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may also be addressed to Marcus Thomsen, PhD, Office of the Provost, 102C, Old Main or by phone at (717-358-4283) or email ([mthomsen@fandm.edu](mailto:mthomsen@fandm.edu)).

Thank you for assisting me with this study.

Signature:

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

The following email was sent to the pastors chosen for project interviews to introduce myself, explain about the project and invite them to be part of the interview pool. Each email was address to the specific pastor to whom it was sent. Note that at this point my focus was specifically on the spirituality and practices of these pastors. It was the result of the interviews themselves that shifted the focus as I found something beyond my initial assumptions.

Hi,

My name is Kathy Harvey Nelson. I'm an Elder in Susquehanna Conference and am working on my Doctoral work at Lancaster Theological Seminary. I have been in conversation with your District Superintendent and you have been recommended by her as someone who might be willing to spend about 45-an hour of time with me completing an interview which I will be voice recording to use with my project.

My project is called, "You Can Do It: Sustaining Vital Spirituality of the Small Church Pastor." I am interested in interviewing small church pastors (serving congregations with 50 or fewer in worship attendance) who are currently sustaining an active spiritual life. You have been identified by your District Superintendent as someone who is doing just that! The goal of my project is to prove that it can be done because there are folk out there, like you, who are; and to create a resource that might help others develop practices that would encourage them to do the same. I believe that the life and health of our denomination in general and the churches we serve in particular, depend on it. Not to mention, our own fullness of life!

If you could reply to this email, indicating your willingness or inability to share about an hour of your time with me, I would appreciate it. After that, I will send you another email to set up a time when I will be in your area conducting interviews. I'm hoping to be in your district August 22-23 or August 29-31.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to meeting you and hearing your story. I've been told you are an inspiration and we can never have too few of those!

Blessings on your Ministry!  
Kathy

## Appendix D

### SUGGESTIONS FOR BEGINNING SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

*Lectio Divina*: The art and practice of reading the scriptures in order to be transformed by the Holy Spirit, or as stated by Christopher A. Beegley, “One way of defining the spiritual interpretation of Scripture is as that sort of reading that provides for transformation and growth in Christ by the power of the Spirit. It was this kind of reading that was discerned and practiced, with plenty of variation and idiosyncrasies, throughout the early church.”<sup>101</sup> *Lectio* asks the practitioner to select just a few verses of scripture – no more than 10, preferably less – read the text slowly and attentively three times (once aloud), listen for a word or phrase that seems to draw the attention; spend some time after reading in silent contemplation of the word or phrase that drew attention; respond to God with prayer, journaling or some type of thanksgiving. The object of this kind of scriptural reading is to draw closer to the deeper meaning found within the text – a meaning that may have significance and application for the reader on a profound level. “The progress that one makes through the study of scripture cannot be measured by how much one reads or even knows by heart, because it is not the words themselves that ultimately matter, but how deeply one perceives their meaning in the core of one’s being.”<sup>102</sup> It is this that ultimately allows God to mold and shape our lives that we become the person we were meant to be, finding the meaning and purpose of our live and the work that will bring us joy and fulfillment.

---

<sup>101</sup> Christopher A. Beeley, *Leading God’s People: Wisdom from the Early Church for Today* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 83.

<sup>102</sup> Christopher A. Beeley, *Leading God’s People*, 86.

*Devotional Reading:* This practice is most often combined with scripture reading. A selected devotional will offer a scripture reading for the day and some thoughts, poetry, or insight that flows from the reading. It may also offer some writing prompts for journaling or thoughtful contemplation. As with the practice of scriptural reading, one is seeking to reach a deeper level of understanding of what the text is trying to say in the moment in order to draw closer to God and be transformed in their daily living. One caution with devotional reading is to remain open to what God might be saying to *you* through the scripture text; it is easy to be drawn into the devotional reading and interpretation of the text, which is fine, but may not be what God wants to say to you that day.

*Journaling:* This practice is often used in conjunction with other practices as a response to what one has encountered. Journaling can be done in a stream-of-consciousness style (writing in a constant movement noting anything that comes into your mind, never stopping the movement of the pen, until you have filled a certain number of pages – no fewer than two). Or one might journal specific thoughts, ideas, or prayers that arose during contemplation of scripture, devotional reading, or a life situation. The pastors reported various uses for their journals with some rereading past entries, while others chose to never revisit them again, some even destroying the journal in a sacred ritual every year.

*Prayer Walking:* A Prayer Walk can be done by a lake or shore, in a meadow, through a wood, in a labyrinth, or on a treadmill. When one walks, they carry with them a thought or idea that has come to them from a time of Lectio or Devotional Reading. They may pray as they walk or just remain open to God, holding the thought gently in their mind. Others walk to observe



what God has to say to them through the scenery of their travels; one pastor walked through the community in order to pray for it and to focus on specific needs of which she was aware.

*Imagery and Prayer:* For some who contemplate scripture, they find it enlightening to allow their imaginations to guide their prayers. Images from life situations or embodying the scriptures by assuming a role of one of the characters are two of the most common ways of using imagination to allow the Holy Spirit to speak. Some call this the movie method of meditation because you enter into the scene of scripture and play it out as though you were watching it. The goal of this type of meditation is to enter the scene of scripture in order to more fully embody it and allow it to speak to you on every level of your being. You place yourself in the text in order to more carefully observe the action, to feel more deeply the responses of the character you are imagining for yourself, to participate more fully in the scene playing out in the text.

Though we don't often use this form of meditation, the idea is certainly supported by tradition and our reading of the life of Jesus. When we consider the Jewish practice of Passover, we are seeing a group of people who have remembered the great salvific act of God by reenacting it over and over again, in a sense by embodying the text. If we closely listen to the many parables of Jesus, he often encourages people to use their imagination when explaining the kingdom of God, choosing to liken it to yeast, a light, buried treasure, or a precious pearl, to name a few examples.

Most important when choosing this form of mediation is to have some background knowledge of the scripture text you are engaging. It is best if you know some historical and cultural background as well as have a theological understanding of the story. This allows us to

let our imaginations run but to also be true to the text and its message as interpreted over time, though we sometimes find that our imagination opens new understandings and avenues through which the Spirit speaks a new word for us.

The great gift of this type of mediation is that it engages our entire being. We find ourselves encounter the text with all of our senses as we try to imagine what people were seeing, smelling, tasting, touching and what they might have heard. This allows us to most deeply open ourselves to the experience and thus to God.

When engaging the imagination in this way, the practitioner usually closes the time with a silent prayer of thanks and journaling anything that has come to light during the imaginative time.

*Fasting:* This practice is considered to be a practice of submission. When using fasting as a discipline, one uses the time normally involved with food preparation and consumption to be set aside in some way for time with God. This is often a time when the participant engages in Lectio or another form of scripture meditation, longer journaling, walking, worship, rest, or service. Whatever is chosen as practice is done while focusing on the presence of God and prayer.

Food fasts can be undertaken in many ways and should always be entered into with first consideration given to health and the very practical physical needs each of us may have. When beginning a practice of fasting, one should begin with a short-term time of fasting – four hours is often a good beginning. As you engage the practice of fasting over a period of time you can increase the number of hours, eventually fasting for at least twenty-four hours, sometimes a bit

more. During these types of longer fasting, water should be used for regular hydration and longer fasts should not be considered before consulting with a physician.

In addition to fasting from food, there are many other types of fasts that can be engaged. One can choose to fast from media – all computers, radio, TV – electronics in any form can be given up for a prescribed period of time during which the focus can be given over to scripture or devotional reading, spending time with family, friends, or in service to others, or engaging other spiritual practices. Whatever has a hold over you can be given over to fasting in order to break its hold and submit that part of your life more fully to God.

*Sabbath:* Sabbath time is a foundational principle based on the earliest biblical story where we find God resting or taking Sabbath after the completion of Creation (Genesis 2:2-3). In Exodus 16: 23, 26 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15, God gives the command that Sabbath be a day of holiness and rest, making it integral to the Jewish faith with whom Christianity shares its roots. In order to participate in Sabbath renewal, one must set aside time for worship and rest. Debora Jackson, in her writing to assist pastoral leaders, notes the sweeping importance of Sabbath rest as she states, “through the blessing of time, Sabbath becomes God’s desire for humanity. Sabbath is a means to assure fruitfulness, prosperity and the like. In return, by observing the blessed Sabbath, humanity takes time apart, and through worship, we express our gratefulness to God.”<sup>103</sup> Yet so often it is difficult for pastors to find time for Sabbath. For the pastors who were interviewed, this was imperative. They celebrated Sabbath in many different ways. Sabbath could be anything that was refreshing to their spirits and honoring of

---

<sup>103</sup> Debora Jackson, *Spiritual Practices for Effective Leadership: 7Rs of Sanctuary for Pastors* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2015), 28.

the God they love. This seems to be in keeping with Jesus' insistence that Sabbath should not be something legalistic, another task to accomplish or rule to follow but should rather be a time of joy and celebration of rest and refreshment. The pastors also spent their Sabbath time in small blocks of frequent time during the week, for instance, a few of the pastors engaged in two to three hours of Sabbath time three times per week; a few engaged their Sabbath in a larger block, setting aside two full days per month for complete Sabbath rest. This also seems to be more in keeping with a Jesus style of Sabbath. As noted by Jackson, "Jesus elevated the notion of taking time apart to extend beyond the seventh day Sabbath observation. Jesus did not wait for the Sabbath to observe time apart. He demonstrated the idea of a daily sabbath, where time apart was intentionally sought and regularly observed during the course of the day and night." <sup>104</sup>

As a Spiritual Director who works with small church pastors who often struggle with time commitments when wanting to engage spiritual practices, it is vital that we prioritize practices that place us before God and open us to new ways of leading and serving within our congregation and community settings. It is really the practice of Sabbath that refocuses our energies and redefines who we are and how we engage others and the world around us. As we move away from the constant demands of life, we are able to return with a new perspective, focus and energy as we re-engage the tasks before us.

*Solitude, Silence and Retreats:* Most of the pastors interviewed sighted the importance of retreat time. They all chose a place away from their regular space in order to be in silence before God. The time may have been an hour, a half-day, a full-day, or in some cases

---

<sup>104</sup> Debora Jackson, *Spiritual Practices for Effective Leadership*, 31.

three- to five-days, with one pastor taking a week-long retreat for solitude and silence every three years. The length of time was not the key, the key was intentionally committing some time to solitude and silence.

The activities that were part of this time were often reading scripture or other devotional reading, prayer, journaling, walking, and meditation. Often a period of rest preceded any other practice that was engaged. This seemed to be both important and necessary as often the pastors came to this time exhausted and drained from their very busy lives. They reported that they were not able to focus on anything before they took time to allow for physical rest. Afterwards they were more able to focus and bring their attention to becoming aware of God's presence with them.

This practice of regular silence, solitude and retreat is one that, in my experience as a spiritual director, many clergy do not engage. The reason is always the lack of time available because often we have taught pastors that the only appropriate Sabbath is one that lasts twenty-four hours and focuses on deep prayer and meditation. We often forget to mention that rest is one of the foundational understandings of Sabbath and as such is important to one who has spent all of their energy and finds themselves physically as well as spiritually depleted. Thus, we set up something that should be refreshing and a time of refocusing as something that cannot be accomplished well by a pastor who feels guilty for falling asleep during their sabbath time.

### Bibliography:

Barton, Ruth Haley. *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation*. Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2006.

--- *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*. Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2008.

Bass, Diana Butler. *Christianity for the Rest of Us: How the Neighborhood Church is Transforming the Faith*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2006.

Beeley, Christopher A. *Leading God's People: Wisdom from the Early Church for Today*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012.

Billings, J. Todd. "What Makes a Church Missional." *Christianity Today*, March 5, 2008.

Bondi, Roberta C. *Night on the Flint River: An Accidental Journey in Knowing God*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999.

--- *Memories of God: Theological Reflections of a Life*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995.

--- *To Love as God Loves: Conversations with the Early Church*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.

Borden, Paul D. *Hit the Bullseye: How Denominations Can Aim the Congregation at the Mission Field*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003.

--- *Direct Hit: Aiming Real Leaders at the Mission Field*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006.

--- *Make or Break Your Church in 365 Days: A Daily Guide to Leading Effective Change*. Abingdon Press, 2012.

Breen, Mike and Walt Kallestad. *The Passionate Church*. Colorado Springs, Colorado: NexGen, 2005.

Cushman, James E. *Beyond Survival: Revitalizing the Small Church*. Parsons, West Virginia: McClain Printing Company, 1981.

Chilcote, Paul W. and Lacey C. Warner. *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church*. Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008,

Dawn, Marva J. *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: ceasing, resting, embracing, feasting*. Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989.

--- *The Sense of the Call: A Sabbath Way of Life For Those Who Serve God, The Church, And The World*. Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006.

Dupre', Louis and Don E. Saliers, eds. *Christian Spirituality III: Post-Reformation and Modern*. New York: Crossroad, 1989.

Easum, Bill. *Leadership on the Other Side: No Rules, Just Clues*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000.

--- *Put on Your Own Oxygen Mask First*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004.

--- *Second Resurrection: Leading Your Congregation to New Life*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007.

Elkington, Robert. *Missional Imagination: Revisioning the Church in the West*. Hamburg: Anchor, 2014. *eBook Collection*, EBSCOhost (accessed July 4, 2018).

Epperly, Bruce G. & Katherine Gould Epperly. *Tending to the Holy: The Practice of the Presence of God in Ministry*. Herndon, Virginia: The Alban Institute, 2009.

Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998.

Guder, Darrell L., Editor. *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*. Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998.

Heitzenrater, Richard P. *The Poor and the People Called Methodists, 1729-1999*. Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 2002.

Jackson, Debora. *Spiritual Practices for Effective Leadership: 7 Rs of Sanctuary for Pastors*.

Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2015.

*Journal of The Susquehanna Conference of the United Methodist Church*, 2015. CD-ROM.

Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania: Susquehanna Conference Media Center, 2015.

Kemp, Bill. *Holy Places, Small Spaces: A Hopeful Future for the Small Membership Church*.

Nashville :Discipleship Resources, 2005.

Malphurs, Aubrey and Will Mancini. *Building Leaders: Blueprints for Developing Leadership at Every Level of Your Church*. Michigan: Baker Books, 2004.

Maxwell, John C. *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People will Follow You*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998.

McConnell, William T. *Renew Your Congregation: Healing the Sick, Raising the Dead*. St. St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2007.

McGinn, Bernard and John Meyendorff, eds. *Christian Spirituality I: Origins to the Twelfth Century*. New York: Crossroad, 1985.

McIntosh, Gary L. and R. Daniel Reeves. *Thriving Churches in the Twenty-first Century: 10 Life-Giving Systems for Vibrant Ministry*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 2006.

McNeal, Reggie. *Practicing Greatness: 7 Disciplines of Extraordinary Spiritual Leaders*. California: Jossey-Bass, 2006.

Muller, Wayne. *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in our Busy Lives*. New York: Bantam Books, 1999.

Nouwen, Henri. *Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith*. San Francisco, California: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006.



Olson, Mark A. *Moving Beyond Church Growth: An Alternative Vision for Congregations*.

Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002.

Pew Research Study, Religion and Public Life. "Young Adults Around the World are Less

Religious by Several Measures." <http://www.pewforum.org/2018/06/13/young-adults-around-the-world-are-less-religious-by-several-measures/> (Accessed January 16,2019).

Quinn, Robert E. *Deep Change: Discovering the Leader Within*. California: Jossey-Bass, 1996.

Roxburgh Alan J. *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006.

Sevier, Melissa Bane. *Journeying Toward Renewal: a Spiritual Companion for Pastoral Sabbaticals*. Bethesda, Maryland: The Alban Institute, 2002.

Silf, Margaret. *Inner Compass: An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality*. Chicago, Illinois: Loyola Press, 1999.

Raitt, Jill, ed. *Christian Spirituality II: High Middle Ages and Reformation*. New York: Crossroad, 1987.

Taylor, Barbara Brown. *Leaving Church: A Memoir of Faith*. San Francisco, Harper Collins, 2006.

Thompson, Marjorie J. *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014.

Twenge, Jean M. "The Decline in Religion Comes Home." Psychology Today on line.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/our-changing-culture/201603/the-decline-in-religion-comes-home> (Accessed January 14, 2019).

Weems, Renita J. *Listening for God: A minister's Journey Through Silence and Doubt*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999.

Wilhoit, James C. *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008.

Witt, Lance. *Replenish: Leading From a Healthy Soul*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: 2011.

Wicks, Robert J. *After 50 – Spiritually Embracing Your Own Wisdom Years*. New York: Paulist Press, 1997.

--- *Handbook of Spirituality for Ministers, Vol 2* . New York: Paulist Press, 1995-2000.

Woolever, Cynthia. "Small is Big Again: Reclaiming Small Church Ministry." *The Parish Paper* Volume 25, Number 4, 2017.

Wuellner, Flora Slosson. *Feed My Shepherds*. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1998.

Yamasaki, April. *Sacred Pauses: Spiritual Practices for Personal Renewal*. Kitchener, Ontario: Herald Press, 2013.