

NAZARENE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

WORSHIP AND WORLD:  
FORMING THE CHURCH FOR FAITHFUL MISSION

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## EPIGRAPH

“Our service has ended. Now may our service begin. Let us go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Amen.”

-Benediction heard at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments .....	i
Epigraph .....	ii
List of Figures .....	v
Abstract .....	vi
The World Has Changed .....	1
<i>Introduction</i>	
<i>Christ Church Anglican</i>	
<i>Conclusion</i>	
Research and Literature Review .....	14
<i>Introduction</i>	
<i>Post-Christendom and the Missional Church</i>	
<i>Worship in the Missional Church</i>	
<i>Spiritual Formation, Practices, and Congregational Culture</i>	
<i>Models and Congregational Sketches</i>	
<i>Conclusion</i>	
Bridging Worship and World .....	87
<i>Introduction</i>	
<i>Forming the Church for Mission</i>	
<i>Potential Paths</i>	
<i>Building a Bridge</i>	
<i>Conclusion</i>	
Extending the Table: Becoming a Church for Others .....	95
<i>Introduction</i>	
<i>Proposed Artifact</i>	
<i>Standards of Publication</i>	
<i>Conclusion</i>	
Conclusion .....	103
<i>Artifact Development</i>	
<i>Considerations for Future Study</i>	
<i>Conclusion</i>	



Bibliography .....	110
APPENDIX A - Bring Life to Others Campaign Brochure .....	119
APPENDIX B – Christ Church Values Document .....	120
APPENDIX C – The Values and Structure of C4SO .....	121
APPENDIX D – Artifact - Extending the Table: Becoming a Church for Others ....	122

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 – Key Johnson County Statistics (2009-2019) . . . . .	6
Figure 2 - Selected Results from May 2019 Feasibility Study . . . . .	7
Figure 3 - Christ Church Anglican Average Annual Worship Attendance . . . . .	10
Figure 4 - Types of Christ Church Attendees . . . . .	11
Figure 5 - Pew Research Center Religious Landscape Study Update . . . . .	15
Figure 6 - Six Elements of the Cultural Web . . . . .	71
Figure 7 – The BELLS Model . . . . .	75
Figure 8 – The Three Circles . . . . .	79
Figure 9 - Extending the Table Sermon Series Weekly Themes . . . . .	97

## ABSTRACT

Jason P. Veach

### Worship and World: Forming the Church for Faithful Mission

Christ Church is a sixty-one-year-old parish with a rich history of worship in the Anglican tradition. Like many established congregations in North America, the church is discerning how to faithfully minister in a rapidly changing, post-Christian culture. As it seeks to engage an increasingly secular context, leaders know that unless the culture of the congregation is oriented around outward-focused habits and practices, the church risks becoming inward-focused and facing decline. Starting and maintaining outreach programming has an important place but ultimately, these efforts must flow from a deep sense of identity that is grounded in God's mission. How can the church draw from its rich theology and practices of worship to help cultivate a culture of mission and hospitable witness among its post-Christian neighbors? Drawing from an exploration of missional theology, liturgical theology, and spiritual formation, this dissertation examines how the church's liturgical practices, when rooted in the *missio Dei*, may serve to help cultivate a mission-focused culture within the church. The project which results seeks to bridge the church's practices of worship with its witness to the world.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE WORLD HAS CHANGED

#### **Introduction**

Pastors feel it. The people in the pews know it. There is a vast difference between the highly churched culture in which many North American congregations were birthed and the increasingly secular context in which they now live. Though they continue to gather for worship on Sunday, many churches find themselves on Monday trying to minister in and to a world which no longer exists. The result among many pastors and leaders is disorientation, frustration, or even despair.<sup>1</sup> The dizzying effects of a global pandemic have only amplified the church's collective anxiety.

In order to minister faithfully in a post-Christian culture, the church in North America knows it must adopt different postures and practices. But this effort is often compelled by institutional anxiety rather than deep theological reflection. While launching new ministry initiatives or adjustments to worship style may play a part, these changes do not address the deeper missiological and ecclesiological questions that must be addressed. To engage a changing world, the church must find ways to shape its culture and form the hearts and habits of its people so that they are both motivated and equipped to engage in God's mission in the rhythms of their everyday lives. This study explores how the church's theology and practice of worship may play a vital role in that task. The context in which this issue will be examined is Christ Church Anglican.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Root, *The Pastor in a Secular Age: Ministry to People Who No Longer Need a God*, Ministry in a Secular Age, Volume 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2019), 5. Root points to the uneasy feeling many pastors have in the face of increasing secularization and pluralization as a "vocational nausea.".

## Christ Church Anglican

Christ Church is a sixty-one-year-old parish with congregations in Overland Park and Mission, Kansas. The “parent” congregation is located in Overland Park, a suburb thirteen miles south of downtown Kansas City, Missouri. Christ Church has a rich tradition of worship in the Anglican tradition. Like many well-established communities of faith, the church is wrestling with how to minister in a world that has changed. Christ Church is seeking to implement strategies that will help it reach out and engage its community in hospitable witness. In order to support and implement these strategies, church leaders know that the habits and culture of the church must be shaped around mission and outreach.

### Threats to Mission

Christ Church was originally formed as a congregation in the Episcopal Church. It remained Episcopalian until the congregation voted in the mid-2000s to exit the denomination. Christ Church’s withdrawal occurred as a larger exodus of congregations from the Episcopal Church was taking place.<sup>2</sup> These departures were driven mostly by conflicts regarding some Episcopal leaders’ lack of adherence to orthodox Christian doctrines and disagreement around issues of human sexuality. After briefly falling under the jurisdiction of the Anglican Mission in America, Christ Church eventually realigned itself within the Anglican Church in North America under the leadership of the Rt. Rev. Dr. Todd Hunter, bishop of the newly formed Diocese of Churches for the Sake of

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<sup>2</sup> Erin Roach, “Episcopal Church Left Historic Christianity, Conservatives Say,” *Baptist Press* (Nashville), January 18, 2007, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/episcopal-church-left-historic-christianity-conservatives-say>. Notable is the exit of The Falls Church, a large and historic Episcopal parish in Virginia.

Others. The exit from the Episcopal Church was already in process when the Rev. Patrick Wildman became senior pastor in 2007.

The transition from one denomination to another was painful and disruptive on many levels. After the vote to exit the Episcopal Church, some Christ Church members left while individuals from other area Episcopal congregations actually migrated to Christ Church, drawn by what they perceived to be Christ Church's steadfast embrace of Christian orthodoxy. In order to avoid a legal battle, Christ Church eventually made the costly but necessary decision to purchase its facility from the Episcopal diocese to which it had previously belonged.

In addition to financial strain during these events, there was a significant emotional and spiritual toll. The church's ability to evangelize was stunted as it wrestled with maintaining peace and equilibrium amidst internal and denominational conflict. The temptation to lose focus on outreach and hospitality, qualities that had previously marked the church's ministry, was strong. According to Rev. Wildman, the effects of this season of the church's life continue to affect some members who were part of the church during this period of time. It is currently expressed in a hesitancy among some to actively welcome new people and embrace some of the changes the church's leadership believe are needed. The lingering effects of the events surrounding the denominational realignment just a few years ago has necessitated renewed efforts to orient the church away from inward-focused conflict and toward outward-focused mission and hospitality.

### Renewed Hope

Despite the turmoil that accompanied this major transition, the church has made progress. It has managed to pay off debt, rebuild staff morale, and revive some ministries.

Under Rev. Wildman's leadership, the church experienced much-needed spiritual, emotional, and financial stability, with a desire to return to the missional posture the church had embraced before the realignment. The mission and values of the church were eventually rearticulated using fresh, relatable language aimed at defining faithful discipleship.

These initiatives culminated with Christ Church planting a new congregation in 2016 in the city of Mission, Kansas. In addition to financial support, Christ Church Overland Park committed approximately eighty-five people to help launch the new work. The Rev. Dean Behrens, who had previously been a member of the church's staff, serves as the lead pastor at Christ Church Mission. The birth of the new church has brought much excitement for participants of the new ministry. For those within the sponsoring Overland Park "parent" congregation, the response has been generous financial and spiritual support, along with renewed energy. However, there has also been some grief expressed within the parent congregation as the sending of a substantial number of people to the new work has resulted in the loss or change of key relationships. This sense of institutional loss, which often operates under the surface, underscores the need for renewed emphasis on mission and outward-focused ministry.

#### Opportunities on the Horizon

As the church moves into the future, there are opportunities on the horizon which may be enhanced by a focus on missional formation. The church's implementation of the Alpha Course with its emphasis on the importance of hospitality has continued to be a

meaningful evangelistic strategy for the church.<sup>3</sup> A well-attended all-church Alpha Course and first ever all-church retreat in the fall of 2019 has helped encourage the church towards an outward focus. The church's ability to provide a strong missiological rationale for Alpha and an imagination for how it may intentionally intersect with those outside the church will be integral for its future ministry.

Christ Church's small group ministry (Life Groups) has been a central strategy of discipleship and ongoing connection. The relational nature of the groups enables them to become natural environments for ongoing formation in ways that can bridge corporate worship with participants' lived experience. Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Life Group ministry at Christ Church remains strong as over 50% of regular attenders participated in a Life Group in the fall of 2020.

A study of the demographics of Johnson County, Kansas, where both Christ Church congregations are located, also reveals significant opportunities for missional ministry. Pew Research reveals that the state of Kansas has become less religious, signaling a need for more missional ministries.<sup>4</sup> Johnson County has experienced significant growth over the past decade. Census data reveals a steady increase in population and economic development (Figure 1). It also shows a slow but steady

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<sup>3</sup> "About Alpha," Alpha International, accessed October 24, 2020, <https://www.alpha.org/about/>. The Alpha Course was started in 1977 at Holy Trinity Brompton in London, England. The course is a 10-week experience designed to invite people to learn more about the claims of Christianity in a non-threatening environment centered around a meal, a brief presentation, and dialogue. The course has been used cross-denominationally in over 100 countries and in over 100 languages. Christ Church has offered the Alpha Course for more than twenty-three years.

<sup>4</sup> Pew Research Center, "Religious Landscape Study: Adults in Kansas," accessed February 13, 2021, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/state/kansas>.



increase in diversity with just over 15% of the population in 2019 identifying as non-white.

Category	2010	2019	Percentage (%) Change
Population	544,179	602,401	+10.7
Race: Non-White	10.2%	15.2%	+5
Housing Units	226,874	248,504	+9.5
Number of Families	141,601	158,981	+12.3
Median Household Income (2019 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars)	\$71,008	\$91,771	+29.2

*Figure 1 – Key Johnson County, Kansas Statistics (2010 – 2019)<sup>5</sup>*

While these statistics do not reveal exactly how the church should reach out in mission, it indicates that the surrounding community is experiencing patterns of consistent growth. Community needs and new opportunities for ministry will continue to present themselves as neighborhoods surrounding the church and in the metropolitan area continue to develop. In order for the church to be responsive to its ever-changing community, the church must have its eyes and ears open, ready to discern where God is calling it to respond. Brainstorming sessions in late 2019 and 2020 among staff and parish council have helped the church begin the process of discernment on how it may choose to intentionally reach out to the community in the months and years ahead.

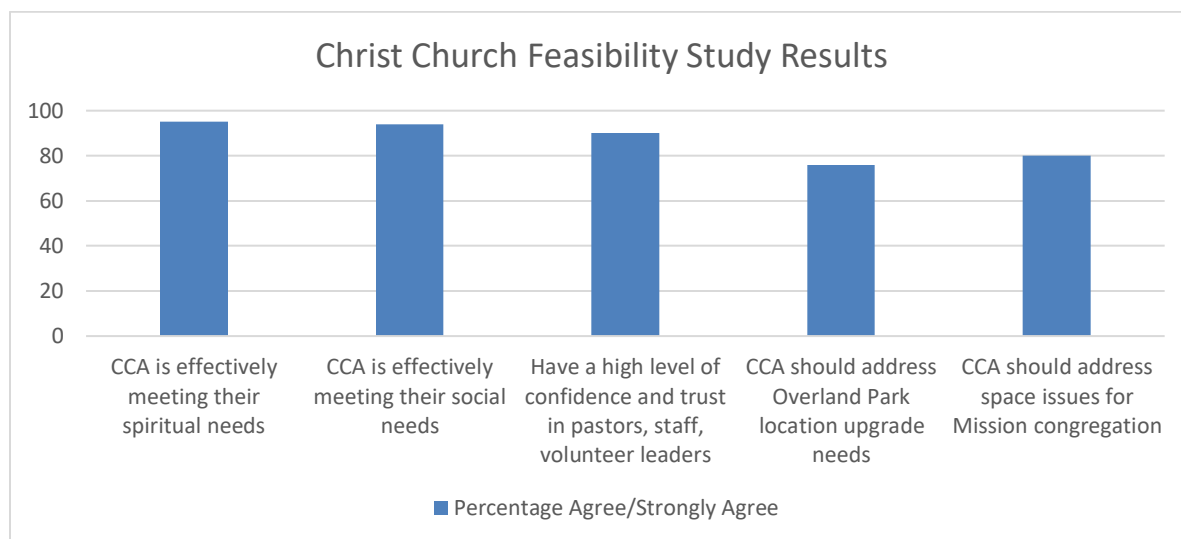
### Bring Life to Others

The need for intentional formation for mission also emerges when recent ministry developments are explored. In early 2019, church leadership began the process of investigating the viability of future ministry initiatives. Responses received from an all-

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<sup>5</sup> US Census Bureau, Census Data Report: Johnson County, KS, accessed January 24, 2021, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=Johnson%20County,%20Kansas&hidePreview=true>.

church feasibility study conducted in May of 2019 yielded a helpful glimpse of the congregation's overall health and willingness to invest in future ministry initiatives (Figure 2).



*Figure 2 – Selected Results from May 2019 Feasibility Study<sup>6</sup>*

The study's results suggested that attendees of Christ Church were positive about the overall ministry and supportive of its leadership's direction. Using the data gleaned from the feasibility study, Christ Church launched a three-year campaign in the fall of 2019 called Bring Life to Others (Appendix A).<sup>7</sup> The campaign was focused on fundraising to bring much-needed updates and repairs to the Overland Park campus, investment in ministry facilities for the Mission congregation, new local ministry initiatives, and support for a global mission partner in Uganda. This effort also lays the

<sup>6</sup> Church Development, *Feasibility Study Report for Christ Church Anglican* (Kansas City, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> Archbishops' Council of the Church of England, *Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England*, (Norwich), 2000, <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/churchs-year/holy-week-and-easter-2>. The title of the campaign was drawn from a line found in a post-communion prayer which calls the church to move from the Lord's Table to "bring life to others."

groundwork for the planting of a future, third Christ Church congregation. Despite the realities of the pandemic, the financial response to the campaign, and overall financial support of the church, has remained steady.

Church leadership chose the theme of hospitality as a way of shaping the narrative of this campaign toward outreach and mission. A sermon series in the fall of 2019 around this theme called *Making Room* helped pave the way for the launch of the Bring Life to Others campaign. Attention was given in the *Making Room* series to highlight ways church members can become more alert to the evangelistic task of the church. The series focused on the need for worship space that is hospitable and the need to acknowledge and engage visitors in the church's midst. There was also an emphasis on reaching the next generation through investing in intergenerational relationships.

These developments point to an opportunity. There is a sense in which Christ Church is redefining itself for the next season of ministry. With the desire of leaders to plant a third congregation in the Kansas City area in the coming years, Rev. Wildman sees the church now in a critical season of preparation for such an endeavor. In addition to fundraising, leaders have identified a need for the church to embrace practices and habits which will help move it toward a more hospitable, outreach-oriented posture. In Rev. Wildman's words, the church needs to "move the dial" toward evangelism and mission by changing the habits and practices of the church from a more inward, maintenance-focused posture to one that is oriented outward toward the community and world.

## The Central Role of Worship

It is impossible to describe Christ Church, or any Anglican parish, without discussing the central role of worship. As a church in the liturgical tradition, worship through word and sacrament, rooted in the tradition of the Book of Common Prayer, is considered a primary means of spiritual formation. Weekly gatherings of worship remain a shared congregational practice and are viewed as a means of living out “a devoted life,” the first core value of Christ Church (Appendix B).<sup>8</sup> Between the Overland Park and Mission congregations, there are five Sunday worship gatherings. The services range in style from traditional to contemporary. Though the style varies, each service shares core content and structure, reflecting the Anglican liturgical tradition.

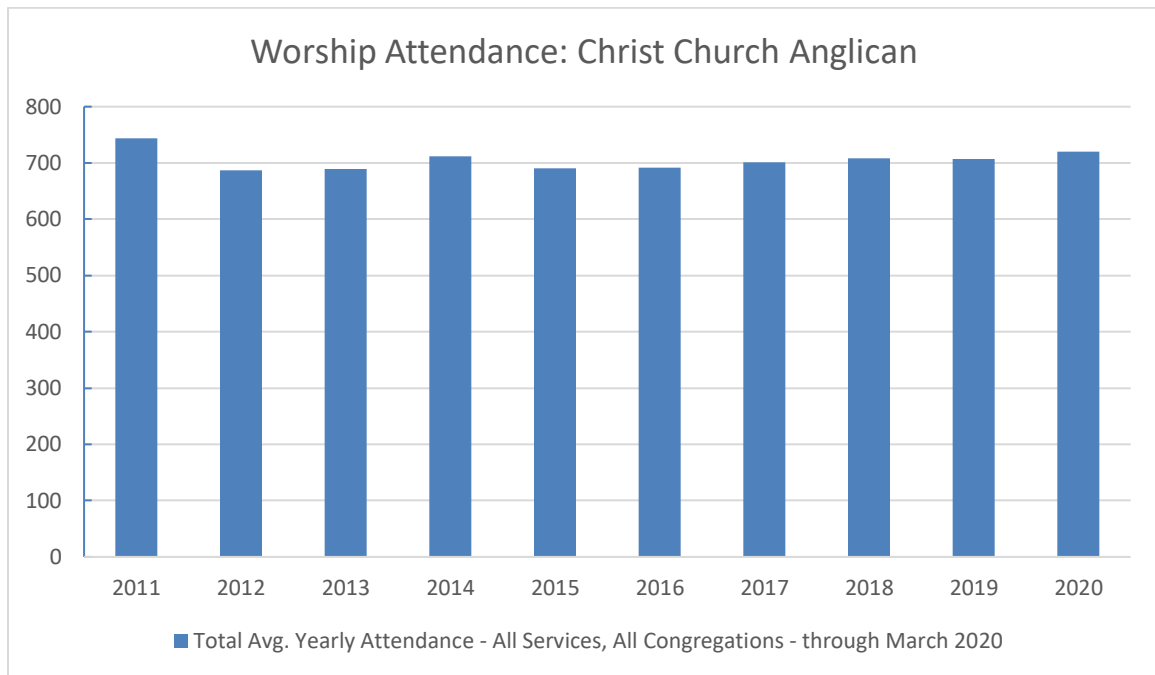
When the COVID-19 pandemic emerged in March 2020, Christ Church was receiving an average of four new guests per week, or approximately two hundred eight first-time guests a year. This does not include family members visiting from out of town. Slow incremental growth has come since the plant of the Mission congregation in 2016 but the church plant has not yet yielded exponential growth in terms of overall worship attendance (Figure 3). The annual average worship attendance has plateaued with a ten-year average of 715. Christ Church has maintained a consistent worship attendance pattern for the past ten years, indicating that it is maintaining enough growth to offset losses. This is certainly a positive in light of wider cultural trends.<sup>9</sup> COVID-19 realities

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<sup>8</sup> “Our Work,” Christ Church Anglican, accessed November 15, 2020, <https://www.christchurchkc.org/about/our-work>.

<sup>9</sup> Pew Research Center, *In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace*, October 17, 2019, 12, <https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2019/10/Trends-in-Religious-Identity-and-Attendance-FOR-WEB-1.pdf>. The share of U.S. adults who never attend religious services jumped from 11% in 2009 to 17% in 2019.

have affected the amount and avenue of worship services for a time. It is currently unknown what the long-term impact of the pandemic will be on the schedule of worship services at Christ Church.



*Figure 3 – Christ Church Anglican Average Annual Worship Attendance<sup>10</sup>*

Understanding parishioners' backgrounds and assumptions about worship also helps reveal the integral role worship must play in the formation of its members for mission. Church staff have identified three descriptive categories of attendees within the parish (Figure 4).

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<sup>10</sup> Christ Church Anglican, *Worship Attendance Records* (Overland Park, 2020).

Type	Description	Relationship to Liturgical Tradition
Cradle Liturgical	Includes individuals who grew up Episcopalian, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, or in another Protestant tradition with a background in some form of liturgical worship (Lutheran, United Methodist, Presbyterian).	This group has at least some background in liturgical worship practices and a basic understanding of the Anglican, and broader Christian liturgical tradition. Many have a deep level of appreciation for Christian liturgy. It symbolizes for them continuity and stability. Individuals here are more likely to have a sense of nostalgia for certain elements of the liturgy as well as an attachment to specific expressions of the tradition. For some, elements of the liturgical tradition may be perceived as negative and associated with empty ritualism. The challenge for this group is to discover the evangelical and missional potential of liturgical worship.
Broadly Evangelical	Includes individuals who have come to Christ Church from another evangelical tradition. Many have previously attended a Pentecostal, charismatic, nondenominational, or other Protestant evangelical denomination (Baptist, Nazarene, Wesleyan, Assemblies of God, Anabaptist/Brethren).	Individuals from this group have come from mostly low-church traditions. They have more likely been influenced by the seeker sensitive and church growth movements and may even view elements of the liturgical tradition with suspicion. However, many in this group have also experienced a drawing to liturgical worship. Their posture is often one of curiosity. The challenge for this demographic is to discover the liturgy as a source of deep formation for an evangelical faith that leads to mission.
Previously Unchurched	Includes individuals with little to no church experience and therefore, a very limited understanding of Christian worship or mission.	The exposure to any form of worship in this group is limited to a few visits throughout their lives on Christian holidays, what they have studied on their own, and what they have gleaned through media. Some people in this category have been through the Alpha Course and have had a limited “introduction” to basic worship practices in that context. Most elements of Christian liturgy are alien to them. The challenge for this group is to experience both the inward formation of the liturgy and its missional potential.

*Figure 4 – Types of Christ Church Attendees<sup>11</sup>*

These three distinct attendee types represent diverging philosophies of worship within the parish. Each type represents a different spiritual history and set of theological

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<sup>11</sup> Rev. Dean Behrens and Rev. Patrick Wildman, interview by author, Overland Park, June 4, 2019. These types and descriptions reflect the clergy’s analysis of the congregation’s makeup.

assumptions about the fundamental role of Christian liturgy and therefore, the mission of the church. This points to the need for ongoing and explicit teaching on the role of Christian worship. Knowing and understanding attendees' assumptions provides insights on how pastors and leaders may identify and present a potential vision of the church's liturgy as a means of missional formation.

The values of the diocese to which Christ Church belongs, Churches for the Sake of Others (C4SO), also affirms the essential role of worship. C4SO presents a vision of the liturgical life of the church as a framework for engaging in the mission of God and therefore as a critical "tool" in the formation of God's people. The five values of C4SO are: Kingdom, Spirit, Formation, Mission, and Sacrament. C4SO seeks to cultivate communities that embody a mission-oriented view of the church with the liturgy and Anglican ethos, and specifically the sacraments, ultimately serving to nurture the church for redemptive engagement in the world (Appendix C). The value of Sacrament, referring to baptism and Holy Communion, states that, "what the church receives in the real presence of Christ in the sacraments, the church becomes for the sake of the world, participants in the life and mission of God."<sup>12</sup> The need at Christ Church is for this framework to be named, taught, and meaningfully experienced by the congregation in such a way that it promotes a culture of mission.

One of the challenges identified by some of Christ Church's leadership regarding worship is that since Anglicanism is relatively unknown to a majority of the population, some of the church's liturgical practices may be seen as a potential barrier to outreach

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<sup>12</sup> "Who is C4SO?" Anglican Diocese of Churches for the Sake of Others, accessed November 28, 2020, <https://c4so.org/who-is-c4so/#values>.

and hospitality.<sup>13</sup> This concern is not unique to Christ Church. All churches desire at some level to welcome non-Christians into their worship services and invite them to participate, as they should. However, the identification of the church's liturgical practices as a potential barrier signals the need for further reflection on worship and the liturgy's relationship to the church's ministry in the world.

### **Conclusion**

Christ Church is an illustration of a tension in which many churches find themselves. Most Christian leaders know that changes must take place to engage a post-Christian world but aren't always sure where to begin. They know the shifts must entail more than institutional reorganization or short-term fixes. They must take place at the heart level of the church and its people. As Christ Church seeks to navigate changing realities and wrestle with its own purpose, it finds itself seeking a way to bridge a cherished history to an unknown future, to unite deep, inner formation with robust outward facing mission, and to connect a faithful worshiping community to an increasingly secular world.

This raises the questions: How can the church's liturgy move from being a barrier to becoming a bridge? How might the church draw from its theology and practices of worship to help cultivate a culture of mission and hospitable witness to its post-Christian neighbors? How might the shape and practices of Christ Church's worship serve to help its members form habits and practices of mission and outreach in their daily lives?

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<sup>13</sup> Pew Research Center, "Religious Landscape Study," May 12, 2015, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study>. Approximately 1.2% of the population in the United States identifies with the Episcopal/Anglican tradition. A larger percentage identifies with what may be labeled historically "liturgical" traditions. This does not automatically translate into an understanding of the Anglican tradition or its liturgy.



## CHAPTER 2

### RESEARCH AND LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Introduction**

Bridging worship and world will involve an examination of the crisis of mission facing the church in North America and the necessity for theological reflection upon the church's ecclesiology in light of the mission of God. The core practices of worship and the role of worship in a post-Christian context will be explored. It will also be important to examine the ways habits and culture are developed in a community through shared practices of Christian spiritual formation. Finally, it is helpful to observe models of missional formation and the ways communities of faith are seeking to bridge worship and world in their own contexts.

#### **Post-Christendom and the Missional Church**

Significant shifts and the changing influence of Christianity in Western culture have prompted fresh reflection on the church's self-understanding and by implication, the role of mission and corporate worship in the life of the church. As the church seeks to engage faithfully in a post-Christian culture, surface-level adjustments to the church's ministry will not suffice. The church must undergo a radical reorientation toward an ecclesiology that is firmly rooted in God's mission and an engagement with the world that is both imagined and sustained through robust missional formation.

#### **The Crisis of Mission**

The world has indeed changed, and this has revealed a crisis of mission for the church in North America. Darrell Guder has noted that, "what we once regarded as Christendom is now a post-Constantinian, post-Christendom, and even post-Christian

mission field.”<sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center’s October 2019 update on America’s religious landscape reported that the percentage of American adults describing themselves as Christian dropped to 65%, down 12 percentage points from 2009. Perhaps more significantly, the percentage of Americans who say they attend religious service at least once a week stands at 31%, down from 37% in 2009. Meanwhile, the amount of religious unaffiliated – the “nones” as they have come to be called – has swelled to 26%, up from 17% in 2009 (Figure 5).<sup>2</sup> This religiously unaffiliated group is now second in size only to evangelical Protestants among the major religious groups in the U.S.<sup>3</sup>

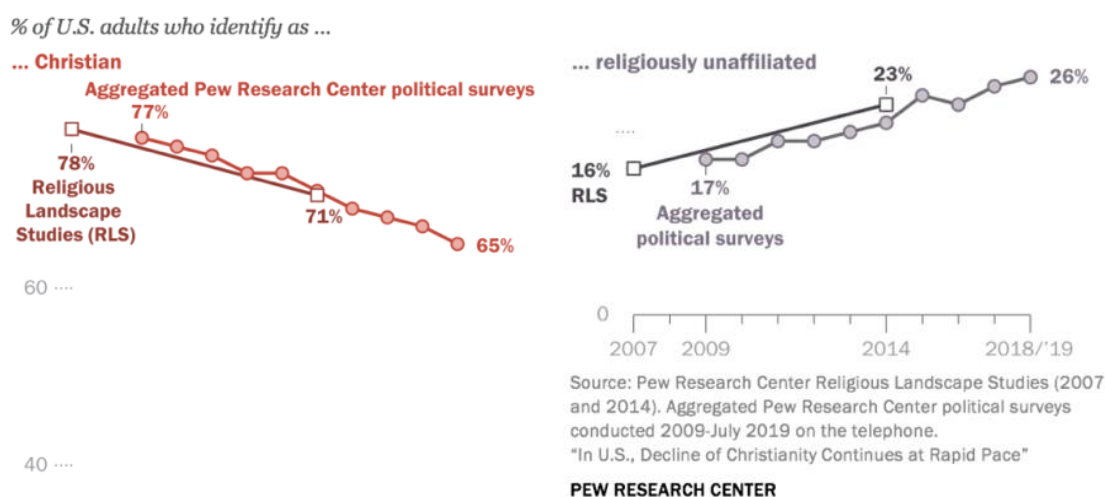


Figure 5 – Pew Research Center Religious Landscape Study Update<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Darrell L. Guder and Lois Barrett, eds., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub, 1998), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Pew Research Center, *In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace*, October 17, 2019, 3, <https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2019/10/Trends-in-Religious-Identity-and-Attendance-FOR-WEB-1.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Pew Research Center, “Religious Landscape Study,” May 12, 2015, 3, <https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2015/05/RLS-08-26-full-report.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Pew Research Center, *In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace*, 3.

This decline is particularly acute among younger adults in the church. Follow-up research from Barna in 2019 also revealed that nearly two-thirds of young Christians, the “dones,” have withdrawn from church involvement, at least for a season, after having been involved as a child or youth.<sup>5</sup> Research conducted by Barna in 2007 has provided some texture to these statistics. Barna noted that over 80% of young adults ages 16-29 have a negative view of Christianity and the church, citing hypocrisy as a chief reason.<sup>6</sup> Of note here is that of the primary reasons given, none had anything to do with issues of style or programming. They were primarily focused on issues surrounding the authenticity of the church’s witness.

Insights can also be gained by those who have remained in the church. When surveying young Christians who remain highly active and engaged in a congregation, Kinnaman and Matlock’s research identified common traits among them. Notable characteristics include a desire to follow Jesus in a way that connects with the world in which they live, a belief that God is more at work outside the Church than inside, and a desire to be a Christian without separating themselves from the world around them.<sup>7</sup> This suggests the importance of embracing a missional formation that both acknowledges the need for internal faithfulness as well as a generous and outward-focused posture. Declining numbers among these demographics suggest that there is a deep need for such formation within the church.

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<sup>5</sup> David Kinnaman, “Church Dropouts Have Risen to 64% - But What About Those Who Stay?” *Barna Group*, 2019, [www.barna.com/research/resilient-disciples](http://www.barna.com/research/resilient-disciples).

<sup>6</sup> David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity ... and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2007), 41.

<sup>7</sup> David Kinnaman and Mark Matlock, *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2019), 31-32.

## The Failed Experiment

The decline with which the church is grappling is not a sudden phenomenon. At the height of the Middle Ages, the church enjoyed a favored place at the center of temporal power and cultural influence in the West. Expansion of the State was accompanied by an expansion of the church.<sup>8</sup> An adapted model of Christendom was transplanted into North America and many churches in the United States were founded and have operated under at least some of the assumptions of the Christendom model. Christianity was not only the dominant religion, but it was assumed a majority of the population were looking for a church to which they might belong. The mantra of church planting and ministry under Christendom in the so-called church growth era has been “if you build it, they will come.”

Since the Enlightenment however, the church’s influence has in many ways steadily declined, first in Europe and then in the United States. In the midst of increased industrialization, automation, and now digitization, the modern self in many contemporary Western societies has come to embrace a set of attitudes and assumptions that make up what Charles Taylor has called “a secular age.”<sup>9</sup>

The result of secularization and increased pluralization is a culture which no longer assumes Christian faith or identity. Gone is the time in which the majority speaks, thinks, and imagines in the vernacular of Christianity. No longer can the church function

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<sup>8</sup> Stephan Bevans, “New Evangelical Vision and Mission,” *Divine Word Missionary Magazine*, Summer/Winter, 2002. Missiologist Stephan Bevans has called the modern missionary era the “religious arm” of colonialism.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007). Taylor charts the emergence of secularism from the Reformation through the twentieth century “enchanted” universe characterized by a self that is relatively open and porous to others and to the presence of God, to a sharply bounded, “buffered” self-disengaged from everything outside the mind.

as though it is the dominant cultural voice. Stuart Murray defines this post-Christendom reality as the “culture which emerges as the Christian faith loses coherence within a society that has been definitively shaped by the Christian story and as the institutions that have been developed to express Christian convictions decline in influence.”<sup>10</sup> And though the culture has changed, the church in many places has tried to continue to operate under the assumptions of Christendom, leaving the church trying to answer questions the culture is no longer asking.

Under the model of Christendom, mission has not served as an essential component of the church’s self-understanding. J. Andrew Kirk writes, “At best, mission is thought of as a vital activity of the Church, one among others.”<sup>11</sup> David Bosch notes that under Christendom, mission was isolated from other parts of theology and became the church’s “department of foreign affairs.”<sup>12</sup> Mission was reserved only for work done in foreign lands. It was the work of professional missionaries and seen as a ministry of the church primarily located in reaching people “over there.” It is a far cry from seeing mission as constitutive and essential for the church in all times and places.

This is not to suggest that cross-cultural or international ministry is wrong or unbiblical. However, to label those expressions of ministry alone as mission work is to reduce mission to being an arm of the church rather than its heart. This deficient view of mission is illustrated in the ways some churches speak about missions as merely a

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<sup>10</sup> Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World*, Second Edition, After Christendom Series (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2018), 19.

<sup>11</sup> J. Andrew Kirk, *What Is Mission? Theological Explorations* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 20.

<sup>12</sup> David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Twentieth Anniversary Ed., American Society of Missiology Series (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2011), 492.

“department” of the church. Even churches that speak of “local mission” when speaking of partnerships with local ministries or non-profits to which they send parishioners to serve, while good and fruitful, may fall short. This perspective still considers mission as one particular action of the church, not necessarily an organizing or constituting principle of the church’s being as a response to the activity of God.

The effects of Christendom models have ultimately stunted the church’s growth and its witness in the West. They have left behind a fixed notion of the church that is “attractional, dualistic, and hierarchical” and moved Christianity into essentially a maintenance mode.<sup>13</sup> Frost and Hirsch have put it rather bluntly, arguing that Christendom was “something of a failed experiment” and that to continue to function under the assumptions of Christendom is to idolize a historically-bound expression of the church conceived for a context that no longer exists.<sup>14</sup> This maintenance model of Christianity has encouraged institutional survival for the institution’s sake. And when the institution is threatened or declines, worry and anxiety set in.

As an old world slips away and a new reality emerges, many churches and leaders have found themselves experiencing the disorienting effects of trying to continue to live out Christendom models of church in a post-Christendom culture. The Barna Group has likened this perplexing reality for young adults in particular as existing in a kind of “digital Babylon.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 12-13.

<sup>14</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 15.

<sup>15</sup> Kinnaman and Matlock, *Faith for Exiles*, 17.

The exilic nature of the church's post-Enlightenment and post-Christendom experience will inevitably require it to grieve and relinquish what has been lost.<sup>16</sup> This is a significant cause for institutional anxiety. But for increasing numbers, this is also a call for reimagining and renewal, as Elaine Heath, picking up on the exilic language, notes, "Contrary to being a disaster, the exilic experiences of loss and marginalization are what are needed to restore the church to its evangelistic place."<sup>17</sup> It seems the Holy Spirit is using the church's current relegation to the margins to awaken it to the necessity of a robust missional ecclesiology in a post-Christendom world.

### The Call of Mission

Missiologists have called the church to recover an ecclesiology in which the mission of God is the starting point for all Christian community and the whole world is viewed as the arena of God's missionary activity.<sup>18</sup> The need to embrace a missional theology of the church has been the fruit of deep theological reflection and has emerged as the church in the West seeks to find its way in a world that has been radically altered.

Recent biblical and theological reflection has sought to return mission to its rightful place. Whereas under Christendom, mission was a peripheral activity of the church reserved for a select few, a missional ecclesiology places mission at the heart of the church's existence and self-understanding. A central characteristic of missional theology is its focus on mission as that which is derived, not from the church, but from

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<sup>16</sup> See Walter Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 4.

<sup>17</sup> Elaine A. Heath, *The Mystic Way of Evangelism: A Contemplative Vision for Christian Outreach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 17.

<sup>18</sup> See Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1986).

God's very own action and being.<sup>19</sup> Mission does not originate with the church nor is it simply an activity that is accomplished by the church. Nor is mission even limited to the church's work. Rather, mission is primarily *God's* work in the world and any and all missional activity of the church is derived from its relationship and partnership with the gracious action of the triune God.

This invitation to a missional identity of the church is rooted in the doctrine of the *missio Dei*: God the Father sends the Son. God the Father and God the Son send the Holy Spirit. The doctrine is expanded as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit send the church into the world.<sup>20</sup> Sending is not merely an activity of God. Rather, God has a sending nature reflected in God's own triune life. Patrick Keifert reflects that, "The very life of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is a process of mission. A Father who sends a Son, a Son who sends a Spirit. In this very likeness of God, we are called, gathered, centered, and sent."<sup>21</sup> Reflecting on the role of the Trinity, especially in Eastern Orthodox thought, Craig Van Gelder highlights the "generative, outward reaching love (ekstasis), and communion (koinonia), of the three persons. The Trinity is seen as a community whose orientation is outward, and whose shared love spills over beyond itself."<sup>22</sup>

It is into this outward-oriented love that humanity is invited to participate and share.<sup>23</sup> This sending nature and activity of God constitutes the church as a sent people

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<sup>19</sup> Guder and Barrett, *Missional Church*, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 309.

<sup>21</sup> Patrick R. Keifert, *We Are Here Now: A New Missional Era, A Missional Journey of Spiritual Discovery* (Eagle, Idaho: Allelon Publishing, 2006), 65-66.

<sup>22</sup> Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*, The Missional Network (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2011), 105.

<sup>23</sup> 2 Pet. 1:4



and gives shape to the church's sense of mission. The whole story of Scripture bears witness to God calling, creating, forming, and sending a people defined by outward facing, missional love.<sup>24</sup> In contrast to the concrete and fixed nature of the church sometimes adopted within Christendom, the missional church is a church on the move, caught up into the redemptive purposes of God in and for the world. The church's very essence and existence is missionary in nature as it is called to be what Eugene Schlesinger calls a church "in departure."<sup>25</sup>

The Incarnation also serves as a model for conceiving of the shape of the church's missionary presence in the world. As Emilio Castro notes, Jesus was not born as a kind of "universal man."<sup>26</sup> He was born as a Jew in a specific geographical location at a specific time in history. Jesus was born into and operated within a specific human culture. This tells us that the missionary call of the gospel is inherently incarnational because there is no such thing as a "culture-free gospel."<sup>27</sup> The Incarnation calls the church to adopt the posture of a missionary, seeking to discern how God's kingdom may be expressed within a particular time and place. Such a posture of adaptability and proximity to context will increase a church's ability to engage in a post-Christian world.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Michael W. Goheen, *A Light to the Nations: The Missional Church and the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011). See especially how the theme of God's mission is present throughout the biblical narrative.

<sup>25</sup> Eugene R. Schlesinger, *Missa Est! A Missional Liturgical Ecclesiology*, Emerging scholars (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 183.

<sup>26</sup> Emilio Castro, *Freedom in Mission: The Perspective of the Kingdom of God: An Ecumenical Inquiry*, Oikoumene (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1985), 76.

<sup>27</sup> Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 4.

<sup>28</sup> Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Brazos Press, 2006), 135.

This creates a tension for the church, particularly for those steeped within a long tradition. As Frost reflects, “The incarnation demands that we neither retreat into a holier-than-thou Christian ghetto nor give ourselves over to the values of secular culture.”<sup>29</sup> So the church must exist in the world but not of it.<sup>30</sup> It must bless the culture but also critique it, the latter often lacking within a Christendom model as the church wrestles with the temptation to align itself with earthly power and influence.<sup>31</sup>

The church is to be a witness to the kingdom of God, displaying “the firstfruits of the forgiven and forgiving people of God who are brought together across the rubble of dividing walls that have crumbled under the weight of the cross.”<sup>32</sup> Such a view of the church moves it away from an ecclesial-centric view of mission and into one that is centered on the activity of God, where the church is always a mission-sending and mission-receiving agent.<sup>33</sup>

This shift from thinking primarily about institution-centered questions (How can we stop decline and grow? How can we reach people?) to God questions (What is God doing in our neighborhood? Where do we see God at work? How is God at work among us and how might we join?) is perhaps one of the most critical shifts that must take place in a church’s local ministry as it seeks to orient itself in the *missio Dei*.

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<sup>29</sup> Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 15.

<sup>30</sup> John 17, 1 John 2

<sup>31</sup> Alan Kreider and Eleanor Kreider, *Worship and Mission after Christendom*, After Christendom (Scottsdale, Pa.; Waterloo, Ont: Herald Press, 2011), 41.

<sup>32</sup> Guder and Barrett, *Missional Church*, 103.

<sup>33</sup> Guder and Barrett, *Missional Church*, 81.

Missional theology suggests that the church is not a self-referential institution. It is the result of God's action. It is a means of bearing witness to the reign and rule of God in the world by reflecting God's own triune life of outward-facing love. This takes the shape of incarnational ministry which "disassembles itself and seeps into the cracks and crevices of a society in order to be Christ to those who don't yet know him."<sup>34</sup> This emphasis on the church's sent-ness into the world to be a redemptive, active presence has been a needed corrective to a church that has been bound to a stationary, attractional Christendom model.<sup>35</sup> Ultimately, missional theology suggests that the church is not compelled by institutional anxiety but by the outward-moving love of the triune God.

### Conclusion

Cultural realities and theological reflection both point to the same conclusion: Mission can no longer exist as a peripheral ministry of the church in a post-Christian world. By adopting a missional ecclesiology, the mission of God can serve as a central and essential lens through which the church in all times and places understands its identity and action. This reality encourages the church to explore its reason for being in an increasingly secular culture. It also prompts renewed reflection upon the way the church may be formed into this missional expression and specifically, the role gathered worship may play in shaping the life of the church for mission in a post-Christian reality.

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<sup>34</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 12.

<sup>35</sup> jeffmagu, "The Missional Church...Simple," YouTube Video, 1:59, January 29, 2010, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=arxfLK\\_sd68](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=arxfLK_sd68). Jeff Maguire's video offers a simple yet effective illustration to compare the attractional and missional models of church.

## **Worship in the Missional Church**

If the church is essentially missionary in nature and is sustained by its participation in the missional God, then the liturgical life of the church when it gathers is vital in shaping and sustaining God's people for faithful mission in the world. This does not pit worship against mission but rather sees them as two sides of the same coin – both vital components of the church's identity. This calls for an understanding of Christian worship which takes seriously its missiological, doxological, and formational nature.

### **The Role of Worship**

As the church has experienced the realities explored in the previous section, the church has also grappled with how to address the role of corporate worship. Some advocate for a return to the past, holding tightly to long-held ways of doing and being church. The emphasis here is often on preserving the church's faithfulness. Worship is seen as the gathering of the church to nurture its relationship with God but has little bearing on life outside of Sunday. Worship is a retreat from the world and the church's liturgy serves to foster the inner spirituality of the church. In this model, the outer witness of the church is at risk of being diminished.

Others vigorously try to reinvent themselves in order to reach an unchurched audience, casting away any hint of tradition. The emphasis here is on evangelism. If worship does play a role, its aim is viewed primarily as a means of attracting unchurched people. Worship is designed to reflect the language and metaphors of the culture and serves as the primary means of the church's outer witness. Every effort is made to modify the liturgy so that it caters to those who do not yet embrace the Christian faith. In this seeker-driven model, the inner life and formation of the church may suffer. This was the

primary approach of the church growth movement of the 1980s-90s.<sup>36</sup> Both of these approaches speak to valid concerns but often do so without addressing the deeper missiological and ecclesiological concerns at play.

Corporate worship plays a vital role within a missional ecclesiology. Worship on Sunday is more than just training for Monday, as though the only purpose of gathering with other Christians is simply to be equipped to go out and evangelize or participate in good works. It is also not merely an evangelistic crusade or performance designed to attract the unchurched to conversion, though the church always hopes and prays for conversion! Nor is corporate worship simply a family gathering of the church, where believers come to experience intimacy with God so they can get “recharged” for their lives in the weary world during the week to come.

Rather, in the gathering of worship, the church is constituted as God acts to draw people by grace into God’s very life in and through Jesus Christ. The missional God is at the very center of the church’s worship and liturgy. Morris Pelzel places the Paschal Mystery and the outward-oriented posture to which it invites people at the heart of the church’s liturgical life, noting that “God is a communion of persons, each equal to one another and sharing a life of mutual giving and receiving and, in the gracious and loving plan of God, this divine communion is opened up to the created world through the missions of the Son and the Spirit in the world.”<sup>37</sup> It is into this mystery of the gospel that humanity is invited, primarily, though not exclusively, through the church’s worship.

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<sup>36</sup> Marva J. Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn-of-the-Century Culture* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995). Dawn explores these tensions and made the case against consumer-driven worship while upholding worship’s evangelistic impulse.

<sup>37</sup> Morris Pelzel, *Ecclesiology: The Church as Communion and Mission*, Catholic Basics (Chicago; Washington, D.C: Loyola Press; National Conference for Catechetical Leadership, 2002), 5-6.

True Christian worship is inherently missional because it invites humanity into intentional dialogue and relationship with the sending God.

While it is important to observe and understand the ways the church is affected by cultural shifts, the church's missiology must ultimately originate from a source other than its own anxiety about its declining influence in the culture. Such vital ministry in and to the world cannot be conjured up from within. Rather, it must be because the church has been, "redeemed, healed, and caught up in God's communal life by grace through faith."<sup>38</sup>

For this reason, the church's very existence cannot simply be justified by its ability to rally people together to do a good deed for a noble cause. The church's very existence is dependent upon the God of mission it acknowledges and adores in worship. Dwight Zscheile notes that, "the paradigm of participation must be set alongside imitation, for it places the priority on God's agency in mission and spiritual growth."<sup>39</sup> In other words, ministry which is not grounded in our grace-enabled participation in the very life of God will be nothing more than a human program dressed up in missional language.

One caution to missional church thinking which emphasizes mission primarily as active witness alone is that it may lead to a view of gathered worship as a sort of optional add-on, something that can be done on occasion in order to get on with the *real* work of mission in order to "reach people." This unfortunately results in a diminished role of worship as communion and replaces it with one that is merely utilitarian and pragmatic in

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<sup>38</sup> Dwight J. Zscheile, ed., *Cultivating Sent Communities: Missional Spiritual Formation*, Missional Church Series (Presented at the Missional Church Consultation, Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2012), 15.

<sup>39</sup> Zscheile, *Cultivating Sent Communities*, 25.

nature. A missional theology devoid of God-centered worship will result in a church that actually seeks to be missional but without the orienting good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ at its core. It ultimately leaves mission open to the potential of losing its specifically Christian identity.<sup>40</sup> It may lead to activism without the spirituality that undergirds and sustains it.

In order to avoid this malformed view of mission the church must remember that worship is doxology. It is for and about God. Lingering in the presence of God and finding joy there is an end in itself. The church worships God because God is worthy.<sup>41</sup> Worship, rooted in gratitude and praise, is an appropriate response to the missional God who seeks and invites humanity into covenantal relationship. And it is through praise and worship that the church is gathered and formed.<sup>42</sup> Marking out times and places to do this is not only essential, it is biblical.<sup>43</sup> Eugene Peterson echoes worship's necessity for the church when he notes, "Worship is the time and place that we assign for deliberate attentiveness to God—not because he's confined to time and place, but because our self-importance is so insidiously relentless that if we don't deliberately interrupt ourselves regularly, we have no chance of attending to him at all at other times and in other places."<sup>44</sup> True worship, because it places us before the presence of the Almighty, will result in the transformation of the worshiper.

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<sup>40</sup> Schlesinger, *Missa Est! A Missional Liturgical Ecclesiology*, 180.

<sup>41</sup> Rev. 4:11

<sup>42</sup> Isa. 43:21

<sup>43</sup> Heb. 10:25

<sup>44</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Leap Over a Wall: Earthy Spirituality for Everyday Christians* (New York: HarperOne, 1998), 152-153.

## The Liturgy

Every church has a liturgy. It may be highly structured and uniform or given more to spontaneity. It may be ancient or contemporary. Regardless of liturgical style or adherence to historic structures, by virtue of being a worshiping community, engagement with some form of liturgy is a logical necessity and is essential to the identity of a Christian community.<sup>45</sup> It is through the ritual gathering around the Scriptures and the breaking of the bread that Christianity has sustained itself for two thousand years.<sup>46</sup>

Whether it is elaborate and conducted in a beautiful cathedral, or simple and takes place in a living room (or even over Zoom), liturgy functions to facilitate and sustain regular meeting and dialogue with God. The various rites of the Christian liturgical tradition, centered on the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ are the “ordered means through which the community of the baptized participate in the redemption which those rites proclaim.”<sup>47</sup> In a missional understanding of the church, to participate in the liturgy is to engage in the mission of God.

The central and principal liturgical celebration, weekly worship on the Lord’s Day, arises from the early church’s weekly celebration of the resurrection of Christ on the first day of the week.<sup>48</sup> Though the style of worship and liturgy may vary by context, the historic shape and elements (the *ordo*) of the Christian liturgy have come to transcend

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<sup>45</sup> Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theologie*, 1. Paperback ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 87.

<sup>46</sup> Ronald Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality*, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 237.

<sup>47</sup> John E. Booty, Jonathan Knight, and Stephen Sykes, eds., *The Study of Anglicanism*, Revised edition (London: SPCK, 1998), 61.

<sup>48</sup> Acts 20:7



culture and serve as a mark of fidelity to the Christian tradition among most liturgical churches.<sup>49</sup> Liturgical theology is concerned with the central shape and practices of historic Christian liturgy for the sake of exploring their role in the church's worship and formation.<sup>50</sup>

This order of the Christian liturgy is not arbitrary. Rather, the shape of the liturgy “evokes and replicates the deep structure of biblical language, the use of the old to say the new by means of juxtaposition.”<sup>51</sup> The movements of the liturgy shape dialogical encounter with the living God in real time. Historically, the church can speak of the two major movements of the liturgy that emerge early in the church: the synaxis, or the Service of the Word, and the Eucharist, the Service of the Table.<sup>52</sup>

The Anglican tradition assumes these two primary movements and expands them based on the Book of Common Prayer and the traditions from which it draws. The primary movements within the principal service of worship for the Lord's Day in the Anglican tradition may be outlined as follows:

The Service of the Word  
     The Acclamation  
     The Collect for Purity  
     The Summary of the Law  
     The Kyrie  
     The Trisagion  
     The Gloria in Excelsis  
     The Collect of the Day

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<sup>49</sup> Winfield H. Bevins, *Ever Ancient, Ever New: The Allure of Liturgy for a New Generation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2019), 35.

<sup>50</sup> Aleksandr Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology* (Crestwood, N.Y: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 22.

<sup>51</sup> Lathrop, *Holy Things*, 33.

<sup>52</sup> Justin Martyr, “The First Apology of Justin Martyr,” ed. and trans. Bard Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), Chap. LXVII. Justin describes the pattern of the weekly worship of the early church.

The Scripture Lessons  
 The Holy Gospel  
 The Sermon  
 The Creed  
 The Prayers of the People  
 The Confession of Sin and Absolution  
 The Passing of the Peace  
 Holy Communion  
   The Offering  
   The Sursum Corda  
   The Sanctus  
   The Prayer of Consecration  
   The Lord's Prayer  
   The Fraction  
   The Prayer of Humble Access  
   The Agnus Dei  
   Receiving Communion  
   The Post-Communion Prayer  
   The Blessing  
   The Dismissal<sup>53</sup>

The basic pattern of gathering in God's name, hearing the Scriptures, celebrating the Eucharist, and the sending, provides a structure which draws the church into a transforming communion with God and each other and then releases them out into the world for ministry. This weekly rhythm, enlivened by the Spirit and set within the context of the church's annual liturgical calendar, has the potential to order the church's spirituality and shape character, habits, and communal life around the person of Christ and the story of God.

The pattern above represents the dominant practice of Christian corporate worship throughout history.<sup>54</sup> Anglicans are explicit in their desire to follow this pattern of

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<sup>53</sup> Anglican Church in North America et al., *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments with Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church According to the Use of the Anglican Church in North America: Together with the New Coverdale Psalter*, 2019, 105 - 138.

<sup>54</sup> James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 3rd ed., rev. and expanded (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 29.

worship as a means of remaining rooted in the faith of Scripture and the early church.<sup>55</sup>

This distinguishes Anglican and other historically liturgical churches from traditions that may look first to current events or to the whims of a particular leader to shape the order and content of its worship. It also means that these liturgical traditions have the raw materials in place that may serve them well as they seek to draw from their worship to form them for faithful mission in the world.

Grounding worship in this ancient liturgical tradition is not simply a practice in historical accuracy or conformity. It enables the church to remain connected to the historic and universal Body of Christ. Participation in this liturgy also serves to transform the worshiper, as James Farwell explains,

In the liturgy, they [worshippers] enact in ritualized ways the actions and attitudes befitting those who are followers of the God of Jesus of Nazareth. In the liturgy, they praise the source of beauty and truth, listen to the proclamation of love and the laws of human flourishing in the kingdom of God, lament that which is broken in the world, focus their energy on help for those broken, acknowledge their failings and commit to begin again to seek God and the good, make peace with one another, and welcome one another to a shared table.<sup>56</sup>

To put it another way, the liturgy points beyond itself so that in the words of the General Thanksgiving, worshippers might praise God, “not only with our lips, but in our lives.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Anglican Church in North America, *The Book of Common Prayer*, 3. The Preface describes Thomas Cranmer’s Book of Common Prayer as a “Prayer Book in the vernacular, one which brilliantly maintained the traditional patterns of worship, yet which sought to purge away from worship all that was ‘contrary to Holy Scripture or to the ordering of the Primitive Church.’”

<sup>56</sup> James W. Farwell, *The Liturgy Explained*, New edition (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2013) accessed November 5, 2018. <http://ezproxy.nts.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=867444&site=ehost-live>.

<sup>57</sup> Anglican Church in North America, *The Book of Common Prayer*, 25.

Worship that is rooted in this liturgical tradition helps worshipers find themselves in the unfolding story of God and gives them an imagination and a vocabulary for conceiving of mission and ministry which flows from a dynamic encounter with the Lord. As Nicholas Monsma notes, “Rehearsing the stories of salvation in worship helps us to learn the habits of union with the Savior for the rest of our lives.”<sup>58</sup> Likewise, the Eucharist invites worshipers into communion with God and each other so that, “all the members are gathered together in communion one with another, offering themselves to the Father with and in and through his Son, Jesus, so that the whole community may be a place of the presence of the Kingdom on this earth and may be life-giving with the love of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>59</sup>

Worship is not a marketing event meant to grow the church. It is an encounter with God grounded in the unfolding story of God. It is dialogical and relational. Christian worship in a missional church will pay attention to the church’s past rhythms because they are historical, communal, experiential, and dynamic. Guder argues that these directly address and counter the modern North American bias toward the ahistorical, individualistic, utilitarian, and abstract.<sup>60</sup> Worship that is rooted is vital for our time and serves as part of the remedy to the ecclesiological deficiencies the church has suffered under Christendom.

Leonard Sweet offers a similar list of desired characteristics, calling the church to worship and ministry in a postmodern world that is experiential, participatory, image-

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<sup>58</sup> Nicholas W. Monsma, *Worship Mission and the Church Year: How Union with Christ Forms Worshipers for Mission in Every Season* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2019), 35.

<sup>59</sup> Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1999), 197.

<sup>60</sup> Guder and Barrett, *Missional Church*, 154.

based, and connected; all qualities into which many forms of the liturgy invites worshipers.<sup>61</sup> This kind of worship will form the church in counter-cultural ways and is uniquely situated to respond to the needs of the young adults of generations Y and Z who do not know the Christian story, remain increasingly skeptical of the church, and yet seek an experience of faith, not merely ideas about it.<sup>62</sup>

### Contextualization

The act of gathering to worship God and participating in the liturgical life of the church is itself an expression of God's mission. And how that rooted worship is ultimately lived out matters greatly. Since the telos of God's mission is the redemption and restoration of all things and people, worship must be marked by a deep sense of hospitality. It must "make room for the curious, the skeptical, the critical, the needy, the exploring, and the committed. It practices the hospitality that is rooted in God's presence and invitation, made known and experienced in Jesus Christ."<sup>63</sup> The church must center its worship on God while being attentive and yes, even attractive, to outsiders, especially those on the margins.

Christine Pohl notes the centrality of hospitality in the Christian tradition that is not first and foremost a duty and a responsibility but rather a response of love and gratitude for God's love and welcome to us.<sup>64</sup> This hospitality must take place through

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<sup>61</sup> Leonard I. Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century World* (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 154.

<sup>62</sup> Andrew Hardy, *Missional Discipleship After Christendom*, After Christendom Series (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2018), 176.

<sup>63</sup> Hardy, *Missional Discipleship After Christendom*, 243.

<sup>64</sup> Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 172.

space, relationships, and structures. But it also must be present within the manner of the liturgy itself. This is the work of contextualization, which Frost and Hirsch describe as,

the dynamic process whereby the constant message of the gospel interacts with specific, relative human situations. It involves an examination of the gospel in the light of the respondent's worldview and then adapting the message, encoding it in such a way that it can become meaningful to the respondent. Contextualization attempts to communicate the gospel in word and deed and to establish churches in ways that make sense to people within their local cultural context. It is primarily concerned with presenting Christianity in such a way that it meets peoples' deepest needs and penetrates their worldviews, thus allowing them to follow Christ and remain in their own cultures.<sup>65</sup>

Worship in a missional church must indeed be contextualized and intelligible, reflecting the cultural realities in which a congregation exists. A church must regularly identify and assess language, music, the arts, and more. It must distinguish which elements are essential and which are culturally bound. A church ought to ensure there are elements of hospitality present in its gatherings and spaces. These factors are important for churches that take mission seriously.

Many objections to liturgical worship are perhaps a reaction to liturgy that has not been appropriately contextualized in the ways described above. It is a reaction against those who believe faithful worship simply involves remaining fixed to one particular culturally-bound expression of the past. To do this would actually betray the missional call of the gospel. Instead, when rightly appropriated and contextualized, Christian liturgy is uniquely poised to make disciples in a postmodern context because it holds in tension the need to be rooted in the past while engaging in the culture of the present.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 83.

<sup>66</sup> Bevins, *Ever Ancient, Ever New*, 22.

Faithful worship will always challenge the culture around it and point it toward transcendent realities. Pelzel notes that "The Gospel is meant not simply to be expressed in different cultural forms but to 'trans-form' all cultures, that is, to build up and develop everything that is good about a culture while purifying it of those elements not in line with Gospel values."<sup>67</sup> But, the missional church engaged in worship must ensure that the gospel it embodies and proclaims offends for the right reasons, not for the wrong ones.<sup>68</sup>

Faithful contextualization therefore removes unnecessary boundaries. It engages with history but does not idolize it. It is the process of participating in established and received practices, but also continually reinterpreting them in light of the context in which the church finds itself.<sup>69</sup> The church is to be "both faithful and innovative" as it contributes to and passes on the historical practices that shape the life and purpose of the Christian community.<sup>70</sup> This work of contextualization means the church must conceive of worship as a Christian missionary would, grounding it in the revelation of God found in Scripture while engaging language, symbols and signs that are accessible to the context.<sup>71</sup> It means, as George Hunter notes was true in the Celtic Christian missionary movement, that worship must take seriously the customs and pathos of its audience.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Pelzel, *Ecclesiology*, 83.

<sup>68</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 83.

<sup>69</sup> Anita Stauffer, ed., *Christian Worship: Unity in Cultural Diversity*, (Geneva: Department for Theology and Studies, The Lutheran World Federation, 1996). The Lutheran World Federation's Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture provide a helpful framework for considering how the church's worship may be faithfully contextualized.

<sup>70</sup> Guder and Barrett, *Missional Church*, 154.

<sup>71</sup> Monsma, *Worship Mission and the Church Year*, 92.

<sup>72</sup> George G. Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West - Again*, 10th anniversary rev. and expanded ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 70.

John Stott offered a helpful image of the church being engaged in “double listening,” paying attention to the voice of God through Scripture and the voices of men and women around us so that we may see how they relate to each other.<sup>73</sup> Missional worship will be engaged with culture yet not *defined* by or driven by its values. It will see history as a compass and yet remain open to the leading of the Holy Spirit.<sup>74</sup> Ultimately, worship and liturgy that is contextualized is an act of hospitality and love which flows from a missional and incarnational understanding of the church.

### Sunday to Monday

This approach to the church’s liturgical life appreciates contextualized worship as an expression of communion with God but it does not individualize it or sequester it to an hour on Sunday. Instead, true communion with God leads to the extension of community to others. Reflecting on the Christian mystical tradition, Elaine Heath describes a progression which may also be applied to the liturgical life of the church, “Christian mysticism is about the holy transformation of the mystic by God, so that the mystic becomes instrumental in the holy transformation of God's people. This transformation always results in missional action in the world.”<sup>75</sup>

In a biblical and missional ecclesiology, as Todd Hunter has noted, the gathering leads outside the walls of the church building into the routines of daily life.<sup>76</sup> This highlights the important relationship between the church’s being and doing, between its

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<sup>73</sup> John Stott, *Contemporary Christian* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1995), 29.

<sup>74</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 194.

<sup>75</sup> Heath, *The Mystic Way of Evangelism*, 15.

<sup>76</sup> Todd D Hunter, *Christianity Beyond Belief: Following Jesus for the Sake of Others* (Downer Grove: IVP Books, 2009), 66-67.



inner life of communion and its outer life of mission, between worship and world. It is not either/or. It is both/and. The work of evangelism, justice, creation care, apologetics, and witness as a whole must flow from a rich and sustained encounter with the living God. The church's participation in God's mission throughout the week must lead the church back to doxology.

If the church exists as a people caught up in the mission of God, then its understanding of its liturgical life must not be fixed or inward facing. Rather, it is dynamic, relational, and ultimately outward. As a public act, gathered worship is really the church's 'first form of mission.'"<sup>77</sup> The reality of God proclaimed and encountered in the gathering of worship is to be announced to and for the entire world. When it comes to worship in a faithful missional ecclesiology, "The walls and windows of churches need to become transparent."<sup>78</sup>

The church participates in the life of God through a rhythm of both gathering and sending. The "disassembled" and sent church must also be the assembled, gathered church. Liturgy and mission are inextricably linked. Unfortunately, at times the two have been treated as distinct objects of theological investigation.<sup>79</sup> Walter Bouman laments, "For many advocates of the Church's mission, liturgy belongs to the task of 'nurture,' and attention to nurture must be balanced by attention to mission. Liturgy is thus viewed as an

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<sup>77</sup> Guder and Barrett, *Missional Church*, 243.

<sup>78</sup> Guder and Barrett, *Missional Church*, 243.

<sup>79</sup> J. G Davies, *Worship and Mission*. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2015), 9.

inward focus, and the fear is that too much attention to liturgy makes the Church narcissistic.”<sup>80</sup>

But worship in a missional framework cannot be relegated simply to internal nurture, though it includes that. Rather, “Missional worship is an understanding and practice of worship that engages worshipers in the mission of God, drawing them into God’s self-offering of redemptive love through Christ and in the power of the Spirit.”<sup>81</sup> It is not inward versus outward. Liturgy and mission are, as Mark Bangert notes, “... one and the same. . . What is inside is out and what is outside is in.”<sup>82</sup> Miroslav Volf similarly reflects that the church’s praise when it gathers and its good works when it scatters “are two fundamental aspects of the Christian way of being-in-the-world. They are at the same time the two constitutive elements of Christian worship: authentic Christian worship takes place in a rhythm of adoration and action.”<sup>83</sup> This rhythm of adoration and action is “a single operation enacted in two spheres: within the assembly of believers and throughout their dispersal in the world.”<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Walter R. Bouman, “Identity and Witness: Liturgy and the Mission of the Church Walter R. Bouman,” *Institute of Liturgical Studies Occasional Papers* 6, no. 43 (1989): 115–139, [https://scholar.valpo.edu/ils\\_papers/43](https://scholar.valpo.edu/ils_papers/43), 116.

<sup>81</sup> Ruth A. Meyers, *Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission: Gathering as God’s People, Going Out in God’s Name*, Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Liturgical Studies Series (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 12.

<sup>82</sup> Thomas H. Schattauer, ed., *Inside Out: Worship in an Age of Mission* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 69-70.

<sup>83</sup> Miroslav Volf, “Worship as Adoration and Acton: Reflections on a Christian Way of Being-in-the-World,” in *Worship: Adoration and Action*, ed. D. A. Carson (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 203.

<sup>84</sup> Clayton J. Schmit, *Sent and Gathered: A Worship Manual for the Missional Church*, Engaging Worship Series (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2009), 49.

Genuine encounter with God in the gathering continues in the “liturgy of mission.”<sup>85</sup> This is what St. Chrysostom referred to as the “liturgy after the Liturgy,” that is, “a liturgical use of the material world, a transformation of human association in society into koinonia, of consumerism into an ascetic attitude towards creation and the restoration of human dignity.”<sup>86</sup> Worship in the gathering leads to worship in the world.

It may be helpful in some sense to think of *one* liturgy which is expressed in both gathering and departure. As Schlesinger notes, "Mission is not a second stage that unfolds alongside or after the liturgy, but is itself part of the liturgy's immanent intelligibility."<sup>87</sup> Josh Sweeden makes a similar case, arguing that the Sabbath and Eucharist “are not abstract rituals confined to corporate gatherings, but extensions of the people of God into the world and everyday life as they practice and perform good work.”<sup>88</sup> This insight of one essential liturgy with two expressions is helpful in understanding how intentional practices of worship and witness may bridge the liturgy of Sunday with the liturgy of Monday.

This does not mean that gathering and dispersal are not distinct. In a missional framework, the gathering of God’s people in the liturgy does more than facilitate an individual’s relationship to God. It not primarily an environment for getting non-churched, secular people to come and be converted through a gospel presentation.

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<sup>85</sup> Aleksandr Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2004), 46.

<sup>86</sup> Gennadios Limouris, Orthodox Eastern Church, and World Council of Churches, eds., *Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism: Statements, Messages and Reports of the Ecumenical Movement, 1902-1992* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994), 66.

<sup>87</sup> Schlesinger, *Missa Est! A Missional Liturgical Ecclesiology*, xxvii.

<sup>88</sup> Joshua R. Sweeden and Michael Cartwright, *The Church and Work: The Ecclesiological Grounding of Good Work* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 98.

Adopting such a view of worship turns worship into a performance and shifts the focus from God to the unchurched person. In the missional church, corporate worship plays a crucial and intentional role in shaping God's people for sent mission, all while hospitably inviting the skeptic, the neighbor, and the community to "come and see."<sup>89</sup>

David Fitch reflects that this does not take place accidentally for, "If we would see people formed into the *missio Dei*, our gatherings must take on liturgical shape, a way of inviting people into the prayers, confessions and affirmations of the alive relationship we have with the living God of Mission. We must learn how to listen, interpret Scripture for what God is doing among us and in the world, hear God and then respond to God."<sup>90</sup> The shape and content of our liturgy when gathered matters because it allows us to participate in the life of God through adoration, and specifically through the Eucharist, which then equips and sends the church to participate in God's life through action. Schlesinger calls this paradigm a "missional liturgical ecclesiology."<sup>91</sup>

The connection of faithful adoration in gathering to faithful action in the world was embedded in the ethos of the Early Church. As Alan Kreider notes, "Worship was the energizing core of the Christians' life...But what the outsiders saw was not their worship. It was their habitus...the outsiders looked at the Christians and saw them energetically feeding poor people and burying them, caring for boys and girls who lacked property and parents, and being attentive to aged slaves and prisoners. They interpreted

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<sup>89</sup> John 1:39

<sup>90</sup> David Fitch, "Against Decaffeinated Belief: The Sunday Gathering as Missional," *Missio Alliance*, December 31, 2008, <https://www.missioalliance.org/against-decaffeinated-belief-the-sunday-gathering-as-missional>.

<sup>91</sup> Eugene R. Schlesinger, *Missa Est! A Missional Liturgical Ecclesiology*, xxi. Schlesinger provides this helpful term to describe a way of being church that holds liturgy and mission in tension.

these actions as a ‘work of love.’”<sup>92</sup> According to pagans, “Christianity's truth was visible; it was embodied and enacted by its members. It was made tangible, sacramental.”<sup>93</sup>

Kreider and others have noted how the worship gatherings of many early Christian communities were not completely open to observation by the public due to the threat of persecution.<sup>94</sup> What *was* visible to a watching world were the habits and practices of the church when it was in action. It was the church’s witness which attracted and drew people into the life of the community. But what lay beneath or behind that witness was the church’s adoration – its inner mysteries. The church’s worship was the “ongoing energizing center of Christian communal life” so that what happened when the church gathered played an active role in shaping the church’s habits as they lived out their personal and communal lives in the midst of a pagan culture.<sup>95</sup> As the church finds itself increasingly as a minority in a culture that is skeptical or even hostile to Christianity, a church without an “energizing core” will not be able to address the challenges and needs of a post-Christendom world.

Missional worship must form the church into a particular way of life, marking it as a distinct witness in the world – a critical component of the church’s credibility in a skeptical, post-Christian context. Here is where the church’s being and doing converge. In the Letter to Diognetus, a Christian work of apologetics from the post-apostolic period,

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<sup>92</sup> Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 61.

<sup>93</sup> Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church*, 61.

<sup>94</sup> Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church*, 135.

<sup>95</sup> Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church*, 186.

the author describes the unique manner of life of the early Christian community. His observations reveal an incarnational and contextualized ministry. He writes, "With regard to dress, food and manner of life in general, they follow the customs of whatever city they happen to be living in, whether it is Greek or foreign. And yet there is something extraordinary about their lives. They live in their own countries as though they were only passing through. They play their full role as citizens, but labor under all the disabilities of aliens."<sup>96</sup>

This early church's liturgical life was never intended to create an insular, cloistered assembly nor was it designed to be an attraction to counter the varied religions or entertainment options of the day. Rather, it animated them to be salt and light within their culture in ways that were both noticeable and attractive to outsiders. The church's worship was not merely an internal set of rites. It signaled that the church was allegiant to a new politic under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.<sup>97</sup> In this way, worship is missional because it always has a "public horizon."<sup>98</sup>

The church must recapture this reality, recognizing that "the public worship of the missional community always leads to the pivotal act of sending. The community that is called together is the community that is sent" and that, "every occasion of public worship is a sending event."<sup>99</sup> David Fitch calls this a church "on the move," gathering in its place of worship to encounter Christ's presence but sent out to extend his presence into our

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<sup>96</sup> W. A Jurgens, *The Faith of the Fathers* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1970), 40.

<sup>97</sup> W. A Jurgens, *The Faith of the Fathers*, 119.

<sup>98</sup> Lois Barrett, ed., *Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness*, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2004), 102.

<sup>99</sup> Guder and Barrett, *Missional Church*, 243.

homes, our neighborhoods, and among the marginalized and hurting in the world. The church location is not “in here” or “out there” for it is an entire way of life.<sup>100</sup>

### Conclusion

In a missional theology, the church’s liturgical life is not incidental. It is central to the church’s identity as it establishes the church as an active participant in God’s own outward-facing, triune life. Faithful engagement with the historic shape and practices of Christian liturgy roots the church in the person of Jesus Christ and the grand story of God.<sup>101</sup> The mission of God invites the church into an ongoing rhythm of gathering into communion and adoration and sending it to continue its worship through loving action in the world. The gathering and sending of the church become a matrix by which it can understand and live out its calling in the world as a participant in God’s mission.

### **Spiritual Formation, Practices, and Congregational Culture**

A Christian community cannot embrace a missional ecclesiology simply by gaining the right information. The church must be shaped for mission through intentional grace-filled practices which God uses to transform the hearts and habits of both individuals and a community. These practices are not an end in themselves but are best understood within the context of Christian spiritual formation. Considering the “why” and “how” of formation can inform how the church might think about the role of the liturgy in cultivating a missional culture within a congregation.

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<sup>100</sup> David E. Fitch, *Faithful Presence: Seven Disciplines That Shape the Church for Mission* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2016), 40-41.

<sup>101</sup> Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, New ed. (London; New York: Continuum, 2005), 37. Faithful liturgical engagement here is shaped by the core of Christian worship as found in the synaxis and the Eucharist, or the Service of the Word and the Service of the Table. These two movements form the two-part core of historic, orthodox Christian worship.

## The Aim of Christian Formation

What is the goal or *telos* of Christian spiritual formation? M. Robert Mulholland Jr. defines spiritual formation as “the process of being formed in the image of Christ for the sake of others.”<sup>102</sup> This helpful definition provides a view of Christian formation’s aims and some handles for thinking about the way practices may serve in formational ways.

According to Mulholland, formation is a *process* – not happening instantaneously but requiring faithful response employed over weeks, months, and years. This reveals communal liturgy’s implicit relevance since it, by definition, assumes faithful patterns of assembly, over time, for worship and praise.<sup>103</sup> Formation is *in the image of Christ*, indicating that there is an inward aspect to faithful Christian formation that is centered on, and made possible through, the person and work of Jesus Christ. Finally, faithful formation is ultimately aimed *for the sake of others*. It is outward facing and has a missional aim. Formation is not relegated to the interior life alone. It leads to an “embodied morality.”<sup>104</sup>

This definition draws on both the inward and outward dimensions of Christian formation. It is a formation where both live in symbiotic relationship so that “outward actions become inward attitudes, and inward attitudes lead to outward actions.”<sup>105</sup> Just as

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<sup>102</sup> M. Robert Mulholland and R. Ruth Barton, *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation*, Revised and Expanded (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 15.

<sup>103</sup> Gordon Lathrop, *Holy People: A Liturgical Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 43.

<sup>104</sup> Tish Harrison Warren, *Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2016), 39.

<sup>105</sup> Mark A. Maddix and Diane Leclerc, eds., *Essential Beliefs: A Wesleyan Primer* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2016), 39.



worship in a missional ecclesiology involves both adoration and action, so Christian formation is concerned with both the inward and outward growth and transformation of a person or community.

### Inward Formation

Who am I? Who am I becoming? These are perennial questions of the inner life. Liturgical theology is not primarily concerned with proper liturgical performance or doctrinal orthodoxy for its own sake. Liturgical theology is ultimately focused on cultivating a patterned, doxological personal and communal identity through the shared practices of worship.<sup>106</sup>

This means that purposeful Christian formation and any formation that may take place in the church has soteriological aim. Its ultimate goal is God's glory, which is realized in humanity's sanctification. God is glorified at the "renewal of the image of God in us."<sup>107</sup> The vision of Christian formation is to live as "genuine, image-bearing, God-reflecting human beings," growing toward a "complete and mature human life."<sup>108</sup> Formation is not just a matter of *doing* the right things. It is a matter of *being* and *becoming*. Formation is ultimately a work of the Holy Spirit in which humans are invited to actively cooperate.

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<sup>106</sup> Gregory Scott Clapper, *Renewal of the Heart Is the Mission of the Church: Wesley's Heart Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Eugene, Or: Cascade Books/Wipf and Stock Pub, 2010), 52.

<sup>107</sup> John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection: As Believed and Taught by the Reverend Mr. John Wesley From the Year 1725 to the Year 1777* (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1966), 117.

<sup>108</sup> N. T. Wright, *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2010), 71.

Christian formation in the image of Christ therefore has a distinctly inward dimension. As John Wesley conceived it, true religion consists in great part of the shaping of religious affections, or inward desires.<sup>109</sup> Formation's goal is to be filled with pure love for God and neighbor.<sup>110</sup> It aims toward the reorientation of our heart's desires and loves. As N.T. Wright describes, it involves "the development of inner character, and habits of heart and life that point toward the true goal of human existence."<sup>111</sup>

The apostle Paul provides a powerful image for the Galatians which highlights this inward orientation. He writes to the Galatian church desiring, as a mother in childbirth, that Christ would be "formed" *in* them.<sup>112</sup> Just as children grow and mature in the womb, the inner life grows and matures more and more into the image of Christ as a result of God's sustained, transforming grace.

Because this formation is "in Christ," the conscious shaping of the heart's habits and character is rooted in Jesus Christ. As Mark Maddix notes, a faithful Wesleyan approach to formation will always emphasize the primacy of God's grace as the starting point of Christian formation.<sup>113</sup> Grounded in the doctrine of justification by grace through faith and in the redemptive purposes of God, this ongoing inner transformation is not the result of human earning.<sup>114</sup> It takes place "simply and solely within the framework of grace – the grace which was embodied in Jesus and his death and resurrection, the grace

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<sup>109</sup> Clapper, *Renewal of the Heart Is the Mission of the Church*, 14.

<sup>110</sup> Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 55.

<sup>111</sup> Wright, *After You Believe*, 24.

<sup>112</sup> Gal. 4:19

<sup>113</sup> Maddix and Leclerc, *Essential Beliefs*, 118.

<sup>114</sup> Eph. 2:8-9, 1 Thess. 5:23-24

which is active in the Spirit-filled preaching of the gospel, the grace which continues to be active by the Spirit in the lives of believers.”<sup>115</sup> Christian formation is not primarily the result of human work. It is the work of the Spirit. It is “Christ in us, the hope of glory.”<sup>116</sup>

But this work of God’s Spirit is not static or monergistic. It is dynamic and relational, inviting humanity to become “participants of the divine nature.”<sup>117</sup> And while grace initiates this work, formation includes ongoing human response. According to Randy Maddox, “God’s grace works powerfully, not irresistibly, in matters of human life and salvation; thereby empowering our response-ability, without overriding our responsibility.”<sup>118</sup> This dynamic view of spiritual formation also encourages a dynamic view of the church’s participation in God’s mission. It affirms gathered worship and liturgy that is dialogical and participatory, not merely an event to be observed. It affirms outward witness that is prompted by the Spirit but embodied through the creative, contextualized, and responsive action of the people of God.

What results from this vision, is, as Ronald Rolheiser notes, formation in which outward disciplines shape the heart’s desires. Depending on whether or not they are directed toward Christ, the church’s practices “will either lead to greater integration or disintegration within our personalities, minds, and bodies – and to the strengthening of

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<sup>115</sup> Wright, *After You Believe*, 60.

<sup>116</sup> Col. 1:27

<sup>117</sup> 2 Pet. 1:4

<sup>118</sup> Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville, Tenn: Kingswood Books, 1994), 55.

our relationship to God, others, and the cosmic world. The habits and disciplines we use to shape our desire form the basis for a spirituality.”<sup>119</sup>

This inner life does not develop automatically but through willing human participation. More than a one-time sinner’s prayer, formation is the result of a pattern of embodied practices. Gordon Lathrop calls this a spirituality of “‘a lived experience, a disciplined life of prayer and action’ that manifests [a distinctly Christian] worldview.”<sup>120</sup> The outward means of grace, including participation in the liturgy, play an active role in this process of inward transformation, ultimately providing “healing for the soul, or character” and a way to “nourish an inner life” that has “real content and quality.”<sup>121</sup>

What is true of individuals can also be said of congregations. A community whose heart is being formed by the Spirit through formational practices will exhibit a closeness to the person and character of Jesus Christ, out of which blessing can flow.<sup>122</sup> Ultimately, seeking to engage a post-Christian context apart from a deep inner transformation of the heart will result in shallow spirituality and stunted mission. It may provide short-term answers to cynics’ questions but will ultimately lack depth of character and therefore, credibility.

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<sup>119</sup> Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing*, 7.

<sup>120</sup> Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Ground: A Liturgical Cosmology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 69.

<sup>121</sup> Maddix and Leclerc, *Essential Beliefs*, 118.; Elizabeth O’Connor, *Journey Inward, Journey Outward* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 18.

<sup>122</sup> John 7:38

## Outward Formation

The inner life that is nourished in Christian formation does not lead to a spiritual cul-de-sac. As Mulholland notes in his definition, it is oriented “for the sake of others.”<sup>123</sup> There is therefore a deep connection between the formation of the heart and the ways one’s life in God is expressed in discipleship and mission. The church is called to embody the two-fold commandment of love for God *and* neighbor.<sup>124</sup>

This connection is severed if salvation is limited to an inner reality, a personalized and romanticized spirituality of simply “asking Jesus into our hearts.” Echoing the reflections of Eugene Peterson, Derek Vreeland laments an evangelical version of salvation that reduces it to an individualistic, intellectual assent to the truth of Christ disconnected from a life of discipleship and mission. He writes, “We come to Jesus in order to follow him—because salvation is not found by asking Jesus into our lives, but by *entering the life of Jesus* where, as a disciple, we find ourselves immersed in God’s rescue plan.”<sup>125</sup> Here, formation involves more than intellectual assent. It is immersion into an obedient and missional way of life. This outward life is marked by practices of service, evangelism, and justice.

## The Inward/Outward Journey

The inner life and outer movements must therefore be connected. Each prepares and shapes us for the other. Spiritualities that do not take this connection seriously are in

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<sup>123</sup> Mulholland and Barton, *Invitation to a Journey*, 15.

<sup>124</sup> Matt. 22:35-40; Mark 12:28-34

<sup>125</sup> Vreeland Derek, “We’ve Gotten Salvation All Wrong: Let’s Reclaim the Heart of Christian Discipleship,” *Missio Alliance*, May 31, 2018, <https://www.missioalliance.org/weve-gotten-salvation-all-wrong-lets-reclaim-the-heart-of-christian-discipleship>; Eugene H. Peterson, *The Jesus Way: A Conversation on the Ways That Jesus Is the Way* (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 2007).

danger of espousing a quasi-gnostic version of Christianity, which see spirituality as exclusively a matter of abstract ideas. Anything “physical” is a distraction to the *real* spiritual stuff. Instead, Christian formation takes matter seriously and celebrates that we are made “by a Creator who does not reject the human body” but instead declares us “very good.”<sup>126</sup> Formation cannot be separated from physicality and therefore, cannot be separated from ethics, justice, and Christian witness.

Gospel-centered sacramental theology contributes here a key understanding for Christian formation. To hold a sacramental soteriology and ecclesiology is to affirm the material world’s role as a means of receiving and offering God’s grace. This includes the elements of gathered worship such as bread, wine, water, spaces, and people. It also affirms that the sanctuary and the supermarket may both be places of missional encounter. Sacramental theology embraces the idea that “the physical, material stuff of creation and embodiment is the means by which God’s grace meets us and gets hold of us.”<sup>127</sup> In both the gathering and sending of the church, the God of mission meets humanity by means of earthly elements in order to form the church to be an embodied means of grace in the world.

Elizabeth O’Conner highlights this connection of inner formation to outer movement, noting that “we cultivate quiet places of our spirit, so that we can come to know a different quality of life.”<sup>128</sup> The Christian prepares him or herself to hear God in

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<sup>126</sup> Warren, *Liturgy of the Ordinary*, 39.

<sup>127</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, Volume 1 of Cultural Liturgies (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2009), 141.

<sup>128</sup> O’Connor, *Journey Inward, Journey Outward*, 17.

contemplation so that they may hear God address them in “newspaper headlines and committee meetings, from the careless friend and the impatient clerk.”<sup>129</sup>

What is true for individuals rings true in the liturgical life of the church. The gathering of the church for formation through shared liturgical practices moves in a similar outward orientation toward shared practices of witness. Sunday worship is “...a forerunner of the birth of a mission” and “where gifts emerge and new ministries are borne and inspired.”<sup>130</sup> The church worships together on Sunday so that it may continue its worship as a scattered community on Monday. This affirms the notion that all good work in the world is ultimately holy work – an act of worship.<sup>131</sup>

This outward movement of liturgy also works the other way around. Missional action finds its energy and origin in worship. Acts of witness must be related to and dependent upon acts of gathered worship. Without worship and the inner formation behind it, words or actions for others can easily become a self-serving, humanistic endeavor. Ken Miyamoto reflects, “...mission is to be seen as a call and invitation to participate in the encounter with God and the transformation of life in worship. The church in mission is sent to the world as a tangible locus where the worship-centered life, and for that matter God-centered life, takes place on earth.”<sup>132</sup> This God-centered life on

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<sup>129</sup> O’Connor, *Journey Inward, Journey Outward*, 18.

<sup>130</sup> O’Connor, *Journey Inward, Journey Outward*, 87.

<sup>131</sup> Warren, *Liturgy of the Ordinary*, 90.

<sup>132</sup> Ken Christoph Miyamoto, “Mission, Liturgy, and the Transformation of Identity,” *Mission Studies* 27, no. 1 (May 1, 2010): 61, [https://brill.com/abstract/journals/mist/27/1/article-p56\\_5.xml](https://brill.com/abstract/journals/mist/27/1/article-p56_5.xml).

earth stretches into our eternal life with God and is enveloped into God's *telos* for all creation. Christian formation therefore has an anticipatory, eschatological dimension.<sup>133</sup>

### How Practices Form

The formation necessary in this inward/outward journey toward God's vision for humanity and the world does not take place automatically, nor does it happen overnight. Formation takes practice. Philip Kenneson defines a practice as, "any activity that both presumes and reinforces a particular way of life, a particular way of seeing, understanding, and interacting with the world."<sup>134</sup> Alan Roxburgh defines practices in a similar way, saying that they are, "shared actions that, when taken together, weave a way of life amongst a people."<sup>135</sup> These two definitions capture the central role of practices: to cultivate a particular *way of life*. If the aim is a particular way, an inward/outward life that reflects Jesus Christ in the world or what may be described for this study as *missional*, then the shared practices the church chooses to embrace or reject is of utmost importance.

The predominant model of formation for much of Protestant, post-Enlightenment Christianity has been what James K. A. Smith calls "worldview-thinking."<sup>136</sup> In this approach, Christian formation is focused on the acquisition of right ideas and beliefs. This approach coincides with the strong Protestant emphasis on the written and preached word, and for some in the Reformation, a devaluation of the role of images and

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<sup>133</sup> Wright, *After You Believe*, 66.

<sup>134</sup> Philip D. Kenneson, "Exegeting Culture: Formation, Identity, Mission," *Leaven* 24, no. 1 (January 1, 2016): 13, <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven/vol24/iss1/4>.

<sup>135</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh, *Joining God, Remaking Church, Changing the World: The New Shape of the Church in Our Time* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2015), 49.

<sup>136</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 24.



symbols.<sup>137</sup> If one can acquire an adequate cognitive understanding of the gospel, ethics, and evangelism, the argument goes, surely right actions will follow.

However, Smith suggests that worldview-thinking alone is inadequate for it places too much emphasis on an Enlightenment intellectualist model and undervalues the many ways human beings are shaped by formative practices. He calls the intellectualist approach, “sanctification by information transfer.”<sup>138</sup> Many seminaries and churches face similar challenges especially when it comes to programs of Christian education which, influenced by this tradition, focus primarily on discipleship as the acquisition of information devoid of shared communal practices.<sup>139</sup>

Smith, drawing on wisdom from Aristotle, affirms the material, bodily formation of our noncognitive dispositions. We acquire the virtues, not just by ideas, but through the formation of habits and practices.<sup>140</sup> Smith contends that because of this reality, we are being daily mal-formed in ways contrary to the gospel through what he calls “cultural liturgies.” One example he offers is the liturgy of consumerism as seen in the “quasi-liturgical practices” at work in sites like the mall which use rituals, images, and architecture in order to shape people into unconscious, habitual consumers of goods and services.<sup>141</sup> Smith offers a critique of these cultural liturgies and thoughtful consideration

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<sup>137</sup> James F. White, *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 26.

<sup>138</sup> James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2016), 4.

<sup>139</sup> Miyamoto, “Mission, Liturgy, and the Transformation of Identity,” 59.

<sup>140</sup> Aristotle and Robert C. Bartlett, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 5. pr (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2012).; Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 60.

<sup>141</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 24.

to the ways that gospel-centered counter-liturgies, enacted within the life of the church, family, and individual, can form the hearts and lives of people into a kingdom-shaped life. This insight suggests that the market-driven approaches to worship, church, and spirituality prevalent in Christendom may be more a reflection of cultural malformation than of deep, gospel-centered theological reflection.

Many people and churches desire to exhibit missional behaviors in their lives. However, the desire alone will not ensure faithful action. Liturgies with shared practices purposefully oriented toward God and Christ-centered formation can, by the Spirit's work, shape people into the image of Christ and for his mission. Smith explains the connection between desire and habits, "In short, if you are what you love, and love is a habit, then discipleship is a rehabituation of your loves. This means that discipleship is more a matter of reformation than of acquiring information."<sup>142</sup> This reformation is the shaping of the heart, mind, and bodies of worshipers by inviting them into a pattern of communal experiences which function much like the script musicians use to make music together.<sup>143</sup> These practices happen as the church is gathered in the sanctuary, in small groups, and as individuals are scattered throughout the community.

This suggests that missional formation may happen through the practices of receiving the Eucharist or serving a meal to someone who is hungry as much as a sermon (monologue by a preacher) on Christian compassion. This is not to diminish the role of the spoken word through preaching, teaching, and instruction, which is an important

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<sup>142</sup> Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 19.

<sup>143</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship: An Exploration of Liturgical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 7.

aspect of the church's worship.<sup>144</sup> It is simply to suggest that preaching is to be seen as more than the distribution of information. It is part of the larger mosaic of formative practices which have the power to shape the desires of worshipers.

This is not a new strategy for Christian formation but is in fact a return to what the Church has always done for “before Christians had systematic theologies and worldviews, they were singing hymns and psalms, saying prayers, celebrating the Eucharist, sharing their property, and becoming a people marked by a desire for God's coming kingdom—a desire that constituted them as a peculiar people in the present.”<sup>145</sup>

The earliest Christians practiced their way into faith and thus, into a life of mission. These insights invite the church to a revival of faithful Christian formation that is centered on grace-filled practices and “full, conscious, and active participation” in the worship of God in the assembly that unfolds into active practices of witness in the world.<sup>146</sup> This is more than simply helping people understand the historical development of the Bible, theology, or liturgy. It is the work of curation - helping people find formational meaning in and through words, images, and gestures.<sup>147</sup> It is to help worshipers understand and experience the liturgy in such a way that it offers “life-orienting symbols newly available to us and to the circumstances of our time.”<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Acts 2:42

<sup>145</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 139.

<sup>146</sup> Vatican Council and Sacrosanctum concilium, eds., *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1995), 36.

<sup>147</sup> Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, 22.

<sup>148</sup> Lathrop, *Holy Ground*, 4.

### The Liturgy as a Set of Formative Practices

In light of the formative power of practices, it can be helpful to think of the church's liturgy as a set of formative practices. To do so, the liturgy must remain connected to the past while attentive to the present. Without engagement with the biblical and historical liturgical tradition, the church may end up adopting, or worse, uncritically mimicking, the cultural liturgies of the day (with their values and aims) and not really offering anything substantively different or life-giving. The life of the church can become untethered from the Gospel and from the faith handed down, becoming what Eugene Peterson calls a "market for religious experience."<sup>149</sup> The scope and meaning of the liturgy gets lost and the church's liturgy actually contributes to the malformation of the people. This may help explain the shortfalls of the modern Christendom model with its obsession of success, numbers, and marketing and with its sometimes-blatant alliance with power, corruption, racism, and all sorts of values that are antithetical to the gospel.

When the liturgy is historically rooted, thoughtfully crafted, and faithfully practiced, it creates an environment that continually reorients worldview and has a shaping effect on peoples' bodies, minds, and hearts.<sup>150</sup> Rituals, words, pictures, and stories regularly engaged over time create what Wright calls a "virtuous circle."<sup>151</sup> It has the capacity to "mold and shape our precognitive disposition to the world by training our desires."<sup>152</sup> Long-term participation in the patterns of the church's liturgy, through the

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<sup>149</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*, 20th anniversary ed. (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 16.

<sup>150</sup> Lathrop, *Holy Ground*, 15.

<sup>151</sup> Wright, *After You Believe*, 259.

<sup>152</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 59.

Spirit's work, can shape the church in both conscious and unconscious ways into the image of Christ, all for the sake of others.

The church has long been able to observe ways the liturgy shapes the life and witness of God's people, matching outward actions in worship to the inward dispositions they help nurture.<sup>153</sup> The content and shape of the historic Christian liturgy as found in the pattern of gathering, reading and hearing Scripture, thanksgiving, and sending has a formative effect on worshipers by inviting the church into an immersive inward/outward journey.

### **Gathering**

The effects of the liturgy begin before the first words are spoken. The very space in which the community gathers has the potential to form the faith of the people. Liturgical space oriented around the gospel through colors of the liturgical year, art, architecture, and the arrangement of furniture orient God's people as to what is taking place when the church gathers. Beauty points to the creative impulse of God and humans' creation in God's image. The central place of the Table for the celebration of the Eucharist, for example, indicate that the practices of worship are "the altar of Christian formation, the heart and soul, the center of gravity of the task of discipleship."<sup>154</sup> Purposeful formation will be concerned with how the liturgy can be enacted faithfully, whether a church meets in a large, Gothic cathedral or a neighborhood pub.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Maximus the Confessor, "Mystagogy." *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, The Classics of Western Spirituality, ed. George C. Berthold (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 206.

<sup>154</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 213.

<sup>155</sup> Frank L. Emanuel, "Worship in the Third Space," *Theoforum*, no. 2 (2013): 365–376, accessed April 30, 2019, [http://poj.peeters-leuven.be/content.php?url=article&id=3062033&journal\\_code=TF](http://poj.peeters-leuven.be/content.php?url=article&id=3062033&journal_code=TF). See this helpful exploration of the relationship between liturgy and space for a post-modern culture.

The gathering acts may include a processional, symbolizing entrance into the splendor of God's holy presence.<sup>156</sup> In some traditions, the processional will include symbols such as the cross. Some bow at the cross's passing to indicate a posture of humility and awe before God.<sup>157</sup> A greeting invoking the Lord's name, which has Jewish roots, serves to begin the dialogue between God and God's people.<sup>158</sup> The call to worship is an invitation from God to respond to the divine call to be God's image bearers in the world. It is an invitation in this brief time of gathered worship to become image-bearers each day.<sup>159</sup> The call is an implicit reminder that God has the first word and takes the initiative in this relationship. The presence of the people in worship is a response to God's grace.

The practice of silence indicates an invitation into a listening, worry-free posture which is to mark each day of God's peoples' lives.<sup>160</sup> Singing hymns and songs of praise, testimony, and even lament function to both allow worshipers to honestly express their hearts to God and to direct and instruct the faith of the worshipers.<sup>161</sup> Songs have power to shape emotions and hearts. This is notable even outside religious settings. As rap artist Jay-Z reflected on the craft of songwriting, "...poets make words work...by giving them layers of meaning, so you can use them to get at complicated truths in a way that straightforward storytelling fails to do. The words you use can be read a dozen different

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<sup>156</sup> Ps. 100:4

<sup>157</sup> Eph. 3:14

<sup>158</sup> Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, 38.

<sup>159</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 165.

<sup>160</sup> Ps. 46:10

<sup>161</sup> Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 208.

ways...They can be symbolic and literal. They can be nakedly obvious and subliminally effective at the same time.”<sup>162</sup> Music across all genres has the power to form faith.

At certain times of the year such as Lent, prayers of confession are often included in the acts of gathering. At other times, they are better suited in response to the Scriptures, before Holy Communion. Confession of sin offered individually and corporately provides an opportunity for covenant renewal with God. Kneeling during confession is an outward expression of the inward disposition of the heart. Origen goes so far as to call kneeling during confession “necessary.”<sup>163</sup> Confession communicates a posture of humility before God and a reminder of humans’ need for God’s saving and sustaining grace. Confession reminds God’s people that fracture remains in our world and in the church. Absolution spoken over the people by the minister functions to assure of God’s forgiveness and give hope, reminding worshipers that “the curse is being rolled back.”<sup>164</sup> The practice of confession and absolution in worship shapes God’s people to remember that repentance and faith are the constant, daily rhythms of the Christian life.<sup>165</sup>

## Word

God speaks a word to God’s people through the reading of Scripture and the proclamation of the gospel. Readings in the assembly from the Old Testament, New Testament letters, and the gospels, a practice drawn from the pattern from Jewish tradition, help the church hear and listen to the echoes of God’s voice in a variety of

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<sup>162</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, Paperback Edition (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2011), 54-55.

<sup>163</sup> Origen, *Origen*, The Classics of Western Spirituality, trans. ed. Rowan A. Greer (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 164.

<sup>164</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 181.

<sup>165</sup> Warren, *Liturgy of the Ordinary*, 56.

genres throughout history.<sup>166</sup> Through the Spirit, God speaks afresh. Readings through the use of a lectionary enables God's people to be shaped year by year through a balance of both pastoral/priestly and prophetic literature.<sup>167</sup> This pattern of weekly immersion is intended to shape worshipers into a storied people, so they may imagine themselves continuing the story in their daily lives of discipleship.

The preaching is more than just an explanation of what the Bible says. It is the Spirit-inspired communication of the word of God, drawn out from the witness of Scripture, and spoken into the lives and context of God's people here and now. Martin Luther expounds on how the reading of Scripture and preaching invite the church into a real encounter with the Living Word:

When you open the book containing the gospels and read or hear how Christ comes here or there, or how someone is brought to him, you should therein perceive the sermon or the gospel through which he is coming to you, or you are being brought to him. For the preaching of the gospel is nothing else than Christ coming to us, or we being brought to him.<sup>168</sup>

The act of preaching is vertical, as described above, but it is also horizontal. In the preaching of the word, there is a communal shaping by the Spirit that takes place. Responses to the word indicate a dialogue with God and each other. This aspect is uniquely illustrated in the element of call and response often found in Black and African American context.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, 89.

<sup>167</sup> Lathrop, *Holy Ground*, 47.

<sup>168</sup> Martin Luther, Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, and Helmut T. Lehmann, *Luther's Works. 35: Word and Sacrament: I*, American ed. (Saint Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publ. House [u.a.], 1960), 121.

<sup>169</sup> James H. Cone, *Speaking the Truth: Ecumenism, Liberation, and Black Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999), 17-22.



## Thanksgiving

In response to the word, worshipers confess their faith in the triune God using the language of the ancient creeds, namely the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds. The repetition of the creeds has a shaping effect, teaching the people the overarching story of God centered in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. This "repeated saying of allegiance works itself into an orienting allegiance."<sup>170</sup>

The church intercedes in prayer for the world, displaying the church's unique role as intercessors who are being shaped "for the sake of others."<sup>171</sup> As the church offers these prayers corporately, it is also invited to be scattered throughout the world as a praying people, inviting God's presence and power to empower it to be a healing agent in God's world.<sup>172</sup>

Before the Eucharistic meal and often right after the absolution, the passing of the peace takes place. Its placement before the Eucharist is purposeful.<sup>173</sup> Before the shared Supper, worshipers actively extend peace to other members of the Body of Christ right them. This is a "liturgical enactment of the reality that we cannot approach the table of the Prince of Peace if we aren't at peace with our neighbor."<sup>174</sup> Unity as expressed through the peace is reminder that the gathering is not simply a social gathering around shared interest. It is an eschatological event, "a foretaste of the unity of the communion

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<sup>170</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 109

<sup>171</sup> Mulholland and Barton, *Invitation to a Journey*, 15.

<sup>172</sup> 1 Thess. 5:17

<sup>173</sup> Matt. 5:23

<sup>174</sup> Warren, *Liturgy of the Ordinary*, 78.

of the saints.”<sup>175</sup> This practice and the words of Jesus which accompany it invite the church to be a people of peace in the midst of conflict in the church and the world at large.<sup>176</sup>

As the elements of the Eucharist are being prepared, the offering is received. More than just collecting money to keep the church’s lights on, the offering is an act of worship in which the ethical implications of a shared communal life are expressed in the voluntary offering of worshipers’ means to God to be used for his service, including the meeting of the needs of the poor.<sup>177</sup> This is an acknowledgment that everything belongs to God and is meant to shape the church into people of generosity who share in “cruciform practices that counter the liturgies of consumption.”<sup>178</sup>

As the bread and wine are presented and then taken, blessed, broken, and shared through the Eucharistic liturgy, many things are taking place.<sup>179</sup> Once again, worshipers are being immersed in the story of God through word and ritual. There is a horizontal, relational element to the Eucharist. The body of Christ is being re-membered in and through Christ by the Spirit. People are reconciled and made one with each other. The Eucharist is shaping the church to live as one by serving as “the school of active love for

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<sup>175</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *In Good Company: The Church as Polis*, Reprint. (Notre Dame, Ind: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 157.

<sup>176</sup> John 20:19

<sup>177</sup> Daniel T. Benedict, *Patterned by Grace: How Liturgy Shapes Us* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2007), 113.

<sup>178</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 205.

<sup>179</sup> This is the pattern employed by Jesus at the Last Supper and after his resurrection on the road to Emmaus. See Luke 22:19; 24:30.

neighbor.”<sup>180</sup> This reminds people that to be Christian is to live, not as isolated individuals, but as members of the Body of Christ with its ethical demands.<sup>181</sup>

There is also a vertical aspect. As the words of institution and the epiclesis are offered over the bread and wine and the people gathered, worshipers are invited to be filled with the Spirit so that they might be a people marked by gratitude in the world. As Nouwen reflects, “In the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, we discern the real presence of the risen Christ among us, not only in the bread and wine but at the center of our lives, the core of our very being, the heart of our community, and the heart of creation.”<sup>182</sup>

Worshipers receive by faith the benefits of Christ’s atonement as in the Eucharist, God gives the recipient God’s own self.<sup>183</sup> The first response is gratitude. Worshipers recognize that all good things, including the very food they eat, are a gift from God.<sup>184</sup> This shared meal of thanksgiving shapes the church into people, nourished by grace, who then go out and participate in the feeding of the world, both spiritually and literally.<sup>185</sup> The

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<sup>180</sup> Pope John Paul II, “Letter Dominicae Cenae of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II to All the Bishops of the Church On the Mystery and Worship of the Eucharist,” February 24, 1980. Vatican, 1980, accessed April 20, 2019. [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1980/documents/hf\\_jp-ii LET\\_19800224\\_dominicae-cenae.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1980/documents/hf_jp-ii LET_19800224_dominicae-cenae.html).

<sup>181</sup> Tim Gaines, “*Sunday Has Everything to Do with Monday: Worship, Ethics, and Moral Christian Vision*,” January 8, 2015, accessed March 15, 2019, <http://www.graceandpeacemagazine.org/issue-11/419-sunday-has-everything-to-do-with-monday-worship-ethics-and-moral-christian-vision>.

<sup>182</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life*, First ed. (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2013), 123.

<sup>183</sup> Henry H. Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace*, Pietist and Wesleyan Studies no. 3 (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1992), 138.

<sup>184</sup> Lathrop, *Holy Ground*, 82.

<sup>185</sup> Benedict, *Patterned by Grace*, 118.

shared meal of the Eucharist becomes a foreshadowing of God's eschatological future where no one goes hungry.<sup>186</sup> It also becomes a metaphor for the sending of the church.

### **Sending**

As the gathering comes to a close, worship does not end. The benediction and dismissal allow the liturgy to continue as the church scatters. Having encountered God's presence together, the church is sent out with hearts and lives re-oriented toward joining the mission of God in the world through worshipers' own vocations.<sup>187</sup> In the practice of the liturgy, the church has been trained "to recognize and respond to beauty" and is alert to signs of God's presence in daily life so that it may bear witness and participate in the redemptive mission of God.<sup>188</sup>

### **A Story-Formed People**

As the brief walk through the liturgy above illustrates, the liturgy itself, from the earliest Christian communities, has a narrative structure which immerses the church in a set of formative practices.<sup>189</sup> This narrative quality of the liturgy is grounded in the story of Israel who, through prayer and ritual, rehearsed the stories that remind them who they are. The temple sacrifice through words and symbol, the recitation of the Shema, the Psalms, and the ritual meal of the Passover, all immersed God's people into the redemptive story of God. The people are not merely observers. They become participants.

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<sup>186</sup> 1 Cor. 11:26

<sup>187</sup> Lathrop, *Holy Ground*, 84.

<sup>188</sup> Warren, *Liturgy of the Ordinary*, 134.

<sup>189</sup> Lathrop, *Holy Ground*, 134.

Christian worship adopted this “storying” feature of the Old Testament and expands and interprets it through the New Covenant as embodied in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christian formation immerses worshipers in Jesus’ ministry and teaching. The seasons of the Christian liturgical year, the church’s “alternative chronology,” orient the community to the whole redemptive story of God.<sup>190</sup> As the church gathers and worships through words, images, and actions that parallel the biblical narrative, the Bible comes alive.<sup>191</sup> As Robert Webber noted, in the liturgy, “we do God’s story” and people find their own narrative to have meaning within God’s greater narrative.<sup>192</sup>

Participation in this rhythm forms people in their life with God. The liturgy provides a framework for establishing and renewing covenant relationship with God through invitations to praise, lament, prayer, dialogue, repentance, confession and absolution, offering, and thanksgiving. The liturgy, through song, word, ritual, and imagery, provides signposts to God’s people to alert them to God’s presence and invite them into engagement with God. In the liturgy, the church is actualized, and the Christian faith becomes more than an idea or belief system.<sup>193</sup> It becomes an embodied way of life.

It is important to note that the practices of the liturgy do not replace God nor is God limited to the structures of the Christian liturgy. The practices must not be disconnected from the intention of the heart. Gregory Clapper notes, “Emphasizing

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<sup>190</sup> Warren, *Liturgy of the Ordinary*, 105.

<sup>191</sup> Lathrop, *Holy Things*, 15.

<sup>192</sup> Robert E. Webber and John Wilvliet, *Ancient-Future Worship: Proclaiming and Enacting God’s Narrative* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 2008), 39-40.

<sup>193</sup> Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship*, 11.

‘practice’ in an exclusive and single-minded way can lead to a deadening moralism that will ignore the heart’s yearning for holiness. No matter how compelling and complete the practice appears to be, if it is not done with the goal of either growing or expressing our gratitude for salvation, our joy in being rightly-related to God, our love for God and neighbor, it has not achieved its purpose.”<sup>194</sup> The liturgy serves as a means of Christian formation. It does not form through coercion or pressure. Rather, it creates an intentional environment where God can communicate with and ultimately form the faith and character of God’s people, drawing them to consider how God is leading them to repentance and holiness.<sup>195</sup>

Finally, the liturgy immerses people into the Christian community and thus, a particular way of life with its relational, ethical, and missional implications. Worship is not just one task of the church. It is a deeply theological reality which actualizes the eternal nature of the church as the Body of Christ.<sup>196</sup> This communal life is both enacted and signified in the liturgy of baptism and sustained through ongoing attendance to the means of grace.<sup>197</sup>

As the church encounters the Body of Christ in the word and in the Eucharist, it also encounters the Body of Christ in the world. The two are inseparably connected and form a cause and effect.<sup>198</sup> As a liturgical community engages with God, it is shaped into a particular people. This has implications for the inner life of the community as ritual

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<sup>194</sup> Clapper, *Renewal of the Heart Is the Mission of the Church*, 95.

<sup>195</sup> Clapper, *Renewal of the Heart Is the Mission of the Church*, 118.

<sup>196</sup> Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, 14.

<sup>197</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 185.

<sup>198</sup> Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, 251.

binds people to one another.<sup>199</sup> The church grows in the practices of neighborly love and care, confession and forgiveness, and service to others. It is formed to embody the ethical teachings of Jesus. The liturgy, which “practices” the faith, shapes the habits, beliefs, and actions of the community, aids in bringing about ethical change in the lives of people.

The potential of shared habits and liturgies to reshape desires and behaviors has been validated through neuroscience and is illustrated in the ways groups like Alcoholics Anonymous have seen addicts experience significant and life-altering change through participation in ritual.<sup>200</sup> The cognitive sciences also reinforce to us that the very act of repetition and pattern, which are central to words, songs, and gestures, has a deeply formative effect.<sup>201</sup>

This community of practice has a unique vocation and a missional posture in the world.<sup>202</sup> Schmemmann argues that worship “places the Church before the face of the world, manifests her purpose in the world, the purpose of the people of God, set in the world with a Gospel and a mission. It is...the leaven which raises the loaf, as the love of God directed toward the world, as a witness to the Kingdom of God, as the good news of salvation as new life.”<sup>203</sup> The liturgy’s repeated acts of gathering, hearing, giving thanks,

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<sup>199</sup> Catherine M. Bell and Reza Aslan, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 25.

<sup>200</sup> Charles Duhigg, *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business*, 1st ed (New York: Random House, 2012). The power and influence of habit on individuals and groups is recognized in many fields, including neuroscience, psychology, religion, and marketing.

<sup>201</sup> Monique Ingalls, *Sing It Again! The Art and Science of Repetition in Worship* (Calvin Theological Seminary, 2019), accessed April 29, 2019, <https://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library>.

<sup>202</sup> Matt. 5:16

<sup>203</sup> Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, 31.

and sending reinforce this pattern of life in the hearts, minds, and bodies of worshipers, enabling the liturgy to form God's people "for the sake of others."

### Creating a Culture Through Shared Practices

In order for the church to embrace a missional posture, it must be formed in this inward/outward life at the congregational level. The local parish must not just have a ministry of formation. It must see its entire shared life as a set of formational practices. The notion of creating a culture is a helpful way to think about how shared practices, including the liturgy, can form the church for mission. Philip Kenneson, reflecting on the role of culture, suggests that Christians must become more attentive to how "our desires, convictions and virtues are profoundly shaped by pervasive cultural stories, practices and institutions."<sup>204</sup> Like Smith, Kenneson contends that people are always being shaped by their dominant culture and these factors are not checked at the door when the church gathers. In fact, the church must be willing to exegete its culture to determine the ways it is being formed to either join, or oppose, the mission of God. Reflecting on a Western, individualistic and consumeristic culture, he writes, "Communities of disciples in cultures like ours, therefore, would do well to attend to the virtues that are being exalted and instilled within daily life to see if they might be forming habits of mind and patterns of action that are at odds with God's desires for the shape of human life."<sup>205</sup>

Mark Scandrette employs a playful metaphor to highlight the importance of multi-sensory formation and shared communal practices by describing the church as "a Jesus

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<sup>204</sup> Kenneson, "Exegeting Culture: Formation, Identity, Mission," 13.

<sup>205</sup> Kenneson, "Exegeting Culture: Formation, Identity, Mission," 15.



dojo.”<sup>206</sup> The church serves as a community of practice where “whole-person apprenticeship to Jesus” takes place.<sup>207</sup> Scandrette places emphasis on experimentation and contextualization as a means of enabling a community to engage with God’s mission in the world. Roxburgh adopts a similar approach, urging churches to cultivate smaller, organic experiments instead of large, fixed institutional plans.<sup>208</sup> Practices are discerned and developed as the community engages in the inward and outward journey of discipleship within their context. It is through the adoption and implementation of shared, multi-sensory practices that a shared habitus and the sculpture of a community is formed.

### A Cultural Web

In his book *Creating a Missional Culture: Equipping the Church for the Sake of the World*, J. R. Woodward affirms the role of shared practices in creating a uniquely missional culture with a Christian community. He insists the practices be holistic, multi-sensory, and rooted in grace.

Becoming more like Jesus is not a matter of trying but yielding, setting the sails of our lives to catch the wind of the Spirit. It happens when we develop a communal rhythm of life—a collection of thick, bodily practices (liturgies) that engage our senses, grab our hearts, form our identities and reshape our desires toward God and his kingdom. As we collectively engage in grace-filled spiritual practices, we cultivate particular environments that help to create a missional culture, which in turn reshapes us. As coworkers with God, we create culture and culture reshapes us.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Mark Scandrette, *Practicing the Way of Jesus: Life Together in the Kingdom of Love* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2011), 16.

<sup>207</sup> Scandrette, *Practicing the Way of Jesus*, 17.

<sup>208</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*, Allelon Missional Series (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 2011), 177.

<sup>209</sup> J. R. Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture: Equipping the Church for the Sake of the World* (Downers Grove, IL: Praxis-IVP Books, 2012), 30.

Woodward provides a helpful description of how an intentional culture is created within a community by describing six elements which combine to form what he calls a “cultural web.” The web includes language, artifacts, narratives, rituals, institutions and ethics.<sup>210</sup> The cultural web provides a helpful summary of the elements necessary for creating a missional culture and point to the wisdom and value of the church’s liturgical tradition (Figure 6).

Element	Description of Element
Language	The terminology we use to speak about God, the church, the world, the gospel, etc.
Artifacts	Created goods which signal participants to the values, narratives, etc. of the culture
Narratives	The dominant story of the culture (theology, stories, and doctrine)
Rituals	Procedures or routines that are fused with meaning (rites, practices, and liturgies)
Institutions	Structures of social interaction (Structures, symbols, and systems)
Ethics	Moral convictions that inform how the community lives

*Figure 6 – Six Elements of the Cultural Web*<sup>211</sup>

Faithful Christian liturgy is culture-creating activity. It immerses worshipers in a counter-narrative, a story which challenges the individualistic consumer narrative of American culture. It utilizes various artifacts and rituals to engage people in specific

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<sup>210</sup> Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture*, 36.

<sup>211</sup> Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture*, 36-43.

practices which enable the Spirit to form members together into the image of Christ.

Participation in shared liturgical practices help locate people within the institution of the church, a community of grace sent into the world to embody the values of God's kingdom in the power of the Spirit. The liturgy shapes the church for mission when the practices are adopted in the gathering. These are then extended out into a context in ways that are relevant to its place, time, resources, and challenges.<sup>212</sup>

Kreider suggests such a cultural web had been formed in the early Christian church as it inhabited faithful missional practices outside its gatherings because its way of life was grounded in and tied to its gospel-centered liturgical life. He contends that a holistic and missional view of formation was integral to the early Christians when he writes, "Christians claimed that week by week they encountered God in worship—from the heart (affective) as well as from the head (mental). Further, their worship was from the body. Their encounter of God in worship involved bodily gestures and rites that became habitual, repetitive, reflexive ways of being. These physical patterns became their *habitus*, a handed-down way of being."<sup>213</sup>

Kreider's insight weaves together the strands of formation, culture creation, shared practices, and mission. The early Christians' participation in the practices of the liturgical life of the church when they gathered was, in a very real sense, cultivating a culture of mission and training them to continue their worship through shared practices when they left the assembly. These were not done out of an anxiousness about growing

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<sup>212</sup> Zscheile, *Cultivating Sent Communities*, 32. Richard Osmer describes this as the process of a congregation's discerning its missional vocation.

<sup>213</sup> Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church*, 186.

the church. Rather, they practiced their way into embodying a missional culture, knowing that “when the habitus was healthy, the churches would grow.”<sup>214</sup>

This insight implies the relevance of a practice-based approach as a potential bridge to a post-Christian world. According to Pew Research, even though 69% of those in the Spiritual But Not Religious category seldom or never attend religious services, 57% pray daily, 58% meditate at least once per week, and 68% feel wonder about the universe at least once a week.<sup>215</sup> Carolyn Headley and Mark Earey argue that the church does not have to develop missional worship from scratch but that the Christian liturgical tradition with its holistic and communal focus and its embrace of the poetic and mystery has a missional resonance today. They write, “In our postmodern world we cannot assume that people do not want a taste of the mystery and majesty of God that more liturgical forms of worship can express, as well as the sense of his accessibility and intimacy that we value as part of the gospel. So worship must be accessible, but not ordinary.”<sup>216</sup> This indicates that what may be needed most is a recovery of the best of the tradition, faithful contextualization, and an integration which leads to authentic witness.

### Conclusion

As the church participates in the liturgical life of the church when it gathers, it is immersed in a pattern of practices that have can have a formative effect on the bodies, minds, and hearts of worshipers. The Spirit uses these practices to form the inward and

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<sup>214</sup> Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church*, 74.

<sup>215</sup> Pew Research Center, “Religious Landscape Study: The spiritual but not religious,” accessed February 13, 2021, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-denomination/spiritual-but-not-religious>.

<sup>216</sup> Carolyn Headley and Mark Earey, *Mission and Liturgical Worship* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2002), 22.

outward life of individuals into the image of Christ. When placed within the context of the mission of God, the practices of the liturgy can serve to cultivate a congregational culture that forms God's people to participate in God's mission.

### **Models and Congregational Sketches**

Having examined the need for a missional liturgical ecclesiology and explored the vital role of worship and the liturgy's role in forming individuals and congregation through shared practices, it is helpful to consider two models and three congregational sketches to examine how some communities are seeking to form their people for missional ministry in a post-Christian context.

#### **The BELLS Model**

In his book *Surprise the World: The 5 Habits of Highly Missional People* Michael Frost offers a model of missional engagement and culture creation that draws on the concept of shared practices or habits. His goal is to “to equip believers to see themselves as ‘sent ones,’ to foster a series of missional habits that shape our lives and values, and to propel us into the world confidently and filled with hope.”<sup>217</sup>

Frost suggests that “evangelistic mission works effectively when we are living generous, hospitable, Spirit-led, Christlike lives as missionaries to our own neighborhoods.”<sup>218</sup> Like Kreider, Frost believes that the *way of life*, the habitus of a Christian, is the primary way that the gospel is shared. This habitus is cultivated through concrete practices. The impetus for embodying these missional habits is evangelistic. Frost argues, “If all believers are leading the kinds of lives that evoke questions from

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<sup>217</sup> Michael Frost, *Surprise the World: The Five Habits of Highly Missional People* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, a NavPress resource published in alliance with Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 2016), xii.

<sup>218</sup> Frost, *Surprise the World*, 1.

their friends, then opportunities for sharing faith abound, and chances for the gifted evangelists to boldly proclaim are increased. In brief, our task is to surprise the world!”<sup>219</sup>

Frost offers five habits that he envisions Christians embrace in their daily lives. He suggests that if one engages in the practices regularly, then one will be shaped into a missional lifestyle (Figure 7).

<b>Bless</b>	If you bless three people every week, you’re going to become a very generous person.
<b>Eat</b>	If you eat with others, you’ll develop a greater capacity for hospitality.
<b>Listen</b>	If you foster the habit of listening to the Holy Spirit, you’ll become an increasingly Spirit-led person.
<b>Learn</b>	If you’re learning Christ, it’s fair to assume you’ll become more and more Christlike.
<b>Sent</b>	If you’re journaling the myriad ways you’ve been sent into your world, you’ll increasingly see yourself as a sent one, or a missionary in your own neighborhood.

*Figure 7 – The BELLS Model*<sup>220</sup>

Frost sees these habits as missional because they, “alert others to the reign of God” and to “propel us outward, beyond ourselves, into the lives of others.”<sup>221</sup> Though we do them, Frost suggests that we do so in response to the gospel. He writes, “Missional habits aren’t just strategic, they’re consequential: Because of the universal reign of God through Christ, we bless, we open our tables, we listen for the Spirit, we learn Christ, and we are sent out on this evangelistic task.”<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Frost, *Surprise the World*, 5.

<sup>220</sup> Frost, *Surprise the World*, 23.

<sup>221</sup> Frost, *Surprise the World*, 21, 27.

<sup>222</sup> Frost, *Surprise the World*, 22.

Though he suggests that the habits are dependent upon and responsive to the universal reign of Christ, a potential weakness of this model is that the missional practices are not always explicitly rooted in the liturgical life of the community. This is where my proposed artifact diverges from Frost's. There may be a lack of an explicit "energizing core" as Kreider suggests was true for the early Christians. Gathered worship, adoration, and thanksgiving is actually not one of the core practices. There is little reference to the Paschal mystery and the Eucharist. When the Eucharist is mentioned, the sacramental significance of eating is almost pitted against a "missional" understanding.<sup>223</sup>

While rightly focused on Spirit-enabled participation in the mission of God, a potential consequence of a model not connected to the liturgical life of the church is that the practices can become self-referential or even self-serving even if they use evangelistic language. The missional practices' derivation in the good news of the gospel can be lost. Faithful liturgy roots us in gratitude and enables all we do for others to be a Spirit-enabled response.

What is especially helpful in Frost's list of others-oriented habits is that they are memorable, specific, and doable within the flow of one's ordinary life. While emphasizing that these are habits meant to be repeated, he also helpfully stresses that habits must be intentional. Frost warns, "The key is to develop mindful habits for all Christians so that their habitual practices don't become merely unconscious habits, like biting your nails. They should become a regular, everyday way of life, but we mustn't

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<sup>223</sup> Frost, *Surprise the World*, 43.

lose sight of the values they were designed to unleash.”<sup>224</sup> Again, a more intentional connection to the liturgical life of the community is one way to keep missional habits focused in the way Frost describes.

### Faithful Presence: Seven Disciplines

In his book *Faithful Presence: Seven Disciplines That Shape the Church for Mission*, David Fitch proposes a model centered on cultivating a missional culture through shared habits and practices. Grounded in an understanding that practices cultivate a particular way of life, the central language in Fitch’s model is to speak of the disciplines as practices which shape the church as a faithful presence. The seven practices are as follows:

The Discipline of the Lord's Table

The Discipline of Reconciliation

The Discipline of Proclaiming the Gospel

The Discipline of Being with the "Least of These"

The Discipline of Being with Children

The Discipline of the Fivefold Gifting

The Discipline of Kingdom Prayer<sup>225</sup>

Fitch affirms the insight that God’s mission births the church and the church’s call to join in what God is already doing in the world. Discernment is required to discover how a particular community is called to join in that work. Fitch also affirms an incarnational ecclesiology, that the church is called to embody the gospel within a

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<sup>224</sup> Frost, *Surprise the World*, 27.

<sup>225</sup> Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 7.



particular context. The emphasis here is on the church's active work in the world. But here Fitch seeks to address what I observed as a potential gap in Frost's model above – that such witness must be grounded in an “energizing core.”

Fitch suggests a more explicit connection between the gathered and sent church. He writes, “This is the pattern throughout the New Testament. The church gathers in its place of worship to encounter Christ's presence. But this same church is sent out to extend his presence into our homes, our neighborhoods, and among the marginalized and hurting in the world...The church's location therefore cannot be seen in terms of *in here* or *out there*. It is an entire way of life.”<sup>226</sup>

The connecting thread between gathered and sent is the image of faithful presence. As the church attends to and discerns the presence of God through the seven disciplines, it is then able to attend to and extend the presence of God outside of its gatherings through those practices. The Church does not control the Lord's presence. Rather, “his kingdom takes shape in our submission to Christ and his reign together as a people...his reign becomes visible among (and in) us by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>227</sup> The language of extension is very helpful. However, the language of “extending the presence” may run the risk of placing too much emphasis on human agency to the detriment of the language of participation in God's already-present Presence in the world.

Perhaps the most helpful contribution of Fitch's work here is how his concept of the three circles connects the gathered and sent aspect of the church's life. The seven disciplines outlined above are to be lived out in all three circles, or spheres, of life. This

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<sup>226</sup> Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 41.

<sup>227</sup> Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 202.

model is very helpful in thinking about how a practice can be connected to the liturgical life. The circles are visualized in Figure 8 followed by summaries of his descriptions.



*Figure 8 – The Three Circles*<sup>228</sup>

The Close Circle: This is where committed subjects to Christ gather as recipients from Jesus, the host. It is “close but not closed” because “this circle does not exclude people...rather, because all are committed Christians carefully discerning their submission to Christ and to one another under his reign, there is a social closeness that is supernatural and Jesus, as the host, is the center of this space. Here the intensity of the presence of Christ is known like nowhere else.” This is the energizing core for Fitch’s model.<sup>229</sup>

The Dotted Circle: This is where committed followers of Jesus turn from being recipients to hosts. Space is cultivated “for neighbors and strangers to enter in and watch what God is doing in this circle. Here, the Christian disciple is the host.” The image here

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<sup>228</sup> Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 40.

<sup>229</sup> Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 40.

is that Christians move from the close circle to the dotted circle where they gather in the neighborhood to practice the disciplines.<sup>230</sup>

The Half Circle: Here is where a Christian moves from being a host and goes "among the world as a guest...and extends the special presence of Christ into the world...but here we discern Christ's presence as a guest among the hurting and the wandering." The Christian practices the same disciplines in the culture as a means of bearing witness and attending to the presence and work of the Lord.<sup>231</sup>

While not every missional discipline Fitch suggests is explicitly tied to a particular movement of the Christian liturgy, the assumption is that each discipline will be practiced in the close circle. The strongest tie is found in the first practice, the discipline of the Lord's Table. Fitch calls the practice of the Eucharist in the gathered worshiping community "ground zero," where "the closest of fellowship is experienced with the resurrected Jesus."<sup>232</sup> This recognition of the centrality of the Lord's Table, especially coming from Fitch's Anabaptist perspective, suggests the compelling nature of sacramental and missional understandings of the church to inform and enrich each other.

#### Word of Life Church<sup>233</sup>

Word of Life Church (WOLC) is a nondenominational congregation located in St. Joseph Missouri. Brian Zahnd serves as the church's founding and lead pastor. Derek

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<sup>230</sup> Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 40-41.

<sup>231</sup> Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 41.

<sup>232</sup> Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 54-55.

<sup>233</sup> Derek Vreeland, interview by author, video conference, February 6, 2020.

Vreeland serves as Discipleship Pastor and oversees the ministries of Christian formation at the church. Derek describes a shift that has taken place over the last decade in the church's philosophy and practice of mission. Derek described a move from seeing missions as a peripheral outreach ministry of the church to seeing the whole church as a strategy of mission. Mission is a central, identifying way of speaking about the nature of the church. There has also been a shift from the language of *outreach* to *practicing justice*, which he describes as "God's work of setting right a world gone wrong." This reflects a church that is seeking to adopt a missional stance in a post-Christian culture.

Vreeland sees everything WOLC chooses to do as the work of "forming people in the ways of Jesus" and making them "disciples fit for the mission." This formation happens through three primary spheres: Worship (God), Community (one another), and Justice (neighbor). All ministries are seen through this three-fold lens. This matrix of formation reflects that the church is seeking to integrate mission and formation, gathering and sending, as they cultivate a culture.

Worship plays a significant role in forming the church for mission. As a church that was initially formed mostly by the charismatic evangelical tradition, the missional shift mentioned above has also been accompanied by a shift in worship practices. Worship is "integral to disciple-making" at WOLC, according to Vreeland. The church has integrated more traditional liturgical practices, including liturgy from the Book of Common Prayer and a move to weekly communion in 2011. Vreeland sees worship at WOLC as "communing with Christ" and participating in "the life he offers to the world." Practically, Vreeland sees worship as a dance between the formational/liturgical and

attractional/contextual. The goal is worship which forms people but remains accessible to those unfamiliar with Christian practices.

A challenge Vreeland has identified in forming the church for mission through worship and liturgy is that many people in the congregation see worship as a privatized/consumer event and the sacrament of communion as merely a moment of individual piety. This reflects not only some tendencies within evangelicalism in general but also the ways in which the consumerism that is so prevalent in North American culture has shaped and formed the people. Vreeland also sees that a missing piece is the need for more regular intercessory, community prayer. As it stands, this happens mostly in response to cultural crises and not as a regular, habitual practice within the church's worship.

Vreeland suggests that resources needed to help equip the church for missional worship will help people that did not grow up in a sacramental background realize that formation through liturgy in worship is a work of the Holy Spirit. Also helpful will be resources that help small groups learn to see worship as a communal act and make the connection between liturgical acts in worship and formation for mission.

#### Resurrection Anglican Church<sup>234</sup>

Resurrection Anglican Church is an Anglican parish in Austin, TX. The founding rector Fr. Shawn McCain, frustrated with missional models which saw worship as “icing” instead of central to the church's mission, set out to plant a church which would cultivate “a haunting curiosity about the nearness of God and his activity” through sacramental

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<sup>234</sup> Rev. Shawn McCain, interview by author, video conference, May 7, 2020.

forms of worship and witness and in the neighborhood of Austin. He is hopeful that the church can get people to ask the question, “How is God present and active here?” and then join in.

McCain affirmed the importance of cultivating a missional culture when he repeated the often-quoted phrase, “Culture eats strategy for breakfast.” He affirmed that the habits and practices of the church supersede what may be listed as values on a worship bulletin or website. For Resurrection, mission is God’s project. God is present and at work in the world and the church is caught up into the mission of God primarily through participation in the Eucharist.

Resurrection’s philosophy of worship places worship and the Eucharist at the center of the church’s life. Mission flows “from the Table out” in McCain’s view. Worship is for God’s sake and liturgy is about helping us to ascribe worth to God. Through worship and specifically in and through the Eucharist, we participate in the paschal mystery of God’s self-emptying love. Formation then is a consequence of worship as participation. We are moved to embody God’s self-emptying love in the world. The church’s liturgical life teaches the people how to speak, relate, and listen to God. McCain offered a helpful image: The liturgy is like the wardrobe that leads to Narnia. The only way to learn it is to go through. The liturgy must be practiced and experienced in order to be formative. The hope is that people will live missionally, which McCain refers to as living a “Eucharistic life.”

McCain named a few challenges the congregation faces in forming the church for mission through worship and liturgy. He stresses that the need for patience is a constant challenge. This process takes time. He also noted that challenging and equipping leaders

to model this is ongoing. Finally, having intentional language to name the connection between worship and mission is an ongoing task. In equipping the church through liturgy, McCain stresses that because memories and personal experiences are so powerful and formative, it is importance to provide space and time in both the preaching and in smaller groups to invite people to call to memory significant experiences they have had in the liturgy and then reflect on relating those to life and context.

#### New Life Downtown<sup>235</sup>

New Life was founded by Ted Haggard in 1984 as an evangelical, nondenominational church in Colorado Springs, Colorado. It grew into a megachurch under Haggard's leadership until his resignation in 2006. New Life Downtown (NLD) is one of seven congregations which form New Life Church. Rev. Glenn Packiam, an ordained priest in the Anglican Church in North America, serves as the lead pastor of New Life Downtown.

The philosophy of mission at New Life has changed dramatically in the last fifteen years. NLD has shifted from a focus primarily on the conversion of individuals to a vision of mission that is centered on participating in the inbreaking of the kingdom of God, bringing evangelism and justice together. This is evidenced by the partnerships and ministries that have emerged such as a home for single mothers fleeing abuse, a health clinic for the underinsured, and other ministries that draw from consulting the community to see where the needs are. Often, people who participate in these ministries will hear and respond to the gospel and attend the church's worship gatherings. Packiam says that NLD

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<sup>235</sup> Rev. Glenn Packiam, interview by author, video conference, May 13, 2020.

is “in the city for the sake of the city,” a phrase which reflects their desire to embody a missional ecclesiology.

Packiam describes worship as central to the outward call to mission and that when the church is at worship, it serves to show the world “what it looks like to be a kingdom community.” New Life as a whole is described as “low church” but New Life Downtown has intentionally adopted and integrated more liturgical forms of worship such as call and response, passing of the peace, lay readers, attention to the Christian year, and weekly confession and communion. New Life Downtown embodies a blend of evangelical, sacramental, and charismatic worship. Packiam describes worship at NLD to be: 1) Christ centered, 2) Gospel-shaped, and 3) Spirit dependent. The worship services offer points of encounter with God through singing, sermon, and sacrament. The Lord’s Table is the high point of each service as the response to hearing the word of the Lord. Viewing worship as encounter with God implies that mission in the world when the church leaves the assembly is dependent upon this gathering.

A key component of connecting liturgy to mission at NLD has been intentional language. Since “Eucharist is the church’s meta-practice,” it provides a way to speak about the congregation’s participation in the mission of God as they move from a gathered to scattered community. Packiam uses the language of “blessed, broken, given” to speak of how what happens at the Lord’s Table is to happen to the people of NLD with the dismissal (called the commissioning) is where this shift outward takes place liturgically. A matrix similar to McCain is used here as the church is invited to share the Lord’s Table in gathered worship, at one another’s tables through community life, and to prepare a table for others.



Packiam sees all of the movements of the liturgy functioning as formative practices and suggests that when a practice is fused with intentional language (and metaphor/imagery), a “practice becomes a paradigm.” He sees that one of major challenges of missional formation in the congregation is to find ways to “undo” the formation of allegiance to political partisanship that is happening through the kinds of discourse congregants encounter through cable news and other outlets. Community formation for mission must help congregants escape their “political echo chamber” and realign their allegiance to Christ and his mission.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to examine how the decline of Christendom in Western culture has provoked reflection on the church’s theology and practice. Missiologists have challenged the church to embrace a missional theology of the church which takes seriously the sent-ness of the church as a lens for ministry in all times and places. Critical to rooting this missional identity in the gospel is the church’s worship, grounded in the shape and practices of the historic liturgy yet contextualized, enabling the church to enter into a rhythm of both adoration and action in the world. The practices of worship and witness which can form the church for engagement in God’s mission are not merely a shift of structure, technique, or language. They are Spirit-led practices that have the opportunity to shape the very heart and habits of the church and its members, all for the sake of others. A congregation which has grappled with these issues and committed itself to a missional ecclesiology rooted in the liturgical life of the church is poised to minister in ways that will resonate in a post-Christian context.

## CHAPTER 3

### BRIDGING WORSHIP AND WORLD

#### **Introduction**

Christ Church Anglican, like many churches in North America, is seeking to find ways to minister in a world which has dramatically changed. When Christ Church was launched in 1959, 2% of the U.S. population claimed “none” as their religious preferences.<sup>1</sup> That number, according to Pew Research now stands at 26%.<sup>2</sup> As Christ Church seeks to engage an increasingly post-Christian culture, reach out in hospitable witness in the Kansas City area, and eventually plant a new congregation, it desires to cultivate a culture of outward-focused mission within the parish and its people. The primary need for the congregation in this endeavor is for intentional missional formation. This study suggests that a primary place this formation must take place is within the context of the church’s liturgical life.

#### **Forming the Church for Mission**

Making significant changes to the core content of liturgical practices with the intention of attracting secular people would reflect an unfortunate misunderstanding and misuse of Christian liturgy. Such a view fails to take seriously the realities of post-Christian America. It assumes that if the church can just have the right musical style, sermon content, or removal of certain “religious” elements, non-religious people will flock to the pews. As emphasized in the previous chapter, such a move may actually

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<sup>1</sup> “Religion,” Gallup Poll, accessed December 15, 2020, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1690/religion.aspx>.

<sup>2</sup> Pew Research Center, *In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace*, October 17, 2019, 3, <https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2019/10/Trends-in-Religious-Identity-and-Attendance-FOR-WEB-1.pdf>.

hamper the church's mission by reinforcing a consumeristic view of worship and depriving the church of vital formational practices. This approach would not align with the values of C4SO or of Christ Church.<sup>3</sup> It would also likely unnecessarily alienate a large portion of the parish, especially those who have been part of the church since its early days.

Cosmetic adjustments to worship or programmatic changes alone will not address the deeper shifts that need to take place within the church. As valuable and needed as updates to the facility will be, neither will these changes automatically move the people within the congregation towards missional ministry or address the credibility gap that exists between the church and a watching world. Instead, the church must be moved at the heart and habit level. The church must be shaped around an ecclesiology in which participation in God's mission is a way of life and grace-filled practices of hospitality are woven into the everyday lives of the church's members. To do this, the church must cultivate a culture of mission through intentional Christian formation.

The church's worship, when rooted in the mission of God, has the potential to help form the church and its members in this way. Such a view treats Christian worship not as a purely internal activity meant to serve insiders nor as a commodity to attract outsiders. Instead, it is a means of regularly encountering the living God in community, being transformed by that encounter, and being sent out into the world to worship God through a life of faithful witness. The church's liturgy becomes an immersive set of embodied practices which shape the hearts and habits of the people for both adoration

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<sup>3</sup> "Who is C4SO?" Anglican Diocese of Churches for the Sake of Others, accessed December 15, 2020, <https://c4so.org/who-is-c4so/#values>.

and action. While this is an understanding for some at Christ Church, it has not yet been made explicit in such a way that it may draw together all of the types of worshipers at Christ Church that were noted in the first chapter.

If the church's worship is vital in missional formation, then Christ Church's Anglican and broader Christian liturgical tradition need not be a barrier to mission. Rather than a barrier, the liturgical life of the church can actually serve as a vital bridge to the world, giving the church the vision for mission and forming it in intentional practices of hospitable witness. The church's worship on Sunday may be deeply and intentionally connected to its witness in the world on Monday. A proposed artifact would give the church's people a practical way to be exposed to and begin to embrace a missional understanding of the church, rooted in their participation in the church's liturgy, and aimed toward enabling them to join God's mission in their everyday lives.

### **Potential Paths**

There are several potential paths an artifact could take to address the need for missional formation through worship at Christ Church. One option would be a resource for the pastors and ministry leaders. Such an artifact could address the hearts and habits of church leadership. It could provide content to present a missional liturgical ecclesiology and a path for exploring the topic. A guided study or retreat setting could provide space for leaders to ask questions, dialogue, and dream about how to move the dial of mission for their congregation. While valuable, such a resource may miss two components that I believe are vital. First, such an artifact would not have as much emphasis on practices as needed. This means participants could face the temptation to stay at the level of theory, believing that things will change with the right information in

hand. Secondly, the artifact would lack congregational involvement, which I believe is a key aspect in seeking to form the habits of the congregation.

A second option could be a sermon series focused on either worship or mission. While sermons and teaching play a vital role in congregational formation, a sermon series alone could run the risk of staying at the level of theory and ideas, falling prey to Smith's accusation of seeking "sanctification by information transfer."<sup>4</sup> Such an artifact would likewise minimize congregational involvement and thus, the potential for missional habits and practices to be formed within the whole church may be lost.

A small group study or curriculum that focuses on missional practices could be an option to address this need. Such an artifact would invite larger congregational involvement. It could have the potential to focus more on practices. There would also be a strong relational element to such an artifact by virtue of its placement within the context of small groups. As noted in the previous chapter, Frost's *Surprise the World* and Fitch's *Faithful Presence* and his abridged *Seven Practices for the Church on Mission* serve as a kind of a manual for mission that are suitable for small groups.<sup>5</sup> Such a resource is helpful for small groups and ministry leaders but would be limited to those who can or will commit to small group life. In addition, a potential shortfall of such an artifact is that a small group curriculum alone would be disconnected from the liturgical life of the church, a key component of the response I believe is needed.

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<sup>4</sup> James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2016), 4.

<sup>5</sup> David E. Fitch, *Seven Practices for the Church on Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2018).

### **Building a Bridge**

I have chosen to address this opportunity within Christ Church by drawing from some of the strengths of the above options. A proposed artifact to respond to the needs of the church would be aimed at inviting the congregation into a series of transformative practices which can help form the church for mission. The practices themselves would be grounded in the core elements of weekly Christian worship and framed in such a way that their relevance as an act of both worship and hospitable witness would be explored and experienced.

The proposed artifact would consist of a seven-week, all-church series with several layers of implementation that incorporate insights from the themes explored in this study. The series would seek to provide a 360-degree experience for the congregation. The artifact would include a combination of sermons/teaching, liturgical elements and musical suggestions, a weekly prayer and practice, a video series and accompanying small group guide, and graphic elements for identifying and sharing the series.

### **Considerations for the Artifact**

The proposed artifact would need to consider a variety of factors in order to best reflect the fruit of this study. The project's content would need to embrace a missional theology of both the church and its corporate worship. Grounded in the doctrines of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and a dynamic theology of the Spirit, it would need to reflect the conviction that the church is itself the fruit of God's mission as a sent community. It would affirm that God is already at work in the world, ahead of the church's efforts. The artifact could acknowledge the shifts in culture and invite the church to reflect on the

church's role in the world. It would contend that worship involves both adoration and action, both gathering and sending. Because of this, the artifact needs to interact with both the gathered life of the community on Sunday and have connections to other ministries of the church. Fitch's three circles are helpful on this point.<sup>6</sup>

The artifact would also need to reflect a commitment to the Anglican and larger Christian tradition's approach to worship, grounded in the historic shape and patterns of the church's liturgy. While leaving space for flexibility and encouraging contextualization, the artifact would need to identify and give a central place to the core practices of Christian worship and provide biblical, theological, and when appropriate, historical context for the practices. It would need to highlight and model the ways the liturgy is forming the church for faithful discipleship and mission in the world. It would teach people the "why" behind the church's worship, grounding the practices in Scripture, and helping the congregation draw connections to the formational and ethical implications of worshiping God within the context of a Christian community. The narrative nature of Christian worship should also be an integral part of the artifact as it locates the community within the story of God and the story of the church catholic.

Addressing this challenge must involve more than information transfer. The artifact will need to reflect the conviction that practices, not merely ideas, will ultimately shift the culture of a church and its people. Drawing especially from Woodward's cultural web and James K.A. Smith's insights, the artifact needs to invite the congregation into embodied practices of both adoration and action. Practically speaking, an artifact that addresses this issue cannot be a peripheral add-on to the church's ministry. Since mission

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<sup>6</sup> Fitch, *Seven Practices for the Church on Mission*, 40.

must define the culture of the church and culture is formed through a web of elements, the artifact will need to have several layers of implementation. It must include in some way the preaching/teaching ministry, the worship and liturgical ministry, and the small group and outreach ministries of the church. The practices must be framed as a means of grace, reflecting an invitational posture. They must connect both adoration and action to the story of God, the story of the congregation, and be relevant to the unfolding story of the participants themselves.

An artifact to encourage missional formation through worship must also be rooted in the rhythms of Christ Church's ongoing congregational life. A solution would need to align with the overarching vision of both C4SO and Christ Church. Close collaboration with church clergy, staff, and vestry would be important. Given the relatively recent series on hospitality and the ongoing Bring Life to Others campaign, it is wise to build connections to these initiatives in order to encourage a higher sense of buy-in from the congregation and ensure the artifact can help the church move the dial toward missional engagement. The artifact would also need to provide ways to engage through various forms of media, tapping into the various ways people learn and grow. Finally, an artifact would do well to utilize the language of hospitality being adopted by the church in this season. The centrality of the Lord's Table presents a natural and relatable connection to this theme.

### **Conclusion**

As Christ Church seeks to embody a faithful response to the gracious call of God's mission, a carefully crafted artifact can help form the hearts and habits of the people. By intentionally connecting missional practices to practices of the weekly liturgy,



the proposed artifact would help the church and its members connect their experience of worship to their engagement with the world. The proposed artifact would seek to integrate the insights from the studies of missiology, liturgical theology, and Christian formation. By creating a multi-layered congregational experience, the artifact may provide maximum formational impact for the church in ways that will reach beyond the seven weeks of the series.

## CHAPTER 4

### EXTENDING THE TABLE: BECOMING A CHURCH FOR OTHERS

#### Introduction

The artifact developed to help Christ Church Anglican move toward a missional ecclesiology through its worship is a seven-week series to be implemented throughout the church's ministry (Appendix D). This practical tool is meant to provide a framework and avenue for Christ Church to begin to cultivate a missional culture through immersion in a series of formational practices, grounded in the church's gathered liturgy. The artifact seeks to bridge the church's practices of worship with practices of outward-focused mission in the world.

#### Proposed Artifact

The name selected for the series is *Extending the Table: Becoming a Church for Others*. The table carries with it the strong biblical theme of both God's hospitality and the call to extend hospitality to others. The image of the table evokes a connection to the Eucharist, which is at the heart of Christian and Anglican worship and is "a chief means of grace for sustained and nurtured life in Christ."<sup>1</sup> The table is also an image that connects with everyday life, making it a helpful metaphor for connecting the practices of worship on Sunday with practices of mission on Monday. Extending a table indicates action, a movement to create space and welcome people in. The language of extending also points to the practices of worship moving outward from the gathering and into daily

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<sup>1</sup> Anglican Church in North America et al., *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments with Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church According to the Use of the Anglican Church in North America: Together with the New Coverdale Psalter*, 2019, 7.

life. The language of “becoming” implies that mission is deeply related to spiritual formation and communicates a posture of patient trust in the work of the Spirit. Becoming “a church for others” connects with the call of the church to exist for something beyond its own survival. This language will challenge a view of the church that is stationary and insular. It also links this series with the Bring Life to Others campaign that is happening within the parish.

The series’ title and theme help locate the church’s worship within a missional ecclesiology and root it in the core practices of Anglican liturgy. This image of table hospitality also connects closely with Christ Church’s *Making Room* series from 2019. The central metaphor of the table is designed to help capture the imagination of the congregation and help it connect the practices of the liturgy when gathered for worship to vibrant practices of hospitable mission.

#### Church Leader’s Guide: Sermon Series

At the heart of the artifact is a resource for the church’s leaders. It includes resources for a core sermon series. The first week’s sermon sets the stage for the series and establishes the foundation for a missional ecclesiology. For subsequent weeks, each sermon highlights a key practice that is rooted in the biblical text, the church’s liturgy, and can be lived out as a practice of witness in the world. The order of the practices follows the unfolding of key practices within the Sunday liturgy. The goal of the sermons is to establish these formational practices from a biblical, theological, and pastoral/congregational perspective and call the church to adopt a missional posture in the world as a response to the good news of the gospel.

Each week's sermon resources include a title, a key Scripture passage for preaching, and additional Scriptures for cross-reference. Specific sermon outlines for each week are not provided so that the preacher may contextualize the message of the biblical text. However, a big idea and preaching notes on the biblical and theological themes of the week's practice are included. The notes include suggestions on ways the sermon can invite the congregation to engage that particular week. Also included are ways the sermon can weave the practice to the liturgy. The seven weeks' themes/practices and the key biblical texts are outlined in Figure 9.

Week	Title/Practice	Key Text
1	<b>Extending the Table: Becoming a Church for Others</b>	Isaiah 25:6-9
2	<b>Extending the Table: The Practice of Listening</b>	James 1:19-27
3	<b>Extending the Table: The Practice of Proclaiming</b>	Colossians 4:2-6
4	<b>Extending the Table: The Practice of Praying</b>	1 Timothy 2:1-6
5	<b>Extending the Table: The Practice of Forgiving</b>	2 Corinthians 5:14-21
6	<b>Extending the Table: The Practice of Eating</b>	Acts 2:42-47
7	<b>Extending the Table: The Practice of Blessing</b>	2 Corinthians 9:8-15

*Figure 9 – Extending the Table Sermon Series Weekly Themes*

#### Liturgical Elements

Understanding that hearing a sermon is only one aspect of formation, the Leader's Guide includes liturgical elements meant to heighten worshipers' awareness of the practice for each week. These elements fit within the context of a weekly worship service and most are already present in some form within the Anglican liturgy. Additional elements may be developed or adapted to ensure the theme of the week connects throughout the service. The liturgical elements included in the artifact include an opening collect prayer, suggested points of intercession for the prayers of the people, and one

thematic post-communion prayer that can be used each week to tie the series together. Musical suggestions for worship that can tie into the theme of the week are also included. These elements are developed in such a way that they may be utilized in Christ Church's traditional or contemporary services in both the Overland Park and Mission congregations.

### A Prayer and Practice

Each week, the practice that has been engaged in the sermon and liturgy is offered as a kind of shared practice for the congregation to engage during the week to come. This is a way to take what has been experienced in worship and put it into practice in daily life. This element of the series includes a number of practical suggestions, keeping it focused yet flexible. Each week is also accompanied by a prayer that helps capture the spirit of the practice. The prayer grounds the practice in God's grace and serves again to connect it to the liturgy and spiritual formation, helping ensure that the congregation continues to see their action in the world to others as an act of worshipful response to God's grace. This element is found in the Prayer + Practice Guide which can be printed and inserted into a Sunday worship folder and disseminated in other church communications. This piece is meant to be a "field guide" for participants.

### Weekly Video Vignettes

Seven scripts were written, and brief weekly video vignettes produced to be posted on the church's website, shared in church communications, and viewed by Life Group participants as they begin each week's small group engagement. The segments feature various clergy from the Christ Church staff. Each vignette opens with a personal story to tie the practice to everyday life. The video then summarizes the practice from a

biblical, theological, and/or historical perspective. The videos close by including the weekly prayer mentioned above and encouraging the congregation to explore the practice in their daily life. These videos serve to bridge the worship service to small group discussion. They are also a resource for people who, for whatever reason, are not able to attend the worship service on a particular Sunday.

### Small Group Guide

The artifact includes a seven-week group guide to enable leaders and participants to read the biblical text at a closer level, wrestle with the sermon, and explore what it means to embrace the practice individually and as a church. Each week includes the prayer and practice mentioned above, the central sermon text for the week, and a set of questions to help guide small group discussion. The questions also seek to nurture relationships and community between the participants.

Christ Church already has a regular rhythm of fall and spring Life Group studies that correspond with Sunday sermons. The Small Group Guide draws on this structure and capitalizes on the high congregational participation and the group of mature, dedicated leaders. Theologically, this piece of the artifact keeps the practices of worship and witness rooted in the Christian community and provides built-in accountability and encouragement. It allows for learning and exploration of the themes to take place within the context of trusted relationships and will naturally lead to points of connection with peoples' lived experiences and relationships. Practically, it serves as a means of inviting more people to go deeper with the themes the series explores than they could simply by listening to a sermon. The small group element is a critical piece for enabling the artifact to reach further into the congregation.

## Graphics for Communication

Art and visuals can play an important role in formation. A logo and branding has been developed to provide a visual representation of the series and its themes. This serves as a sort of “icon” for the series. This element is to be implemented in the worship bulletin, digital presentations for use in worship, church website, weekly video, small group promotion, and in social media and church communications. The goal of this piece of the artifact is to draw the series together from a visual perspective and invite deeper participation.

## Standards of Publication

For a project with multiple elements, it is important to keep a consistent tone across the artifact while adapting the delivery of content for the intended audiences of each piece. It was essential to reflect adequate knowledge of missiology, liturgical theology, biblical studies, homiletics, Anglican theology and history and so on, while not getting wrapped up in too much technical jargon or theoretical discussions. The tone needed to be appropriate to the audience. In this case, the leader’s guide needed to offer vital information to help pastors and worship leaders plan worship services and sermons that can integrate the resources provided. It was important for the Small Group Guide to be written with a layperson in mind, recognizing that most group facilitators and participants will not be professional clergy. The project needed to reflect a pastoral voice while still speaking with appropriate authority on the subject.

As a resource, the artifact integrated insights from educational theory and curriculum development, namely Bloom's taxonomies.<sup>2</sup> The focus on the immersive nature of the liturgy as a multisensory experience and the inclusion of sermons, discussion, common prayers, video, and other elements reflect the insight of Edgar Dale and subsequent educational theorists.<sup>3</sup> The Small Group Guide reflected principles from cooperative learning models which encourage learning in group settings. In order to be usable in a congregational setting where a group's facilitator may shift at the last minute, one guide for both participants and facilitators was provided. This makes the resource flexible.

Finally, the artifact needed to reflect a professional level of design. The website on which the materials are presented seeks to be simple, clean, easily navigable, and mobile-friendly for both Apple and Android platforms. The graphics provided reflected the name and theme of the series and have modern, usable branding. Resources needed to be as free as possible from errors. The inclusion of video content was a strategic piece for this artifact.<sup>4</sup> It was important for the video vignettes to have a high production value with good sound, framing, and adequate resolution for both download and streaming.

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<sup>2</sup> Benjamin Samuel Bloom, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals Handbook I, Handbook I* (New York; New York; London: McKay ; Longman, 1956).

<sup>3</sup> Edgar Dale, *Audio-Visual Methods in Teaching* (New York: The Dryden Press, 1947).

<sup>4</sup> Cisco Systems, "Cisco Annual Internet Report (2018-2023) White Paper," accessed December 15, 2020, [https://www.cisco.com/c/en/us/solutions/collateral/executive-perspectives/annual-internet-report/white-paper-c11-741490.html#\\_Toc484813971](https://www.cisco.com/c/en/us/solutions/collateral/executive-perspectives/annual-internet-report/white-paper-c11-741490.html#_Toc484813971). Cisco estimate that video will represent 82% of all IP traffic in 2021, including consumer and business IP traffic, amounting to a million minutes of video transmitted through networks every second.



## Conclusion

The *Extending the Table* series seeks to address the question of how the church's liturgy may serve to form the church and its people for mission. By inviting the whole congregation into the experience and integrating various layers of the church's ministry, it can serve to cultivate a culture of mission. The artifact connects missional practices to core practices of the weekly liturgy, grounding the church's call to witness in the world to its gracious encounter with God in worship.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

#### **Artifact Development**

The *Extending the Table* series described in chapter four has been designed to help form Christ Church for mission and bridge the church's practices of worship with its witness in the world. By grounding the artifact in the liturgical life of the church, the assumption is that this formation isn't something that will happen in a mere seven weeks. This artifact is meant as a catalyst - to stir the hearts and minds of the people in the church so they may passionately embrace practices of worship that the Spirit will use to form them to join God's mission in the world.

The idea for this artifact began as I have reflected on my own ministry and practice in the past. When planting a church in Portland, Oregon in 2012, I felt the distinct call to plant a church around values and practices, not numerical goals or a particular ministry program. Practices are enduring and can transcend culture and geography. They are naturally contextual. They can be fixed yet flexible. They provide comfort in times of great difficulty and a challenge in times of great comfort. I have incorporated the liturgical contributions of the Anglican tradition in past ministry as a means of spiritual formation in the church. As I engaged in ministry at Christ Church Anglican and talked with the pastoral team about the needs of the church, it seemed that what they were describing as the need could be addressed through intentional missional formation around practices, rooted in the church's tradition of worship.

My initial research took me into an exploration of Anglican worship, particularly around the development of the prayer book tradition. This subject, while interesting and

overall helpful to the process, did not seem to fully address the challenges I was observing. As my research interest developed, I was drawn to the insights of missiology for the North American church and how the study of worship and missiology converge. My own diocese, Churches for the Sake of Others, is committed to a missional expression of the Anglican way in which the sacramental life of the church is a sustaining element to the church's life and mission. It seemed that this commitment at the diocesan level could be very life-giving if fleshed out more in the local context. I was also intrigued by the opportunity to uncover the possible relevance the Anglican church's worship tradition may have for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In developing an artifact that would focus on the practices of worship and mission at Christ Church, I first consulted with Rev. Patrick Wildman, lead pastor of Overland Park, and Rev. Dean Behrens, lead pastor of Mission. Over the course of six months in 2019, I was able to meet with both of these church leaders several times in order to gain perspective on Christ Church's history, the makeup of its worshipers, and plans for future ministry. The Rev. Trish Nelson also provided helpful feedback on the needs of the church and some of the issues surrounding the transition of Christ Church out of the Episcopal Church. From the beginning, Patrick intended for the artifact to be woven into the fabric of the church's ministry. This commitment and the trust shown was extremely beneficial. My ongoing participation as an assisting priest at the church allowed me times to serve as a preacher and celebrant in worship, increasing my proximity to the context and helping me develop relationships with congregants and leaders.

In December 2019, I was able to meet with key staff as a group to propose the initial vision of the artifact. Over the course of early 2020 I was then able to meet with

Rev. Beth Dixon, director of Life Groups, and Micah Huebner and Lindsey Pryor, worship directors at Overland Park and Mission, to drill down further into the needs of the congregations and to plan the implementation of the artifact.

Because of the commitment to have the artifact integrate closely with the ongoing ministry rhythms of the church, I enlisted staff involved in past small group curricula to help provide feedback and input on the format and questions included in the Small Group Guide. Their participation helped the artifact fit the needs of the church and anticipate the concerns of the facilitators of Christ Church's small group ministry. While I wrote the scripts or the video vignettes, I invited the clergy to help implement the video vignettes. I crafted the script so that the clergy could begin the segment with a personal story of their own.

Though COVID-19 greatly affected the ability to implement the artifact as originally envisioned, *Extending the Table: Becoming a Church for Others* served as the fall series in 2020 at both Christ Church Overland Park and Christ Church Mission. The sermons, liturgical elements, and practice/prayer were implemented at both in-person and online/pre-recorded worship gatherings. Over 400 individuals participated in a Life Group and went through the small group discussions.

I was also able to collaborate with the children's ministry team. Tiffany Mills, director of children's ministry, developed a packet to be sent to every family with children. She worked with me to adapt the weekly prayer and practice to be especially suitable for families and had weekly place cards made for families to display on their dinner tables as a supplemental resource.

Feedback I received from the series was extremely encouraging. A sampling of responses from the church included:

- “I liked the connection between worship and mission. This was a good way to dig deeper, even in the midst of a pandemic!”
- “Being a lifelong Episcopalian...I can see how this study would be very helpful for a newcomer or someone who has just finished Alpha etc. the final teaching on blessing I thought was particularly good in encouraging and challenging us in terms of both evangelism and social justice - both of which are really important.”
- “The practices transcend circumstances (like pandemics).”
- “The listening session has made a difference in my interactions with others as I have refocused on really being present.”
- “I asked God to reveal the person I most did not want to pray for. Then I committed to pray for them for a week. Powerfully changed my heart towards that person.”
- “With the Life Group meeting following the Sunday sermon, it was especially helpful to take notes on Sunday to reinforce the Wednesday meeting...the breakdown into categories further impacted the many components necessary to meet our goal of a welcoming presence to others.”
- “The prayers were so simple and accessible - We used them nightly at our dinner table and plan to keep rotating through them going forward.”
- “I have appreciated the study, and the continuity between worship service and life group. Rather than one being a repetition on the other, they enhanced each other.”
- “I liked having several practices each week associated with the week's theme. They were practical, concrete, focused.”

I also received helpful suggestions. One participant encouraged a sharper focus in the small group sessions on “gospel,” while still acknowledging that a series on “behaviors” was helpful and necessary. Another suggested the video vignettes could be expanded to include inspiring or practical ways to live out the practice mid-week. Still other suggestions included ways to increase the production value of the videos.

If I were doing the project again or expanding it, I would include more ways for children and youth to be involved. More attention would be given to the ways the practices could be lived out among families with children and I would have had more collaboration with the youth ministry of the church. I may also provide a simple guide for

leaders that could provide a biblical and theological framework for the basic ordo of Christian worship.

I would also expand the video vignettes. The videos are currently simple and brief. Visually, they could be expanded to include footage that could help illustrate the practice in motion. This would make the clips more visually interesting and engaging. In addition, the videos could include real-life stories from the congregation – ways that people in the church are embodying the practices that were being explored.

### **Considerations for Future Study**

The exploration of the connection between liturgy and mission certainly warrants further study. There is a documented movement among many Evangelicals toward the practices of the ancient church and liturgical worship.<sup>1</sup> Further study on this phenomenon will be crucial for traditionally non-liturgical churches seeking to make this shift in theologically and contextually appropriate ways. One challenge is to help churches embrace and celebrate the contributions of the liturgical tradition while not allowing it to devolve in the next fad. Maintaining the formational power of the liturgy to shape the church for mission will be key.

In addition, issues of contextualization in worship must continue to be explored. Christ Church currently has traditional and contemporary services. While remaining rooted in the Anglican tradition, what elements are considered stylistic and may be easily changed? What is considered substantive and fixed? How can it remain Anglican in

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<sup>1</sup> Winfield H. Bevins, *Ever Ancient, Ever New: The Allure of Liturgy for a New Generation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2019). Bevins has reported on trends which highlight the relevance and popularity of liturgical forms of worship among younger adults.

content and spirit while also not being limited to Anglo-centric expressions in an increasingly diverse ecclesial body?

These issues will also continue to be explored in light of the pandemic which has ravaged the globe in 2020. COVID-19 brought challenges to the church in ways no one could have anticipated, causing many churches to be unable to gather for worship in the ways they had before. The decline outlined in the first section of chapter 2 may only be accelerated by the pandemic's effects on churches. Because of the real-time developments of the pandemic at the time of the writing of this study, it is premature to provide too much commentary on the long-term effects.

Barna notes that the proliferation of video and online worship options is raising questions among congregants as to what constitutes “attending” worship.<sup>2</sup> Questions remain as to what the “new normal” will be once the pandemic ends. The life of the church outside of the building on Sundays has become more important than ever as many people have recently quoted the oft-repeated phrase, “The church is not a building.” This is true. The church is a missional people, called and sent by a missional God. At the same time, in order for this people to be sent into the world in the power of the Spirit, the church will continue to need an “energizing core” from which to minister to the world. I believe a focus on the formational practices inherent in worship will continue to be critical in a post-COVID world.

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<sup>2</sup> “What Churches Might Miss When Measuring Digital Attendance,” *Barna Group*, 2020, accessed December 20, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/watching-online-church>.

## Conclusion

This study began by describing a church that is maneuvering a sea of cultural and institutional change. Christ Church is not alone in this. Thousands of churches in the West are wrestling with how to minister in a rapidly changing world, asking how they might be able to bear witness to the good news in the midst of a complex culture that is also now reeling from the effects of a global pandemic. Shallow answers, new programs, doubling down on marketing efforts, and quick fixes will not address the deep missiological issues that have arisen within Christendom models of church. A reorientation around the mission of God and a deep formation of the hearts and habits of the church is necessary to engage a post-Christian world.

To name the church's gathered worship as a central means for this formation is not only a strategic decision. It is theologically necessary. Without a transformative and dynamic encounter with the God of mission, the church may have the form but lack the power.<sup>3</sup> As the church moves into an unknown future, may the Spirit use the practices of the church's liturgical life to shape the people of God for vibrant participation in God's mission in the world. May this be so until the vision of the prophet Isaiah is fully realized, and all peoples are finally gathered at the table with God.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> 2 Tim. 3:5

<sup>4</sup> Is. 25:6-9



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## APPENDIX A

## Bring Life to Others Campaign Brochure



**Christ Church**  
ANGLICAN

Annual Stewardship  
2020



**Bring Life to Others**

Three-Year Fundraising Effort

## THE VISION

NOTE FROM PATRICK



This fundraising effort has given me the opportunity to reflect on hospitality and how this fundraising effort can help us bring life to others. Making room for others in our conversations, homes, and churches and creates the space needed to experience the fullness of God's life, love, and mercy.

I am excited to see how God will use our efforts to build a kingdom of hospitality by funding needs for our physical spaces, mission and ministry development.

Please take time to read and pray through this brochure and celebrate Commitment Sunday on November 24th!

Patrick Wildman  
Senior Pastor

**Nave Concept Drawings - CCOP**





Commitment Sunday  
November 24, 2019

## THE GOAL







— FIRST \$3 MILLION —		
Hospitable Spaces \$2.2 Million	Hospitable Mission \$400,000	Hospitable Church \$400,000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Worship Spaces</li> <li>Parking Lot and Roof</li> <li>Bathroom Upgrades</li> <li>Kitchen Upgrades</li> <li>Student Life Basement Upgrades</li> <li>CCM Studio Finishing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>International Missions</li> <li>Mission Trip Scholarships</li> <li>Local Missions and School Partnerships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CCM Growth and Development</li> <li>Student Life</li> </ul>
— BEYOND \$3 MILLION —		
10% Hospitable Spaces <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contingency Fund</li> </ul>	60% Hospitable Mission <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Church Planting</li> <li>Mission Trip Scholarships</li> </ul>	30% Hospitable Church <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leadership Development</li> <li>Marketing and Communications</li> </ul>

**CAMPAIGN GOAL**  
\$3 Million Base Goal

**STRETCH GOAL**  
\$4 Million

## APPENDIX B

## Christ Church Values Document


**OUR VISION**

**To be a people fully alive  
in God's Kingdom**

Jesus' first sermon announced that a new reality had come into the world: the kingdom of God. (Mark 1:15)

The way of the kingdom is to enable life. Like the growth of a small seed into a large tree, it helps people become their best selves.

Every ministry of our church flows from this invitation to experience life at its fullest (John 10:10). It's what we seek for ourselves, our homes, our city. It's what we seek to participate in every single day. Will you join us?



**COME FULLY ALIVE**

**OUR WORK**

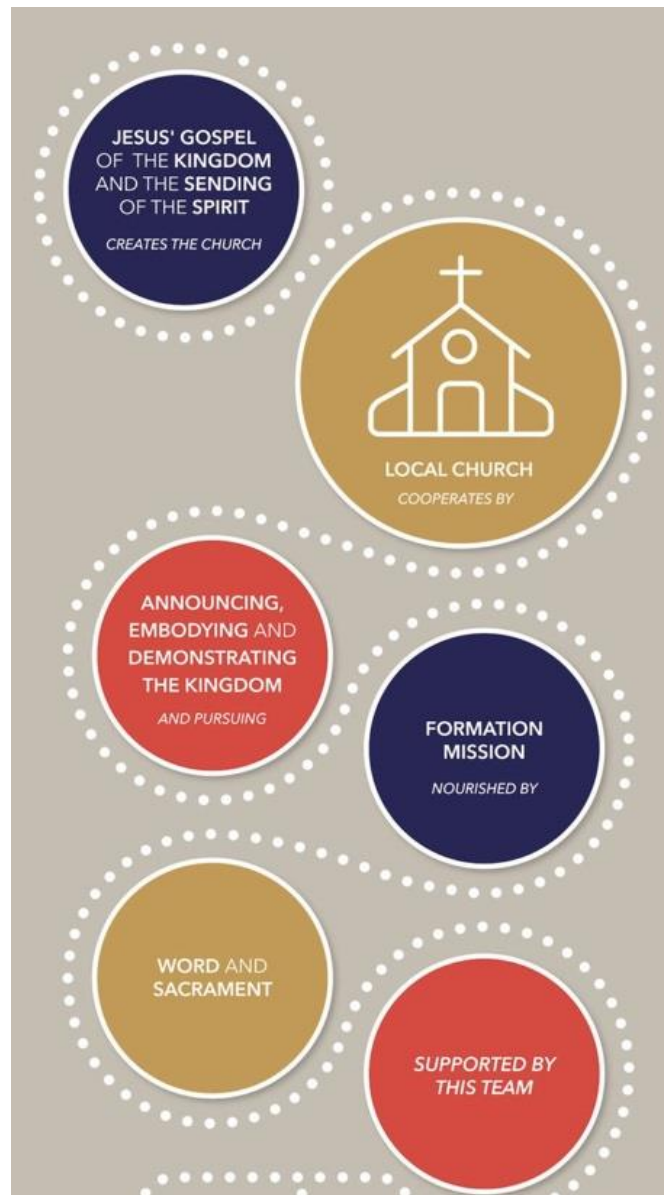
We believe the only way to experience the fullness of life is through discipleship to Jesus. And Jesus, because of his last words, calls his disciples to go and help the rest of the world experience this life as a result of following him. So what does the life of a disciple look like? This is, of course, not an exhaustive list, but at the most basic level, the life of a disciple looks like this:

- **DEVOTED LIFE** – A disciple lives a devoted life through their personal and corporate worship.
- **SHARED LIFE** – A disciple lives a shared life by meeting with others regularly to share a meal, study God's Word, and support one another through prayer. The best way to do this at Christ Church is by joining a Life Group.
- **SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE** – A disciple lives a Spirit-filled life by regularly asking to be filled with the Holy Spirit, setting their minds on God's truth, receiving His power to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ, and serving others with boldness.
- **GENEROUS LIFE** – A disciple lives a generous life – with their time, abilities, & resources – by giving themselves away for the sake of others.

[www.christchurchkc.org](http://www.christchurchkc.org)

## APPENDIX C

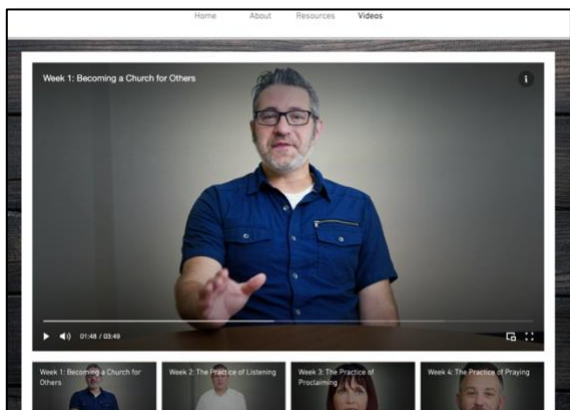
## The Values and Structure of C4SO



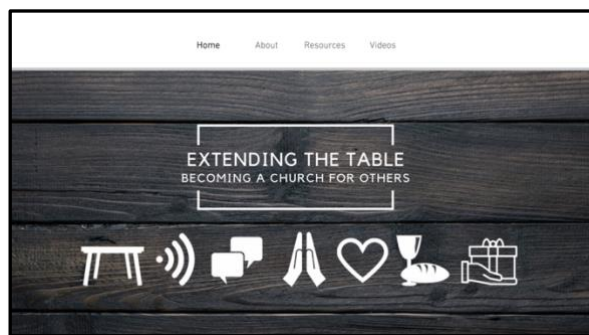
## APPENDIX D

**Artifact - Extending the Table: Becoming a Church for Others**

All elements of the artifact are available to download/stream at  
<https://jveach.wixsite.com/extendingthetable>



*Screenshot: Video Vignettes*



*Screenshot: Extending the Table homepage*

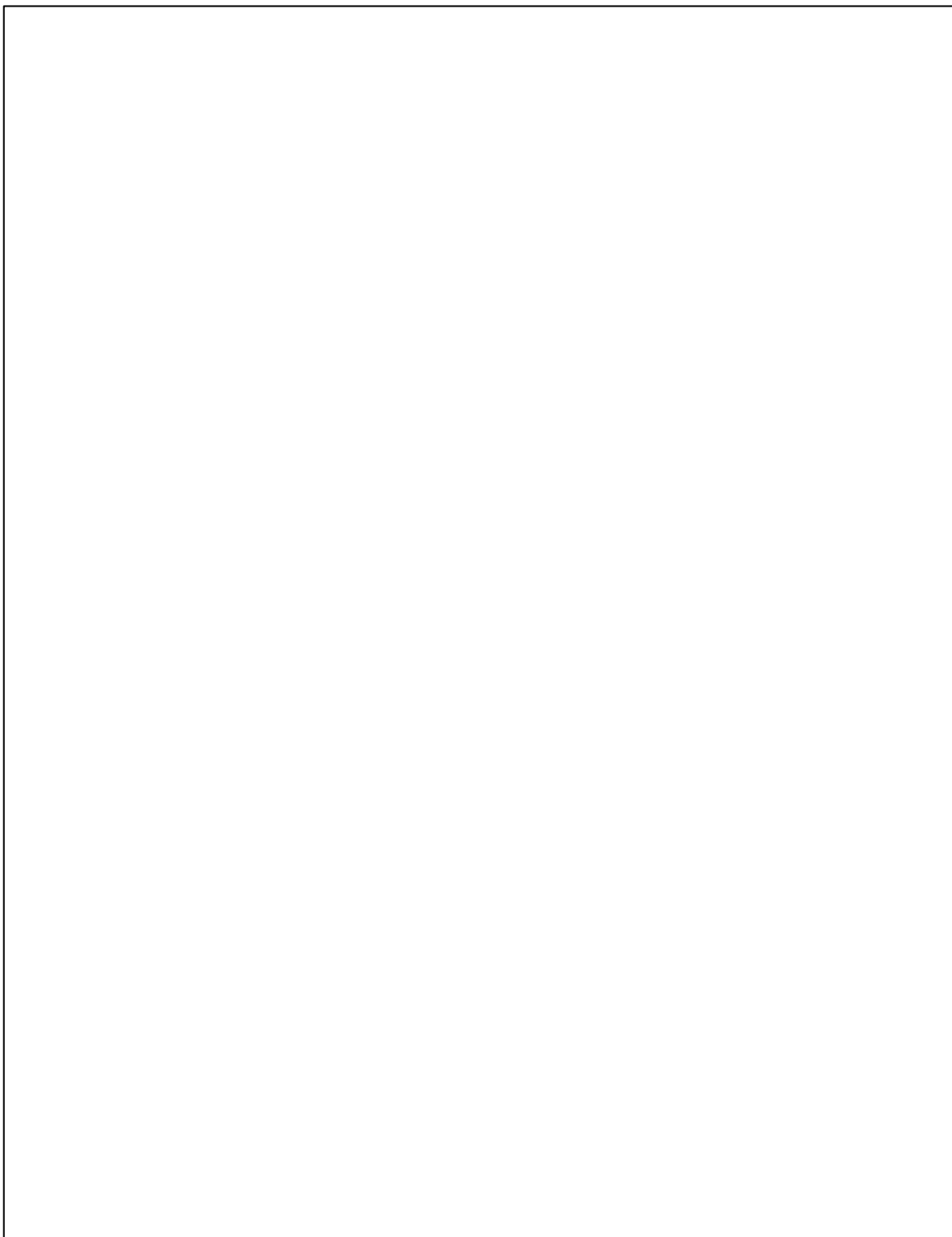
Artifact Element	Included below	Available to download
Church Leader's Guide	pp. 122 - 155	Yes
Prayer + Practice Guide	pp. 156 - 175	Yes
Small Group Guide	pp. 176 - 195	Yes
Video Vignettes	Download only	Yes
Communication Resources	Download only	Yes



EXTENDING THE TABLE  
BECOMING A CHURCH FOR OTHERS



CHURCH LEADER'S GUIDE



## **CONTENTS**

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Series Resources
- 3 Week 1: Extending the Table
- 7 Week 2: The Practice of Listening
- 11 Week 3: The Practice of Proclaiming
- 15 Week 4: The Practice of Praying
- 19 Week 5: The Practice of Forgiving
- 23 Week 6: The Practice of Eating
- 27 Week 7: The Practice of Blessing



## INTRODUCTION

One way Scripture describes God's mission to redeem, heal, and restore our fractured world is through the image of hospitality. God's kingdom is portrayed as a great banquet where all are invited to the table to feast on God's grace and share in a healing, life-giving community.

The church consists of those who have received and embraced this invitation - but not just for its own sake. As we receive God's gracious hospitality, we are compelled by love to become agents of hospitality, extending the table of God's gracious welcome to the world around us.

In this series, we examine six practices from our weekly pattern of worship that are central to becoming a church for others:

- **Listening**
- **Proclaiming**
- **Praying**
- **Forgiving**
- **Eating**
- **Blessing**

Extending the Table explores how these practices of worship on Sunday can become practices of witness on Monday, shaping us into people who joyfully invite others to experience the hospitable love and grace of God.



## SERIES RESOURCES

Extending the Table: Becoming a Church for Others is designed to encourage the whole church to journey and grow together over seven weeks. The following resources are provided:

- This **Leader's Guide** contains resources to help plan worship and preaching. You'll find a key Scripture, big idea, preaching notes, and additional Scripture readings for further study. Liturgical resources and musical suggestions are also provided. A brief description of each week's **Video Vignettes** and **Small Group Guide** are included. Finally, the text of the congregational **Prayer + Practice Guide** is included so you can draw connections to the weekly practice.
- The **Prayer + Practice Guide** provides the congregation prompts for each week, including daily readings, a daily prayer, and suggestions to live out the practice for the sake of others. The guide can be printed and distributed and may also be shared digitally with the congregation.
- The **Video Vignettes** are 3-5 minute video clips that provoke reflection on the week's practice. The videos may be shared digitally with the congregation and are designed to be used in coordination with the Small Group Guide to help stimulate discussion.
- The **Small Group Guide** can be printed and shared digitally with the congregation. It contains weekly questions to guide small groups to reflect on worship, the sermons, and the weekly practice.
- **Communication Resources** such as logos, slides, and images for bulletins, sermons, social media, and other communication channels are provided. These may be used in all print and digital communications.

Download all materials:

- Prayer + Practice Guide
- Video Vignettes
- Small Group Guide
- Communication Resources



[JVEACH.WIXSITE.COM/EXTENDINGTHETABLE](http://JVEACH.WIXSITE.COM/EXTENDINGTHETABLE)



## WEEK 1 EXTENDING THE TABLE

### SERMON RESOURCES

#### Extending the Table: Becoming a Church for Others

**Key Scripture:** Isaiah 25:6-9

**Big Idea:**

God invites all to the table and calls the church to be a hospitable presence in the world. Our acts of worship sustain and shape us for this mission.

**Preaching Notes:**

This sermon is designed to open the series by painting a picture of God's heart for the world and the church's role in God's mission. The central metaphor of this series is the table. The fulfillment of God's kingdom is portrayed in Scripture as a great banquet where all are invited to feast on God's transforming grace and share in a healing, life-giving community. The church does not exist for itself but is sent into the world in the power of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 20) to join God's mission to redeem and restore all things. To be a church for others is to "extend the table," to receive God's gracious hospitality, and be shaped into a community that embodies hospitality for others in the rhythms of our daily lives.

Becoming a church for others does not happen by accident or by simply wishing it to be true. Rather, hospitality takes place when we adopt intentional habits and practices. We must be formed. The church's worship, centered around the Lord's Table, is the place where we most visibly encounter God's grace and are shaped into a hospitable people. Worship gives us a pattern. Practices rooted in weekly worship are more than acts of obligation based on fear or desperation. They are habits of grace, allowing us to joyfully participate in God's very life. As we engage in practices in our worship with our hearts open to the world, we are empowered to extend hospitality outward into the lives of others through those same practices. Our worship leads us into the world.

The sermon may conclude by preparing the church to participate in the rest of the series through the weekly practice and prayer, video vignettes, and joining a small group.

**Additional Readings:**

Genesis 12:1-3  
Exodus 19:5-6  
Isaiah 55  
Matthew 26:17-30  
Luke 14:7-14; 24:13-49  
John 20:21  
Romans 12:13  
1 Corinthians 5:6b-8  
1 Timothy 2:4  
1 Peter 2:9  
1 Peter 4:9  
Revelation 3:20; 19:9; 22:17



## WEEK 1 EXTENDING THE TABLE

### WORSHIP RESOURCES

#### Opening Prayer:

God of grace, whose desire is to draw all people to your table; turn our hearts outward toward the world you love and help us make room for others, that all who encounter us may also encounter you, we pray this in the name of Jesus, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

#### Intercession:

- Our city
- Mission partners by name
- Participants in the Alpha Course and other ministries of welcome
- Small Groups forming
- A spirit of openness throughout the church
- Eyes to see family, friends, and neighbors seeking a place to belong
- Other specific needs that may be represented in the church

#### Post-Communion Prayer:

Loving Father, we thank you for welcoming us to your table; for teaching us, feeding us, and sharing your life with us. Extend our tables and enlarge our hearts, that the grace we have received, may become the grace we joyfully share. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

#### Musical Suggestions:

The Table (Chris Tomlin)  
 Remembrance- (Hillsong)  
 Prayer After Communion (Greg Lafollette)  
 Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty (Trad.)  
 Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing (Robert Robinson)  
 Amazing Grace (John Newton)  
 Praise To The Lord The Almighty (Joachim Neander and Catherine Winkworth)



## WEEK 1 EXTENDING THE TABLE



### VIDEO VIGNETTE

The Rev. Jason Veach shares a story about a gift that brought both joy and a deep sense of responsibility.

View at [jveach.wixsite.com/extendingthetable](http://jveach.wixsite.com/extendingthetable).



### SMALL GROUP GUIDE

This week's Small Group Guide explores Isaiah's vision of a great banquet and challenges participants to imagine and discuss what it means to be a church that extends the table to others.

### PRAYER + PRACTICE GUIDE

WEEK 1 EXTENDING THE TABLE	
<p><b>Daily Readings:</b></p> <p>Sunday: Isaiah 25:6-9            Monday: Exodus 19:5-6            Tuesday: Matthew 26:17-30            Wednesday: Revelation 3:20            Thursday: Genesis 12:1-3            Friday: 1 Corinthians 5:6b-8            Saturday: Luke 24:13-49</p> <p><b>Daily Prayer:</b></p> <p>Loving God, thank you for inviting us to your table. Shape our hearts by your Spirit, that through us, your grace may flow into the lives of others. Amen.</p> <p><b>Practice:</b></p> <p>This week, we want to raise our awareness of others. Extend an intentional word of thanks to someone within your sphere of influence (work, neighborhood, church) that you may not otherwise regularly acknowledge. Thank them for the way(s) their presence enriches you and/or others. This may take the form of a spoken or written word (text, email, letter). Record your ideas.</p>	<p><b>NOTES:</b></p>
3	4





**WEEK 1**  
**EXTENDING THE TABLE**

**NOTES**



## WEEK 2 THE PRACTICE OF LISTENING

### SERMON RESOURCES

#### Extending the Table: The Practice of Listening

**Key Scripture:** James 1:19-27

**Big Idea:**

Listening keeps us humble before God and allows us to hear and respond to the needs of others. Listening is an act of love.

**Preaching Notes:**

This sermon invites the church to take up the practice of intentional listening. To listen is to quiet our own thoughts, opinions, and agendas so that we can hear a voice other than our own.

Hearing is foundational to biblical faith (Deut. 6) and is central to worship (Eccl. 5). Listening is about attentiveness. It involves humbling and quieting ourselves to hear and respond to God's voice. As we listen, we become more aware. Listening is first and foremost a posture of the heart. Listening is also a practice. We intentionally quiet our hearts, minds, and voices, allowing us to hear the Lord's voice. As we learn how to be quiet before the Lord, we are then freed to be fully present and attentive to others - a key aspect of hospitality.

To listen is to open oneself to another's story, history, joys, and pains. It is to set aside our agenda and need to interject or control the conversation and allow someone else's story and experience to be heard. People are drawn to communities and people who know how to listen well, especially in a culture where everyone is clamoring to be heard. Active listening is a form of extending love and care and is therefore central to hospitality.

The sermon will lift up the practice of listening. It will explore how the practice of listening in our worship (**especially through the acts of entrance and the reading/hearing of Scripture**) may be extended into our daily lives for the sake of others.

**Additional Readings:**

Habakkuk 2:20  
Exodus 3:7  
Deuteronomy 6:4-9  
Psalm 34:17  
Proverbs 28:9  
Ecclesiastes 5:1-3  
John 4:4-42  
John 10:1-6  
Acts 1:8  
1 John 5:14



## WEEK 2 THE PRACTICE OF LISTENING

### WORSHIP RESOURCES

#### Opening Prayer:

As we enter this time of worship, let us begin in a moment of silence, preparing ourselves to hear God's voice.

*Wait in silence*

Holy and loving God, who always hears us when we call; Quiet our hearts and teach us to listen, that hearing your voice, we may be attentive to others. We pray this in the name of Jesus, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

#### Intercession:

- Our city
- Mission partners by name
- Participants in the Alpha Course and other ministries of welcome
- The vulnerable and those whose voices are seldom heard
- For those who have felt wounded by the church in some way
- Hearts that are open to hearing the stories, hopes, and fears of those around us
- Other specific needs that may be represented in the church

#### Post-Communion Prayer:

Loving Father, we thank you for welcoming us to your table; for teaching us, feeding us, and sharing your life with us. Extend our tables and enlarge our hearts, that the grace we have received, may become the grace we joyfully share. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

#### Musical Suggestions:

All Creatures of Our God and King (St. Francis)  
 Holy Spirit (Bryan and Katie Torwalt)  
 Lord, I Need You (Matt Maher)  
 Rest In You (All Sons & Daughters)  
 Not in a Hurry (Will Reagan, United Pursuit)  
 God, I Look To You (Bethel)





## WEEK 2 THE PRACTICE OF LISTENING



### VIDEO VIGNETTE

The Rev. Patrick Wildman talks about a question he often heard as a child: "Are you listening?"

View at [jveach.wixsite.com/extendingthetable](http://jveach.wixsite.com/extendingthetable).



### SMALL GROUP GUIDE

This week's Small Group Guide explores the New Testament admonition to be "slow to speak" and invites participants to examine what forces keep us from listening well.

### PRAYER + PRACTICE GUIDE

<b>WEEK 2</b> THE PRACTICE OF LISTENING	
<p><b>Daily Readings:</b></p> <p>Sunday: James 1:19-27            Monday: Deuteronomy 6:4-9            Tuesday: John 4:4-42            Wednesday: Proverbs 28:9            Thursday: 1 John 5:14            Friday: Psalm 34:17            Saturday: Ecclesiastes 5:1-3</p> <p><b>Daily Prayer:</b></p> <p><i>Turn off all of your devices and eliminate as much noise as possible. Spend 5-10 minutes in silent listening.</i></p> <p>Lord, silence in us any voice but yours that hearing you, we may become more attentive to others.            Amen.</p> <p><b>Practice:</b></p> <p>This week's practice is to listen intentionally. After 5-10 minutes of silence and prayer, consider one of the following ideas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the course of natural conversation, ask a neighbor or coworker some questions about their background/history/current needs.</li> <li>• Walk or drive your neighborhood, paying close attention to who lives around you. Record your observations.</li> <li>• Do some research on a topic you're passionate about but include perspectives with which you're unfamiliar or usually disagree.</li> <li>• Research the demographics of your neighborhood or city, taking special care to note the greatest needs you observe. Record your observations.</li> <li>• Fast from all media for a day. Ask the Lord to speak to you.</li> </ul>	<p><b>NOTES:</b></p>



## **WEEK 2**

### **THE PRACTICE OF LISTENING**

#### **NOTES**



## WEEK 3 THE PRACTICE OF PROCLAIMING

### SERMON RESOURCES

#### Extending the Table: The Practice of Proclaiming

**Key Scripture:** Colossians 4:2-6

**Big Idea:**

Our world is longing for good news. A gracious, intentional message offers hope and serves as an invitation to community.

**Preaching Notes:**

This sermon invites the church to take up the practice of proclamation. To proclaim is to bear witness to the good news of the Gospel.

The foundation for speaking good news is the fact that God proclaims good news to us - through the Scriptures and ultimately, through Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh (John 1). The Spirit empowers the church to share the good news by bearing witness to who God is, what God has done, and what God is doing among us. Proclamation is not the same as proselytizing. Rather, it is the practice of sharing the good news of God's love through grace-filled speech.

Preceded by careful listening and covered with prayer, we are called to share good news with humility and joy in such a way that the message of God's redeeming love can be heard, understood, and embraced by others.

One of the primary ways proclamation takes place is through testimony (1 Jn. 1-3). By sharing our own accounts of God's transforming grace, God's Spirit uses our witness (our story) to awaken others to God's work in their own lives. This is done within the context of our everyday lives - with gentleness, respect, sensitivity, and most of all, love. Gracious proclamation can mark all of our speech and happens through conversation, writing, music, the arts, and in a variety of other ways.

The sermon will lift up the practice of proclamation. It will explore how the practice of proclaiming in our worship (**especially through preaching and the confession of the creeds**) may be extended into our daily lives for the sake of others.

**Additional Readings:**

Genesis 1:1-3	Colossians 3:16
Isaiah 61:1-2	1 Peter 3:15
Jonah 3:2	1 John 1-3
Matthew 12:36	Revelation 14:6
Mark 16:15	
Luke 4:14-21	
John 1:14	
Acts 5:42	
Romans 10:8-15	
1 Corinthians 11:26	



## WEEK 3 THE PRACTICE OF PROCLAIMING

### WORSHIP RESOURCES

#### Opening Prayer:

Holy God, who is always faithful to speak with grace and truth; Open our lips to praise your name, that sharing your word, others may come to know of your love. We pray this in the name of Christ Jesus, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

#### Intercession:

- Our city
- Mission partners by name
- Participants in the Alpha Course and other ministries of welcome
- The vulnerable and those whose voices are seldom heard
- For those disconnected from Christ and his Church
- For all who proclaim the gospel
- For God's Spirit to empower and guide us to speak good news using the voice, resources, and context to which we have been called
- Other specific needs that may be represented in the church

#### Post-Communion Prayer:

Loving Father, we thank you for welcoming us to your table; for teaching us, feeding us, and sharing your life with us. Extend our tables and enlarge our hearts, that the grace we have received, may become the grace we joyfully share. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

#### Musical Suggestions:

- Great Are You Lord (All Sons and Daughters)
- Build My Life (Housefires)
- O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing (Wesley)
- Be Still My Soul (Psalm 131) (Sandra McCracken)
- Speak O Lord (Getty/Townend)
- All The Poor and Powerless (All Sons and Daughters)
- God So Loved (We The Kingdom)
- Praise The Lord Ye Heavens (Young Oceans)



## WEEK 3 THE PRACTICE OF PROCLAIMING



### VIDEO VIGNETTE

The Rev. Amanda Goin Burgess shares how timely words have had a powerful influence on her life.

View at [jveach.wixsite.com/extendingthetable](http://jveach.wixsite.com/extendingthetable).



### SMALL GROUP GUIDE

This week's Small Group Guide examines the New Testament's call to share good news through loving and gracious speech.

### PRAYER + PRACTICE GUIDE

<b>WEEK 3</b> <b>THE PRACTICE OF PROCLAIMING</b>	
<p><b>Daily Readings:</b></p> <p>Sunday: Colossians 4:2-6  Monday: Genesis 1:1-3  Tuesday: Matthew 12:36  Wednesday: Isaiah 61:1-2  Thursday: Romans 10:8-15  Friday: 1 Corinthians 11:26  Saturday: Ecclesiastes 5:1-3</p> <p><b>Daily Prayer:</b></p> <p>Loving God, keep us mindful of the power of our words. Fill our speech with grace, that the message of our lives may point others to the good news of your love. Amen.</p> <p><b>Practice:</b></p> <p>This week's practice is to share good news and speak graciously. Some ideas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Map out your spiritual journey and share it. On a timeline: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Plot significant life events (people, places, vocation, etc.)</li> <li>2) Plot seasons of joy and loss</li> <li>3) Plot moments of spiritual dryness and growth</li> <li>4) Respond: Where have you seen God at work in your story? How can your story be shared with others?</li> </ol> </li> <li>• Know someone who is struggling? Reach out intentionally with a word of grace or encouragement through a conversation, card, call, or text that expresses the good news that they are loved by God and that they are not alone.</li> <li>• Commit to say nothing negative or critical for a day. Take a "speech inventory" and record times or situations in which you were tempted to use harsh, negative, or critical words. How did these times affect your mood? Ask the Lord to change your heart and fill your words with grace.</li> </ul>	<p><b>NOTES:</b></p>
7	8





## **WEEK 3**

### **THE PRACTICE OF PROCLAIMING**

#### **NOTES**



## WEEK 4 THE PRACTICE OF PRAYING

### SERMON RESOURCES

#### Extending the Table: The Practice of Praying

**Key Scripture:** 1 Timothy 2:1-6

**Big Idea:**

Prayer connects us with God's heart and enables us to extend compassionate care and welcome to others.

**Preaching Notes:**

This sermon invites the church to take up the practice of prayer. Prayer is our heart's response to the love and grace of God. It is both a posture and a practice.

The prayer of intercession is rooted in the priestly ministry of Jesus who lives to intercede for us (Rom. 8:34). Intercession moves God's heart and ours. It immerses our life in God and opens the way for us to live each day in the power and guidance of the Spirit, all for the sake of others. Intercessory prayer is an act of love and hospitality because it allows us to surround others with grace and enter into their story with compassion, bearing their burdens with them. It enables us to name and entrust our friends, family, neighbors, community, and world to God's care, freeing us to love generously without an agenda or a need to control outcomes.

We are truly praying that God's will would be done on earth as it is in heaven. The practice of intercession can be done anytime and anywhere, with or without the participation of the ones for whom we pray. This kind of prayer softens our hearts, expands our souls, cures us of our self-centeredness, and allows us to see others from God's perspective. It also enables us to discern how and where we are called to join God's redemptive mission in the world. In other words, prayer moves us to action. To practice intercessory prayer is to trust that God's grace is already present and at work in the lives of others.

The sermon will lift up the practice of intercessory prayer. It will explore how the practice of intercession in our worship (**especially through the prayers of the people and the Lord's Prayer**) may be extended into our daily lives for the sake of others.

**Additional Readings:**

Exodus 17:8 – 13

Job 16:20-21

Psalms 68:19

Jeremiah 29:7

Matthew 6:5-15; 7:9-11

Luke 6:27-28; 11:1-13

Mark 2:1-12

Romans 8:34

Galatians 6:2

Ephesians 1:16-23; 3:16-19

Philippians 4:6-8

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

James 5:13-16



## WEEK 4 THE PRACTICE OF PRAYING

### WORSHIP RESOURCES

#### Opening Prayer:

Loving God, who daily bears our burdens; Awaken us to the needs of others, that as we pray for your world, we may also participate in its healing. In the name of Jesus Christ, Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

#### Intercession:

- Our world
- Our nation and its leaders
- Our city
- Mission partners by name
- A healing of divisions
- The sick and those providing frontline care
- The lonely
- Those seeking a relationship with God
- Encouragement and strength to all clergy and to our bishop
- Other specific needs that may be represented in the church

*Consider including an extended period of intercessory prayer in response to the sermon - individually or in small groups.*

#### Post-Communion Prayer:

Loving Father, we thank you for welcoming us to your table; for teaching us, feeding us, and sharing your life with us. Extend our tables and enlarge our hearts, that the grace we have received, may become the grace we joyfully share. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

#### Musical Suggestions:

O Lord We Seek Your Face (Worship Central)  
 Open Up Our Eyes (Elevation)  
 I Sing the Mighty Power of God (Isaac Watts)  
 Spirit Divine Attend Our Prayers (Andrew Reed)  
 What a Beautiful Name (Ben Fielding and Brooke Ligertwood)





## WEEK 4 THE PRACTICE OF PRAYING



### VIDEO VIGNETTE

The Rev. Dean Behrens tells of a powerful moment when someone stepped in to intercede for him in a time of need.


View at [jveach.wixsite.com/extendingthetable](http://jveach.wixsite.com/extendingthetable).



### SMALL GROUP GUIDE

This week's Small Group Guide explores what happens when we place others before God in intercessory prayer.

### PRAYER + PRACTICE GUIDE

 <b>WEEK 4</b> <b>THE PRACTICE OF PRAYING</b>	
<p><b>Daily Readings:</b></p> <p>Sunday: 1 Timothy 2:1-6  Monday: Exodus 17:8-13  Tuesday: Matthew 6:5-15  Wednesday: Job 16:20-21  Thursday: Ephesians 1:10-23  Friday: Mark 2:1-12  Saturday: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18</p> <p><b>Prayer:</b></p> <p>Gracious Father, remind us of the privilege we have in bringing the needs of others before you. Fill our hearts with love and move our feet to action. Amen.</p> <p><b>Practice:</b></p> <p>This week's practice is to engage in intercessory prayer. Here is a simple format that may be helpful:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remove distractions and relax your body and mind. You may be sitting, standing, or walking.</li> <li>• Ponder God's love and acknowledge that God is already loving and gracing the people for whom we pray. Ask the Holy Spirit for that same love.</li> <li>• You may already have a list of people or situations in mind. If not, imagine yourself walking through the spheres of your life (family, friends, work, community, difficult situations, etc.). As people or situations are brought to mind, pause to focus on each one. Ask God to fill that person with Christ's love and make them whole. Release the person to God's care and pray that God's will would be done.</li> <li>• Pray a prayer of gratitude and express your openness to be an instrument of grace to others. Close with the Lord's Prayer.</li> </ul>	<p><b>NOTES:</b></p>
9	10



## **WEEK 4**

### **THE PRACTICE OF PRAYING**

#### **NOTES**



## WEEK 5 THE PRACTICE OF FORGIVING

### SERMON RESOURCES

#### Extending the Table: The Practice of Forgiving

**Key Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

**Big Idea:**

A deeply divided world is seeking healing and reconciliation. Confession and forgiveness cultivate humility, grace, and peace.

**Preaching Notes:**

This sermon invites the church to take up the practice of forgiveness.

Our ability to extend grace, forgiveness, and peace to others is rooted in the good news that God graciously extends forgiveness to us (2 Cor. 5:19). The church is called to be a humble community that practices and embodies a ministry of reconciliation in the world.

The regular practice of confession and forgiveness creates a hospitable space where broken people do not feel they have to pull it all together before they can belong. It allows space for us to admit our sins and faults, receive assurance of God's forgiveness, and be changed by God's grace. This keeps us humble before God and each other.

Having received assurance of forgiveness, we can grow in grace. We can stop keeping score in our relationships and pursue reconciliation, healing, and peace with others. The practice of giving and receiving forgiveness enables us to be ambassadors of peace in a culture so often addicted to blaming, division, and violence. Forgiveness eliminates shame as a motivation for change and replaces it with love.

The sermon will lift up the practice of forgiveness. It will explore how the practice of forgiveness in our worship (**especially through the confession, absolution, and passing of the peace**) may be extended into our daily lives for the sake of others.

**Additional Readings:**

Psalms 32:1-2

Isaiah 44:22; 57:15

Matthew 5:9; 5:23-24; 6:12-14

Luke 6:37; 24:36

John 20:19, 21, 26

Romans 5:1; 8:1

Ephesians 2:14-21; 4:3; 4:29-32

James 5:16

1 John 1:8-9



## WEEK 5 THE PRACTICE OF FORGIVING

### WORSHIP RESOURCES

#### Opening Prayer:

Merciful God, who gives grace to the humble; Help us forgive as we have been forgiven, that being liberated by your grace, we may become instruments of your peace. In the name of Jesus, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

#### Intercession:

- Our world
- Our nation and its leaders
- Our city
- Mission partners by name
- A healing of racial divisions
- People caught in cycles of addiction and shame
- For the healing of marriages and families
- Other specific needs that may be represented in the church

#### Post-Communion Prayer:

Loving Father, we thank you for welcoming us to your table; for teaching us, feeding us, and sharing your life with us. Extend our tables and enlarge our hearts, that the grace we have received, may become the grace we joyfully share. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

#### Musical Suggestions:

Living Hope (Phil Wickham and Brian Johnson)  
 You Cannot Be Stopped (Phil Wickham)  
 Let Us Be Known By Our Love (Liturgical Folk)  
 Forgive Our Sins as We Forgive (Rosamond Eleanor Herklots)  
 Great Are You Lord (All Sons and Daughters)



## WEEK 5 THE PRACTICE OF FORGIVING



### VIDEO VIGNETTE

The Rev. Patrick Wildman shares about the important connection between forgiveness and peace.


View at [jveach.wixsite.com/extendingthetable](http://jveach.wixsite.com/extendingthetable).



### SMALL GROUP GUIDE

This week's Small Group Guide invites participants to explore what it means to both receive and extend forgiveness on a regular basis.

### PRAYER + PRACTICE GUIDE

 <b>WEEK 5</b> <b>THE PRACTICE OF FORGIVING</b>	
<p><b>Daily Readings:</b></p> <p>Sunday: 2 Corinthians 5:14-21  Monday: Matthew 5:23-24  Tuesday: Romans 8:1  Wednesday: Psalm 32:1-2  Thursday: 1 John 1:8-9  Friday: James 5:16  Saturday: Isaiah 44:22</p> <p><b>Prayer:</b></p> <p>Lord, remove our pride and help us forgive. Deliver us from holding grudges and fill our lives with your peace. Amen.</p> <p><b>Practice:</b></p> <p>This week's practice is to extend forgiveness. Some ideas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Pray the Lord's Prayer.</b> When you come to the line, "And forgive us our trespasses," open your hands with palms up. Release any sins to God which come to mind. When you pray, "as we forgive those who trespass against us," open your hands palms down. Imagine yourself releasing grace and forgiveness to any who may have offended you.</li> <li>• <b>Reflect:</b> Is there something I have said or done, whether intentional or not, that has wounded another person or group of people? What do I need to do to reconcile?</li> <li>• <b>If there is bitterness over past hurt,</b> don't carry it alone or let it linger. After a prayer for wisdom, extend an apology through a conversation, phone call, or written message. If you have been wronged and there is no apology, consider reaching out to talk with a pastor, friend, or trusted mentor.</li> <li>• <b>If you are struggling with guilt over past sins,</b> contact a pastor who can schedule a time to meet with you confidentially and lead you through a time of confession and assurance of forgiveness.</li> </ul>	<p><b>NOTES:</b></p>
11	12



## **WEEK 5**

### **THE PRACTICE OF FORGIVING**

#### **NOTES**





## WEEK 6 THE PRACTICE OF EATING

### SERMON RESOURCES

#### Extending the Table: The Practice of Eating

**Key Scripture:** Acts 2:42-47

**Big Idea:**

The table is a central place of connection. Eating with others breaks down boundaries and creates community and belonging.

**Preaching Notes:**

This sermon invites the church to take up the practice of eating with others. This involves sharing food, time, and space in relationship with others around the table.

The practice of eating together is rooted in the recognition that God is the host and the giver of all good gifts. A table representing God's provision and salvation stands at the center of the spiritual lives of God's people in both the Old and New Testaments. We find a table at the center of the commemoration of the Passover and the Lord's Table at the center of Christian worship. The table was paramount to the shared life of the early Christians (Acts 2) and Jesus frequently met and ministered to people around a table.

The practice of eating together is central to hospitality as it opens up space for relationships to be cultivated and deepened. The table is where strangers, and even enemies, are invited to become friends. In a world where division and isolation are common, one of the compelling and attractive distinctives of the church can be its recovery of generous table fellowship. Believing that Jesus promises to be present as we gather in his name, the grace we receive from the Lord's Table can be extended into the tables at which we find ourselves each day, whether we serve as the host or as a guest. Intentionality around what, where, and with whom we eat allows us to recognize and join God's mission to gather all people to his table.

The sermon will lift up the practice of eating together. It will explore how the practice of eating in our worship (**especially through Holy Communion**) may be extended into our daily lives for the sake of others.

**Additional Readings:**

Genesis 1:29

Exodus 12:1-30; 16:12

Leviticus 3:1-17; 7:15

Deuteronomy 12:7

Psalms 34:8; 145:15-16

Ecclesiastes 3:13

Isaiah 55:1-2

Matthew 9:10-13; 11:18-19; 18:20; 25:35; 26:26

Luke 15; 22:14-20; 24:13-49

John 6:35

Acts 10 - 11:18

1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:17-26

Ephesians 2:14

Hebrews 13:2

Revelation 3:20



## WEEK 6 THE PRACTICE OF EATING

### WORSHIP RESOURCES

#### Opening Prayer:

Gracious God, who gathers us to your table; Fill our lives with your grace, that with hospitable hearts, we may share our tables with others. In the name of Jesus, our gracious host, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

#### Intercession:

- Our world
- Our nation and its leaders
- Our city
- Mission partners by name
- Participants in the Alpha Course and other ministries of welcome
- For our hungry and homeless neighbors and organizations involved in providing meals and assistance to them
- For the lonely
- Other specific needs that may be represented in the church

#### Post-Communion Prayer:

Loving Father, we thank you for welcoming us to your table; for teaching us, feeding us, and sharing your life with us. Extend our tables and enlarge our hearts, that the grace we have received, may become the grace we joyfully share. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

#### Musical Suggestions:

Alleluia! Sing to Jesus (Dix and Prichard)  
 Remembrance (The Communion Song (Maher/Redman)  
 Mass Of Communion - Holy Holy (Maher)  
 Behold the Lamb (Getty)  
 This I Believe (Fielding/Crocker)  
 Come, Sinners, to the Gospel Feast (Wesley)

*Note: If possible, this may be an appropriate Sunday to plan an all-church meal following the worship service. Consider how this meal may not only bring your church together around the table but also be extended out into your community.*





## WEEK 6 THE PRACTICE OF EATING



### VIDEO VIGNETTE

The Rev. Jason Veach tells of a time he and his family were the recipients of radical hospitality.

View at [jveach.wixsite.com/extendingthetable](http://jveach.wixsite.com/extendingthetable).



### SMALL GROUP GUIDE

This week's Small Group Guide explores the practice of eating with intentionality, watching for Christ in our midst.

### PRAYER + PRACTICE GUIDE

<b>WEEK 6</b> <b>THE PRACTICE OF EATING</b>	
<p><b>Daily Readings:</b></p> <p>Sunday: Acts 2:42-47  Monday: Genesis 1:29  Tuesday: Isaiah 55:1-2  Wednesday: Deuteronomy 12:7  Thursday: Luke 22:14-20  Friday: Revelation 3:20  Saturday: 1 Corinthians 11:17-26</p> <p><b>Prayer:</b></p> <p>Loving God, thank you for providing food that sustains us. Open our eyes to your presence, that every table may become for us an altar, and every guest be welcomed as Christ. Amen.</p> <p><b>Practice:</b></p> <p>This week's practice is to eat with intentional hospitality. Some ideas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many of us have habits of eating with people we know well. However, we often do not easily open the circle to new people. If you have a meal planned with others, offer an intentional invitation to someone new to join you or your group.</li> <li>• If your situation allows it, eat with coworkers when you may normally eat alone. Use the time to get to know your colleagues better.</li> <li>• Plan a meal where everyone in the household helps prepare. Make it a point to enjoy the preparation as much as the meal itself. When it comes time to eat, turn off all electronic devices and be present with each other. Pay special attention to how you can celebrate everyone's presence and contributions through an intentional mealtime discussion. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-What do you love about each person at the table?</li> <li>-What gifts does each person bring to the table?</li> <li>-How can the group be praying for each person in the coming week?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Deliver a meal, special dish, or a restaurant gift card to someone you know who may need it, a neighbor, or a person who may otherwise typically eat alone.</li> </ul>	<p><b>NOTES:</b></p>
13	14



## **WEEK 6**

### **THE PRACTICE OF EATING**

#### **NOTES**



## WEEK 7 THE PRACTICE OF BLESSING

### SERMON RESOURCES

#### Extending the Table: The Practice of Blessing

**Key Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 9:8-15

**Big Idea:**

Offering blessing through generous presence, words, and actions serve as a sign to others that they are deeply loved and valued by God.

**Preaching Notes:**

This sermon invites the church to take up the practice of blessing others. To bless is to invoke and embody God's kindness toward others through our words and actions.

At the heart of God's mission is the call to live as a blessing to others. God blessed Israel so that they might be a blessing to the world (Genesis 12:3). In like manner, the Church is called to bless the world through its witness and good works, contributing to the common good and the flourishing of all.

One of the primary ways God offers blessing to the world is through the generosity of his people. The practice of blessing involves words - offering spoken or written expressions of love and encouragement. It also involves making our words active by sharing tangible expressions of care for others through working to meet physical, social, emotional, financial, or spiritual needs. This kind of blessing may be spontaneous or strategic. Regardless of how and when, to regularly practice blessing others is to live with open hands, ready to receive from the Lord, and then generously give to others.

The sermon will lift up the practice of blessing. It will explore how the practice of blessing in our worship (**especially through the offering, blessing, and dismissal**) may be extended into our daily lives for the sake of others.

**Additional Readings:**

Genesis 12:1-3; 22:18

Numbers 6:24-26

Proverbs 11:25

Isaiah 60:3

Jeremiah 29:7

Matthew 5:13-16; 25:31-46

Luke 6:38

Romans 12:14

Ephesians 2:10

Philippians 2:1-11; 4:19

1 Thessalonians 5:11

1 Peter 3:8-9

Hebrews 10:24-25; 13:15-16



## WEEK 7 THE PRACTICE OF BLESSING

### WORSHIP RESOURCES

#### Opening Prayer:

Loving God, who generously supplies our needs; Fill us with your grace, that receiving your blessing, we may extend blessing to others. In the name of Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

#### Intercession:

- Our world
- Our nation and its leaders
- Our city
- Mission partners by name
- For a spirit of hospitality to fill our church
- For the courage and creativity to reach out and bless others
- Other specific needs that may be represented in the church

#### Post-Communion Prayer:

Loving Father, we thank you for welcoming us to your table; for teaching us, feeding us, and sharing your life with us. Extend our tables and enlarge our hearts, that the grace we have received, may become the grace we joyfully share. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

#### Musical Suggestions:

Praise the Father Praise the Son (Hillsong)  
 Benediction (Greg LaFollette)  
 Benediction (Jonas Myrin/Matt Redman)  
 God With Us (All Sons and Daughters)  
 Blessed Be Your Name (Redman)  
 Blessed Jesus At Thy Word (Winkworth/Clausnitzer)  
 A Mighty Fortress is Our God (Martin Luther)



## WEEK 7 THE PRACTICE OF BLESSING



### VIDEO VIGNETTE

The Rev. Dean Behrens discusses the ways that blessings are generously passed on.


View at [jveach.wixsite.com/extendingthetable](http://jveach.wixsite.com/extendingthetable).



### SMALL GROUP GUIDE

This week's Small Group Guide explores the practice of reaching out to others with intentional acts of blessing.

### PRAYER + PRACTICE GUIDE

 <b>WEEK 7</b> THE PRACTICE OF BLESSING	
<p><b>Daily Readings:</b></p> <p>Sunday: 2 Corinthians 9:8-15            Monday: Numbers 6:24-26            Tuesday: 1 Thessalonians 5:11            Wednesday: Proverbs 11:25            Thursday: Matthew 5:13-16            Friday: 1 Peter 3:8-9            Saturday: Luke 6:38</p> <p><b>Prayer:</b></p> <p>Generous God, help us live with open hands, that every gift we have received may become an instrument of blessing to others. Amen.</p> <p><b>Practice:</b></p> <p>This week's practice is to joyfully bless someone outside of the church. You may want to practice this on your own and/or with a group. Some ideas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliver a meal, special dish, or gift card to someone in need.</li> <li>• Write a note or card of encouragement and mail or deliver it to someone who would benefit from such a blessing.</li> <li>• With a group, decide on a person or group not directly connected to the church who would be blessed by an act of generosity. Identify either a need or a way that would be of encouragement and mobilize the group to bless them with a gift or an act of service.</li> </ul>	<p><b>NOTES:</b></p>
15	16



## **WEEK 7**

### **THE PRACTICE OF BLESSING**

#### **NOTES**





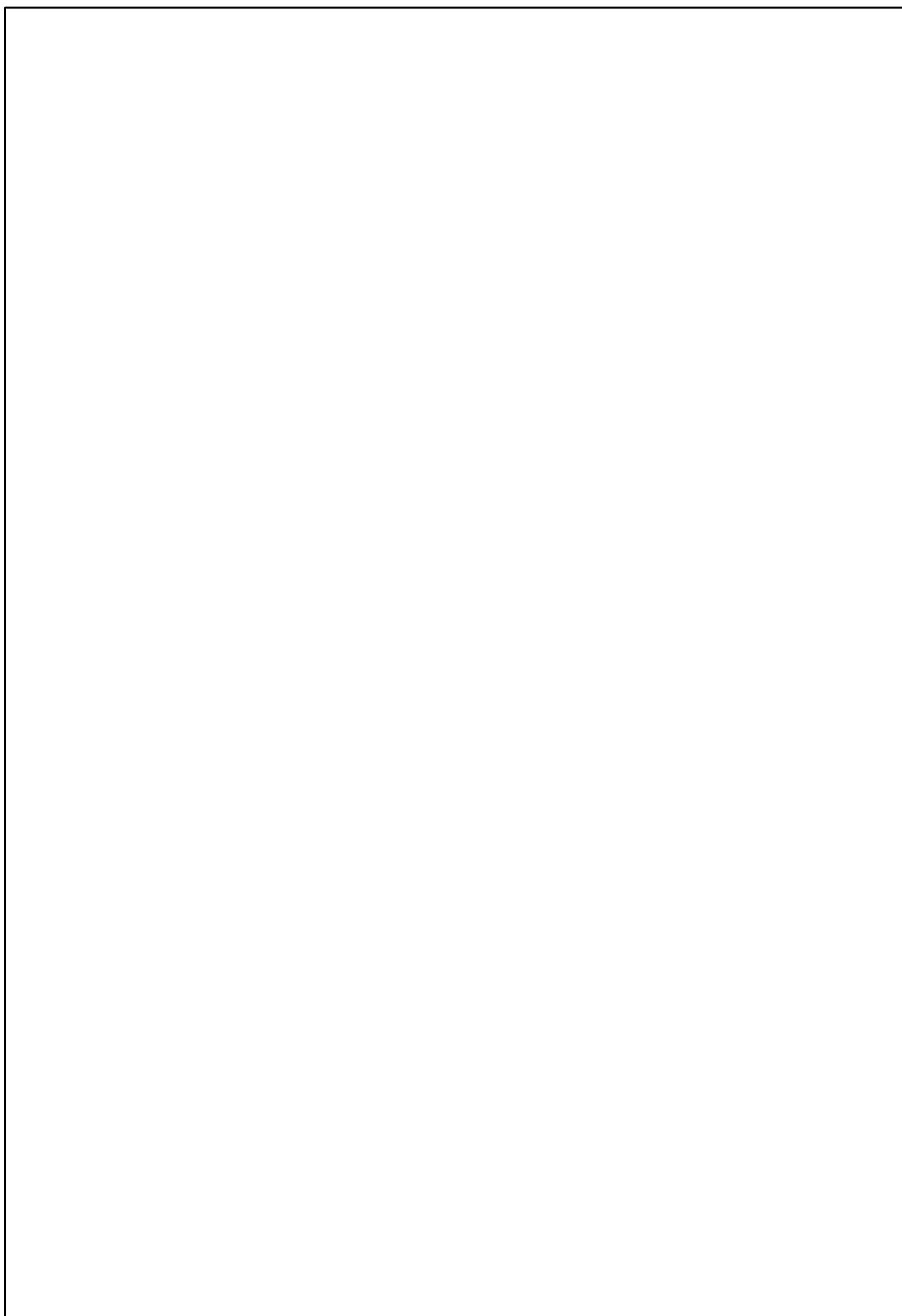
EXTENDING THE TABLE  
BECOMING A CHURCH FOR OTHERS

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BECOMING A CHURCH FOR OTHERS



PRAYER + PRACTICE GUIDE





## **CONTENTS**

- 2 Introduction
- 3 Week 1: Extending the Table
- 5 Week 2: The Practice of Listening
- 7 Week 3: The Practice of Proclaiming
- 9 Week 4: The Practice of Praying
- 11 Week 5: The Practice of Forgiving
- 13 Week 6: The Practice of Eating
- 15 Week 7: The Practice of Blessing



## INTRODUCTION

This booklet is a resource for you during the seven weeks of the Extending the Table series. It is a "field guide" for you as we explore the call to extend the table of God's grace to others.

This series begins with an introductory week and then examines six practices from our weekly pattern of worship that are central to becoming a church for others:

- **Listening**
- **Proclaiming**
- **Praying**
- **Forgiving**
- **Eating**
- **Blessing**

This guide draws from the themes and practices explored each week in worship and provides ways to live these practices out in our daily lives. It is suggested to have it with you during worship to note what the Lord is teaching you. As you engage with others in small group discussion, prayer, and learning, come back to this booklet to reflect on how God may be calling you to extend grace to others in tangible ways.

In this booklet, you will find the following for each of the seven weeks:

- Daily readings.
- A prayer focused on the week's practice that you could include in your daily prayers.
- A suggested practice and options for living out the practice in your daily life. These are meant to be suggestions. Allow God's Spirit to direct you.

May God bless you as you receive and share the hospitable grace of God!



## WEEK 1 EXTENDING THE TABLE

### Daily Readings:

Sunday: Isaiah 25:6-9  
Monday: Exodus 19:5-6  
Tuesday: Matthew 26:17-30  
Wednesday: Revelation 3:20  
Thursday: Genesis 12:1-3  
Friday: 1 Corinthians 5:6b-8  
Saturday: Luke 24:13-49

### Daily Prayer:

Loving God, thank you for inviting us to your table. Shape our hearts by your Spirit, that through us, your grace may flow into the lives of others. Amen.

### Practice:

This week, we want to raise our awareness of others. Extend an intentional word of thanks to someone within your sphere of influence (work, neighborhood, church) that you may not otherwise regularly acknowledge. Thank them for the way(s) their presence enriches you and/or others. This may take the form of a spoken or written word (text, email, letter). Record your ideas.

**NOTES:**





## WEEK 2 THE PRACTICE OF LISTENING

### Daily Readings:

Sunday: James 1:19-27  
 Monday: Deuteronomy 6:4-9  
 Tuesday: John 4:4-42  
 Wednesday: Proverbs 28:9  
 Thursday: 1 John 5:14  
 Friday: Psalm 34:17  
 Saturday: Ecclesiastes 5:1-3

### Daily Prayer:

*Turn off all of your devices and eliminate as much noise as possible. Spend 5-10 minutes in silent listening.*

Lord, silence in us any voice but yours that hearing you, we may become more attentive to others.  
 Amen.

### Practice:

This week's practice is to listen intentionally. After 5 -10 minutes of silence and prayer, consider one of the following ideas:

- In the course of natural conversation, ask a neighbor or coworker some questions about their background/history/current needs.
- Walk or drive your neighborhood, paying close attention to who lives around you. Record your observations.
- Do some research on a topic you're passionate about but include perspectives with which you're unfamiliar or usually disagree.
- Research the demographics of your neighborhood or city, taking special care to note the greatest needs you observe. Record your observations.
- Fast from all media for a day. Ask the Lord to speak to you.

**NOTES:**





## WEEK 3 THE PRACTICE OF PROCLAIMING

### Daily Readings:

Sunday: Colossians 4:2-6  
 Monday: Genesis 1:1-3  
 Tuesday: Matthew 12:36  
 Wednesday: Isaiah 61:1-2  
 Thursday: Romans 10:8-15  
 Friday: 1 Corinthians 11:26  
 Saturday: Ecclesiastes 5:1-3

### Daily Prayer:

Loving God, keep us mindful of the power of our words. Fill our speech with grace, that the message of our lives may point others to the good news of your love. Amen.

### Practice:

This week's practice is to share good news and speak graciously. Some ideas:

- Map out your spiritual journey and share it. On a timeline:
  - 1) Plot significant life events (people, places, vocation, etc.)
  - 2) Plot seasons of joy and loss
  - 3) Plot moments of spiritual dryness and growth
  - 4) Respond: Where have you seen God at work in your story? How can your story be shared with others?
- Know someone who is struggling? Reach out intentionally with a word of grace or encouragement through a conversation, card, call, or text that expresses the good news that they are loved by God and that they are not alone.
- Commit to say nothing negative or critical for a day. Take a "speech inventory" and record times or situations in which you were tempted to use harsh, negative, or critical words. How did these times affect your mood? Ask the Lord to change your heart and fill your words with grace.

**NOTES:**



## WEEK 4 THE PRACTICE OF PRAYING

### Daily Readings:

Sunday: 1 Timothy 2:1-6  
 Monday: Exodus 17:8 – 13  
 Tuesday: Matthew 6:5-15  
 Wednesday: Job 16:20-21  
 Thursday: Ephesians 1:16-23  
 Friday: Mark 2:1-12  
 Saturday: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

### Prayer:

Gracious Father, remind us of the privilege we have in bringing the needs of others before you. Fill our hearts with love and move our feet to action. Amen.

### Practice:

This week's practice is to engage in intercessory prayer. Here is a simple format that may be helpful:

- Remove distractions and relax your body and mind. You may be sitting, standing, or walking.
- Ponder God's love and acknowledge that God is already loving and gracing the people for whom we pray. Ask the Holy Spirit for that same love.
- You may already have a list of people or situations in mind. If not, imagine yourself walking through the spheres of your life (family, friends, work, community, difficult situations, etc.). As people or situations are brought to mind, pause to focus on each one. Ask God to fill that person with Christ's love and make them whole. Release the person to God's care and pray that God's will would be done.
- Pray a prayer of gratitude and express your openness to be an instrument of grace to others. Close with the Lord's Prayer.

**NOTES:**



## WEEK 5 THE PRACTICE OF FORGIVING

### Daily Readings:

Sunday: 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

Monday: Matthew 5:23-24

Tuesday: Romans 8:1

Wednesday: Psalm 32:1-2

Thursday: 1 John 1:8-9

Friday: James 5:16

Saturday: Isaiah 44:22

### Prayer:

Lord, remove our pride and help us forgive. Deliver us from holding grudges and fill our lives with your peace. Amen.

### Practice:

This week's practice is to extend forgiveness. Some ideas:

- Pray the Lord's Prayer. When you come to the line, "And forgive us our trespasses," open your hands with palms up. Release any sins to God which come to mind. When you pray, "as we forgive those who trespass against us," open your hands palms down. Imagine yourself releasing grace and forgiveness to any who may have offended you.
- Reflect: Is there something I have said or done, whether intentional or not, that has wounded another person or group of people? What do I need to do to reconcile?
- If there is bitterness over past hurt, don't carry it alone or let it linger. After a prayer for wisdom, extend an apology through a conversation, phone call, or written message. If you have been wronged and there is no apology, consider reaching out to talk with a pastor, friend, or trusted mentor.
- If you are struggling with guilt over past sins, contact a pastor who can schedule a time to meet with you confidentially and lead you through a time of confession and assurance of forgiveness.

**NOTES:**





## WEEK 6 THE PRACTICE OF EATING

### Daily Readings:

Sunday: Acts 2:42-47  
 Monday: Genesis 1:29  
 Tuesday: Isaiah 55:1-2  
 Wednesday: Deuteronomy 12:7  
 Thursday: Luke 22:14-20  
 Friday: Revelation 3:20  
 Saturday: 1 Corinthians 11:17-26

### Prayer:

Loving God, thank you for providing food that sustains us. Open our eyes to your presence, that every table may become for us an altar, and every guest be welcomed as Christ. Amen.

### Practice:

This week's practice is to eat with intentional hospitality. Some ideas:

- Many of us have habits of eating with people we know well. However, we often do not easily open the circle to new people. If you have a meal planned with others, offer an intentional invitation to someone new to join you or your group.
- If your situation allows it, eat with coworkers when you may normally eat alone. Use the time to get to know your colleagues better.
- Plan a meal where everyone in the household helps prepare. Make it a point to enjoy the preparation as much as the meal itself. When it comes time to eat, turn off all electronic devices and be present with each other. Pay special attention to how you can celebrate everyone's presence and contributions through an intentional mealtime discussion. For example:
  - What do you love about each person at the table?
  - What gifts does each person bring to the table?
  - How can the group be praying for each person in the coming week?
- Deliver a meal, special dish, or a restaurant gift card to someone you know who may need it, a neighbor, or a person who may otherwise typically eat alone.

**NOTES:**





## WEEK 7 THE PRACTICE OF BLESSING

### Daily Readings:

Sunday: 2 Corinthians 9:8-15  
 Monday: Numbers 6:24-26  
 Tuesday: 1 Thessalonians 5:11  
 Wednesday: Proverbs 11:25  
 Thursday: Matthew 5:13-16  
 Friday: 1 Peter 3:8-9  
 Saturday: Luke 6:38

### Prayer:

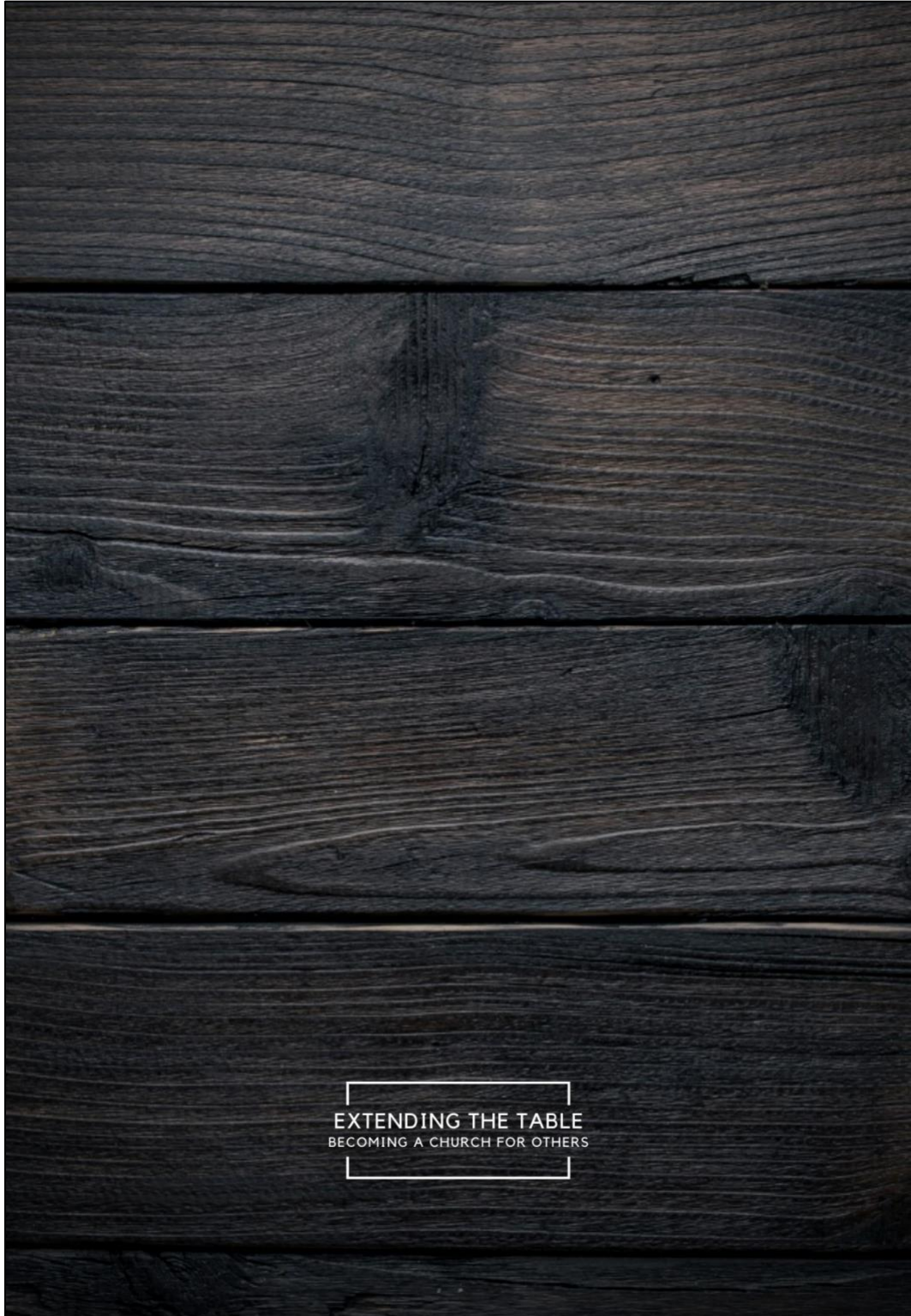
Generous God, help us live with open hands, that every gift we have received may become an instrument of blessing to others. Amen.

### Practice:

This week's practice is to joyfully bless someone outside of the church. You may want to practice this on your own and/or with a group. Some ideas:

- Deliver a meal, special dish, or gift card to someone in need.
- Write a note or card of encouragement and mail or deliver it to someone who would benefit from such a blessing.
- With a group, decide on a person or group not directly connected to the church who would be blessed by an act of generosity. Identify either a need or a way that would be of encouragement and mobilize the group to bless them with a gift or an act of service.

**NOTES:**



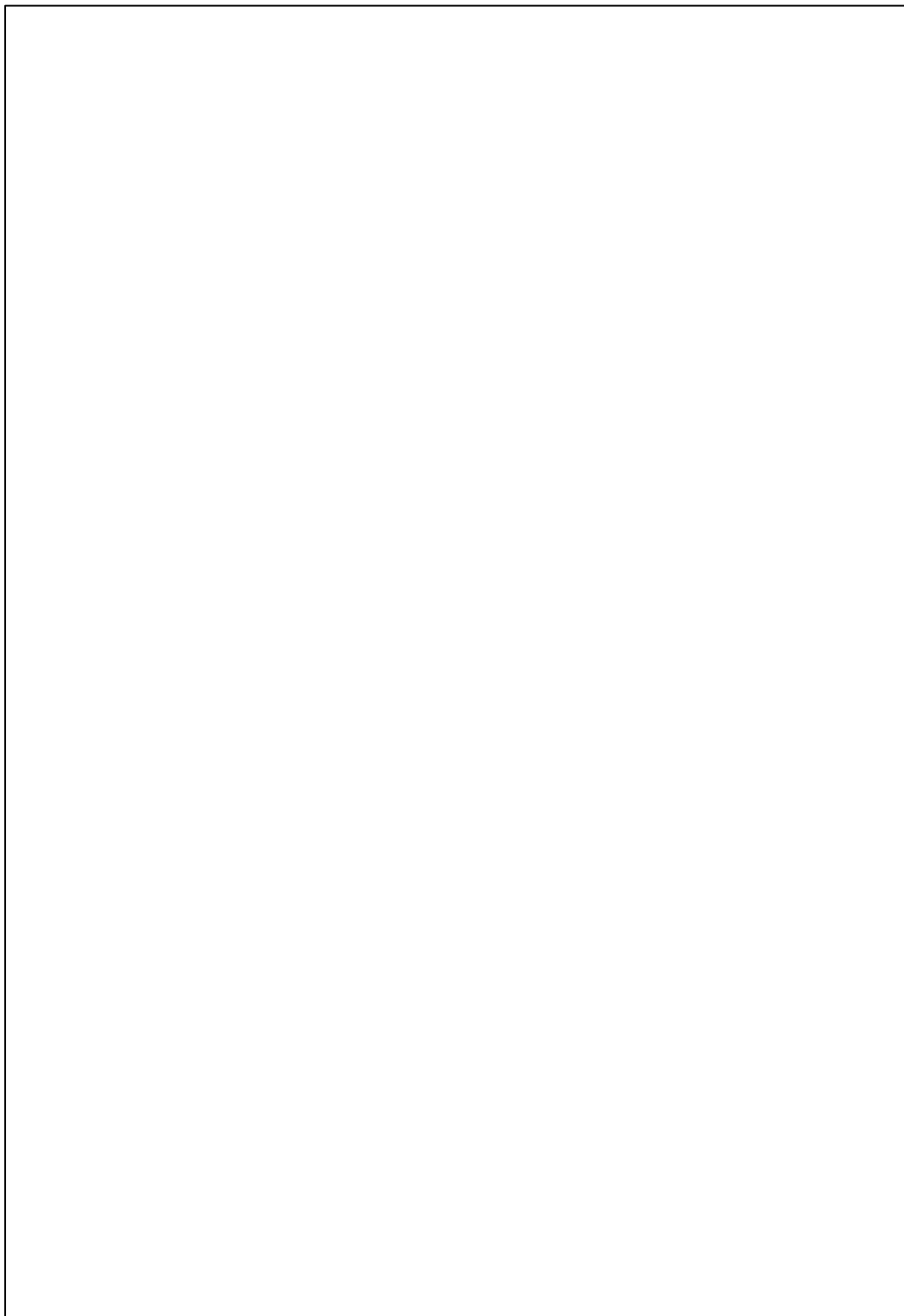
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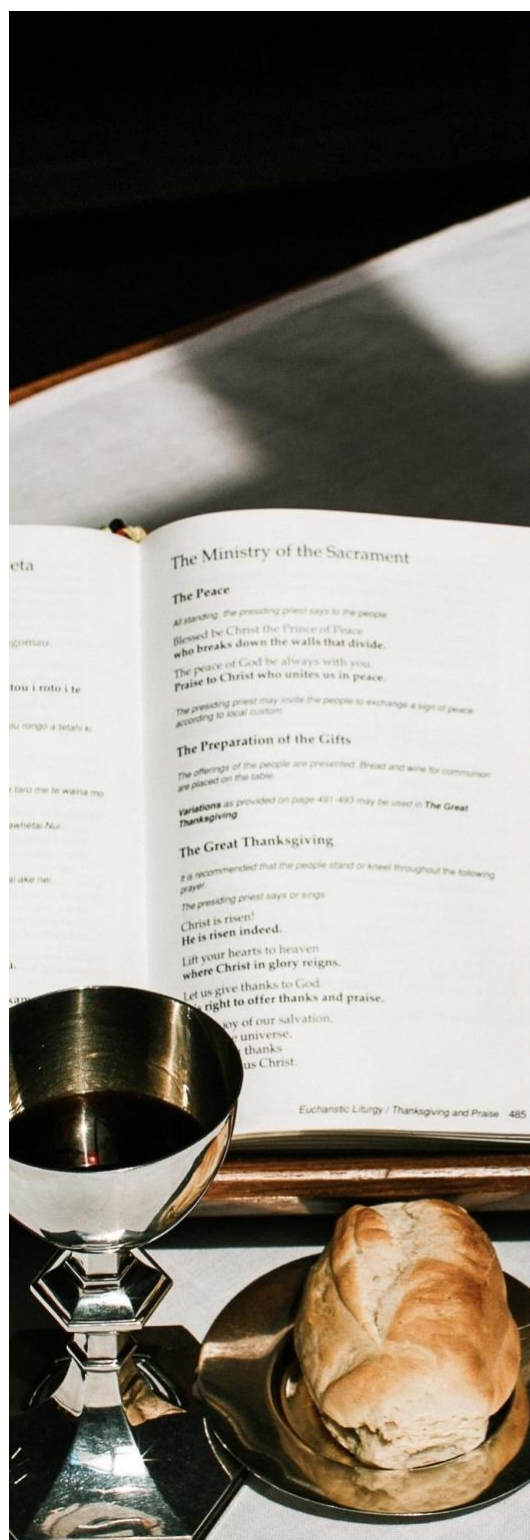


SMALL GROUP GUIDE



## **CONTENTS**

- 2 Introduction
- 3 Week 1: Extending the Table
- 5 Week 2: The Practice of Listening
- 7 Week 3: The Practice of Proclaiming
- 9 Week 4: The Practice of Praying
- 11 Week 5: The Practice of Forgiving
- 13 Week 6: The Practice of Eating
- 15 Week 7: The Practice of Blessing



## INTRODUCTION

One way Scripture describes God's mission to redeem, heal, and restore our fractured world is through the image of hospitality. God's kingdom is portrayed as a great banquet where all are invited to the table to feast on God's grace and share in a healing, life-giving community.

The church consists of those who have received and embraced this invitation - but not just for its own sake. As we receive God's gracious hospitality, we are compelled by love to become agents of hospitality, extending the table of God's gracious welcome to the world around us.

In this series, we examine six practices from our weekly pattern of worship that are central to becoming a church for others:

- **Listening**
- **Proclaiming**
- **Praying**
- **Forgiving**
- **Eating**
- **Blessing**

Extending the Table explores how these practices of worship on Sunday can become practices of witness on Monday, shaping us into people who joyfully invite others to experience the hospitable love and grace of God.

This booklet serves as a discussion guide for individuals and groups as we walk through each week together. These sessions flow from our worship gatherings and serve as a companion to the personal **Prayer + Practice Guide**.

This guide is designed so anyone may use it to facilitate a group discussion. Each session opens with a **Video Vignette** and then questions are provided to help guide conversation. Don't worry if you do not get through them all. The goal is for each group to hear and respond to the Lord. May God's grace be extended to others as we learn and grow together!





## WEEK 1 EXTENDING THE TABLE

### Watch Video 1: Extending the Table

#### Optional Icebreaker (5-10 minutes)

Briefly describe the most wonderful dining experience you've ever had. Include: Where it was, what was served, and who you were with.

#### Scripture and Discussion (30-40 minutes)

Isaiah 25 paints a picture of a great feast taking place on Mount Zion, the highest point in Jerusalem and a location symbolic of the Promised Land. The fulfillment of God's kingdom is also described in Revelation 19 as a great wedding feast. These images in Scripture invite us to imagine what God's kingdom will look like when it comes in all of its fullness. As you read and reflect, imagine what it looks like for us to embrace this vision of the kingdom right here and now. If God is preparing a feast for all people, what is our role in extending an invitation to God's table?

Read Isaiah 25:6-9:

*On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines. 7 On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; 8 he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The Lord has spoken. 9 In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."*

- 1) What words, images, and ideas stand out to you in this passage?
- 2) God is described as the host of the meal. Based on the description of the meal in verse 6, what do you notice about God's hospitality?
- 3) According to verses 7-9, what are the results of sharing at the table with God? What makes you hopeful? What do you find challenging?
- 4) Read the words of Jesus to the Pharisees in Luke 14:12-14. What do Jesus' words teach us about the hospitality of God? What does it say about the hospitality the church is called to extend?
- 5) One of the deepest needs people have is for belonging and community. Can you think of examples where that need is expressed in our culture or in your own life? How is the church uniquely gifted and called to meet people at this point of need?
- 6) What factors most often keep the church from extending generous hospitality?
- 7) What happens if our worship never leads us outward in mission? What happens if we try to engage in mission apart from the practices of worship?

**Personal Reflection (5 minutes)**

What keeps you from personally extending hospitality toward others? Write them below and offer them to the Lord:

**Closing (5-10 minutes)**

Spend the last few minutes sharing any burdens or thanksgivings with the group and then pray together. Close by praying in unison this week's prayer found from the **Prayer + Practice Guide**:

**Loving God, thank you for inviting us to your table. Shape our hearts by your Spirit, that through us, your grace may flow into the lives of others. Amen.**



## WEEK 2 THE PRACTICE OF LISTENING

### Watch Video 2: The Practice of Listening

#### Optional Icebreaker (5-10 minutes)

Describe a time someone listened to you well. What did he/she do that made them a good listener?

#### Scripture and Discussion (30-40 minutes)

In his letter to early Christian communities, James encourages the churches to live faithful, authentic lives. In chapters 1 and 3, James urges believers to tame the tongue because of the great power words have to either build up or tear down. The implication is that if we want to live faithfully and hospitably, it will require us to first close our mouths and open our ears. Listening opens the way for us to become more aware of and responsive to the voice of the Spirit and to the voices and needs of others. As you read and reflect, consider what it would look like for us to be a community that is known for listening well.

#### Read James 1:19-27

*19 My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, 20 because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. 21 Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. 22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. 23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25 But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do. 26 Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. 27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*



- 1) What words, images, and ideas stand out to you in this passage?
- 2) According to verses 19-20, what is the relationship between anger and listening? How does the presence of anger affect our ability to be a hospitable presence?
- 3) According to James 1, describe what you see as the relationship between listening/hearing and acting?
- 4) Read Ecclesiastes 5:1-3. This passage describes the importance of listening when approaching God in worship. What effect do times of silence in worship have on you?
- 5) To what extent is silence and careful listening valued in our culture? Why do you think this is?
- 6) What is the role of listening in extending hospitality? How does practicing silence allow us to become more present to others?

**Personal Reflection (5 minutes)**

What factors keep you from being an effective listener? What habit(s) would need to be released or adopted in order to grow in this area?

**Closing (5-10 minutes)**

Spend the last few minutes sharing any burdens or thanksgivings with the group and then pray together. Close by praying in unison this week's prayer found from the **Prayer + Practice Guide**:

**Lord, silence in us any voice but yours that hearing you, we may become more attentive to others.  
Amen.**



## WEEK 3 THE PRACTICE OF PROCLAIMING

### Watch Video 3: The Practice of Proclaiming

#### Optional Icebreaker (5-10 minutes)

What's the best news you've ever received and how did it make you feel? How did others respond when you shared the news?

#### Scripture and Discussion (30-40 minutes)

In his letter to the Colossians, the Apostle Paul writes from prison to encourage the church in its devotion to Jesus Christ. In chapters 3-4, Paul explores the contours of the new life that ought to mark those who belong to Jesus. As Paul draws his letter to a close, he asks the church in Colossae to pray for open doors for him to clearly proclaim the mystery of the good news of Jesus to others. He then encourages the Colossians to make the most of opportunities they will have to speak and respond gracefully to others, especially to those who are not yet part of the church. The implication is that Paul is not the only one who will be doing the proclaiming. The church, through gracious conversation with the culture around it, will have open doors to speak good news, thereby creating hospitable space for people who are seeking a relationship with the living God. As you read and reflect this week, we are invited to consider the power that comes through gracious speech.

Read Colossians 4:2-6

*2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. 3 And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. 4 Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. 5 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. 6 Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*

- 1) What words, images, and ideas stand out to you in this passage?
- 2) Paul asks for prayer that God would open doors so that the mystery of Christ may be proclaimed. He wrote these words while in chains. What do you think an "open door" would look like for Paul in that situation? What might it look like for us in our homes, neighborhoods, or workplaces?
- 3) Paul instructs the church to "Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders" and "make the most of every opportunity." What do you think Paul means by this? How does the church's posture toward the world affect its ability to speak good news?
- 4) Conversation that is "full of grace" (v. 6) is often in short supply today. Where do you see that reality playing out in our culture? How can a lack of grace in our speech impede the church's ability to extend the table to others?
- 5) Read the message Jesus was called to proclaim in Luke 4:14-21. What do you observe about the good news presented there? How does it compare with the message being proclaimed by the church today?
- 6) Proclaiming or sharing good news with others may look different for different people, according to their personality, temperament, and gifting. Can you think of examples of this? What do you think practicing proclamation and gracious speech looks like for you?

**Personal Reflection (5 minutes)**

What "open doors" for sharing good news within your circle of influence exist now or could exist in the future? Record situations that come to mind:

**Closing (5-10 minutes)**

Spend the last few minutes sharing any burdens or thanksgivings with the group and then pray together. Close by praying in unison this week's prayer found from the **Prayer + Practice Guide**:

**Loving God, keep us mindful of the power of our words. Fill our speech with grace, that the message of our lives may point others to the good news of your love. Amen.**





## WEEK 4 THE PRACTICE OF PRAYING

### Watch Video 4: The Practice of Praying

#### Optional Icebreaker (5-10 minutes)

Can you think of a significant time someone prayed for you? How did it affect you?

#### Scripture and Discussion (30-40 minutes)

In the first letter to Timothy, the Apostle Paul writes to his young son in the faith to encourage him as he serves the church in Ephesus. The very first reminder Paul wants Timothy to pass on to the Ephesian church is about the role and importance of prayer. The church is to offer "petitions, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving." This prayer is not just an inward-facing activity. Rather, this prayer for others is done with the belief that God desires all to come to a knowledge of Christ as Savior. Prayer for others enables us to participate in God's work in others' lives in ways that will bring about salvation and wholeness. As you read and reflect, we are invited to consider how the practice of intercessory prayer is a key aspect of becoming a church for others.

Read 1 Timothy 2:1-6

*1 I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for all people—2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. 3 This is good, and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time.*

- 1) What words, images, and ideas stand out to you in this passage?
- 2) From the beginning, believers have prayed for others in their gatherings of worship. According to verses 1-2, who are believers called to lift up in prayer? Why is including intercessory prayer in our worship important?
- 3) Paul indicates that we are to pray specifically for governmental authorities. Why does Paul include this group in the instructions on prayer?
- 4) According to verse 4, God wants all people to "be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." How does knowing that God is already at work in people's lives affect the way we pray for them?
- 5) Read Luke 6:27-28. Have you ever prayed for someone who mistreated you? How does interceding for those who mistreat us affect our ability to extend hospitality?
- 6) Praying for others' needs, whether we are present with them physically or not, requires a compassionate heart. What factors most often keep us from engaging in intercessory prayer?

**Personal Reflection (5 minutes)**

Consider the rhythms of a typical day for you. When could intercessory prayers for others be easily inserted into your day? Who comes to mind that would benefit from such prayers?

**Closing (5-10 minutes)**

Spend the last few minutes sharing any burdens or thanksgivings with the group and then pray together. Close by praying in unison this week's prayer found from the **Prayer + Practice Guide**:

**Gracious Father, remind us of the privilege we have in bringing the needs of others before you. Fill our hearts with love and move our feet to action. Amen.**





## WEEK 5 THE PRACTICE OF FORGIVING

### Watch Video 5: The Practice of Forgiving

#### Optional Icebreaker (5-10 minutes)

Can you think of a time when someone forgave you for something you said or did? How did their forgiveness affect you?

#### Scripture and Discussion (30-40 minutes)

The Apostle Paul writes to the church in Corinth to address challenges that had arisen in the community. Paul wanted the Corinthian Christians to know that ministry comes not through power, but through weakness. The cross ultimately reveals God's character as sacrificial and self-giving love. This love God has shown, displayed in the cross, has the power to forgive us and reconcile us to God and each other. The good news that God no longer counts our sins against us means that we don't have to keep score of others' sins. God's forgiveness and peace can be received and extended through us, wherever we are. As you reflect this week, we are invited to consider how our lives may be increasingly marked by the practice of forgiveness.

#### Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

*14 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. 16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

- 1) What words, images, and ideas stand out to you in this passage?
- 2) According to this passage, how does God respond to our sins? How does the answer challenge your understanding of God?
- 3) Paul speaks of being an ambassador of reconciliation and that God is "making His appeal through us." (v. 20) What does an ambassador do? Does this idea motivate, surprise, or alarm you?
- 4) Read Matthew 5:23-24. What is the relationship between our reconciliation with God and our reconciliation with others?
- 5) What are some of the reasons we sometimes avoid forgiveness and reconciliation? What happens to us if we do not forgive?
- 6) It's tempting for the church to adopt the angry, combative stance that's so prevalent in our culture. How does doing so affect our ability to be a hospitable presence? What can we do to maintain a peaceful presence in our interactions with others?
- 7) Read James 5:16. Why is regular confession important both in our times of gathered worship and in our daily lives? How do you think this practice helps us become a church for others?

**Personal Reflection (5 minutes)**

Is there a person or group in your life you need to either forgive or ask forgiveness from? How is God calling you to respond?

**Closing (5-10 minutes)**

Spend the last few minutes sharing any burdens or thanksgivings with the group and then pray together. Close by praying in unison this week's prayer found from the **Prayer + Practice Guide**:

**Lord, remove our pride and help us forgive. Deliver us from holding grudges and fill our lives with your peace. Amen.**



## WEEK 6 THE PRACTICE OF EATING

### Watch Video 6: The Practice of Eating

#### Optional Icebreaker (5-10 minutes)

Briefly describe a fun or unique tradition observed at mealtimes in your household. It may be a current tradition or one from your childhood.

#### Scripture and Discussion (30-40 minutes)

The Gospel of Luke ends with Jesus ascending to the Father and the disciples in Jerusalem praising God and waiting for "power from on high." (Luke 24:49) Luke's sequel, the book of Acts, opens as the Holy Spirit descends on the followers of Jesus. This gives birth to the church, a dynamic and growing multicultural community of shared life and mission. Acts 2 provides a snapshot of the early Christian community where a key feature of the church's life was eating together. This practice provided social connection that bridged many cultural divisions of the day. It helped ensure those with less would not be hungry. It also became a primary doorway for seekers to experience the hospitable life of the church. At the center of their shared life and meals was their worship which included the "breaking of bread." (2:42) Here, the celebration focused on the bread and wine, Jesus' words to them from the Upper Room (Luke 22), and the presence of God at work among them. As you reflect this week, consider how the very common habit of eating a meal together may be a powerful way people can experience the hospitality of God.

#### Read Acts 2:42-47

*42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*



- 1) What words, images, and ideas stand out to you in this passage?
- 2) As you read this Scripture, what do you notice about the shared life of the early Christians? In what ways is this similar to or different from your experience of church?
- 3) Read verses 46-47. The early church experienced rapid growth without advertising itself or intentionally setting out to attract newcomers. What do you think contributed to the growth of the church? What was the role of worship in this growth?
- 4) Read the following brief passages:
  - a. Luke 22:19 (the Last Supper)
  - b. Luke 24:28-32 (Jesus with disciples on the road to Emmaus)
  - c. 1 Corinthians 11:23-24 (Paul's instructions for worship)

What patterns do you notice? Why do you think Communion was so central to the worship of the early Christians?

5) In what ways does an invitation to share a meal help someone feel loved and welcomed? What are the key features of being a hospitable host?

6) How can being a gracious guest at someone else's table serve to also extend God's hospitality to others? What could this look like?

**Personal Reflection (5 minutes)**

As you think about your current lifestyle and habits, what keeps you from extending hospitality to others in this way? What habits would need to change for you to extend the table?

**Closing (5-10 minutes)**

Spend the last few minutes sharing any burdens or thanksgivings with the group and then pray together. Close by praying in unison this week's prayer found from the **Prayer + Practice Guide**:

**Loving God, thank you for providing food that sustains us. Open our eyes to your presence, that every table may become for us an altar, and every guest be welcomed as Christ. Amen.**



## WEEK 7 THE PRACTICE OF BLESSING

### Watch Video 7: The Practice of Blessing

#### Optional Icebreaker (5-10 minutes)

Have you ever received an unexpected gift? Briefly share the experience with the group.

#### Scripture and Discussion (30-40 minutes)

In his pastoral guidance to the church in Corinth, the Apostle Paul celebrates the generosity of the Corinthians and admonishes them to "abound in every good work." (2 Cor. 9:8) This call to generous, outward-focused living is not rooted in their natural abilities but in the acknowledgment that they have been blessed and graced by God. According to Paul, the consequence of being blessed by the gospel is to become a blessing. We receive so that we can share. When this economy of grace is extended, it will result in others being blessed and ultimately, offering their praise and thanks to God. As you read and reflect this week, consider what it might look like to live lives that overflow in ways that tangibly bless others.

#### Read 2 Corinthians 9:8-15

*8 And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. 9 As it is written: "They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever." 10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. 11 You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. 12 This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. 13 Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. 14 And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. 15 Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!*

- 1) What words, images, and ideas stand out to you in this passage?
- 2) According to this passage, what does it mean to be blessed? How is this different than popular understandings of being "blessed"?
- 3) A majority of the earliest Christians were poor and would have had very little material wealth. What role does our economic status play in our ability to bless others?
- 4) Read verses 12-14. What effect does blessing others in the name of Christ have on them? How would you describe the relationship between blessing and praise?
- 5) In our culture, there is a high value placed on calculating the return on investment – what we may receive by giving something away. How does the Scripture's definition of blessing challenge this approach? What does it require of us to bless others without strings attached?
- 7) Our worship services end with a blessing and a dismissal (meaning sending) to "go in peace to love and serve the Lord." How does this practice help us think of our daily lives as an act of worship?

**Personal Reflection (5 minutes)**

What habits have to be cultivated in order to be a person who consistently blesses others? Think about the habits you have developed surrounding your time, money, and gifts. What habits may need to change in order to enable you to live a life of generous blessing to others?

**Closing (5-10 minutes)**

Spend the last few minutes sharing any burdens or thanksgivings with the group and then pray together. Close by praying in unison this week's prayer found from the **Prayer + Practice Guide**:

**Generous God, help us live with open hands, that every gift we have received may become an instrument of blessing to others. Amen.**



