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**Ecclesiology and Adaptive Change: A Qualitative Study of  
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Congregations in the  
Northwest Regional Christian Church**

Kara Lynn Markell

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ECCLESIOLOGY AND ADAPTIVE CHANGE:  
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST)  
CONGREGATIONS IN THE NORTHWEST REGIONAL CHRISTIAN CHURCH

BY  
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A written project submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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Lake Washington Christian Church, my partners in exploring what it means to be church, have supported me in this work in countless ways, and are learning to embrace change with courage and faithful resolve.

## DEDICATION

For my children who have patiently endured the demands of this project with little complaint—the future of the church belongs to them. For my husband, Matt, and his unfailing support of me and my work. For my parents, who raised me in the faith, supported my calling out of the church of my up-bringing into the fullness of my call. For the many diverse congregations that have formed me over the course of my life—I am convinced that there is more that binds us together than separates us.

In loving memory of two very special mentors and friends: Rev. Dr. Gláucia Vasconcellos-Wilkey, who delighted, inspired, cajoled, and enticed me into fully embracing my calling; and Rev. Loren Arnett, who embodied the best of Disciples in his work for the unity of the Church, and whose commitment to theological education and the future of the Church made this work possible.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

## ABSTRACT

### ECCLESIOLOGY AND ADAPTIVE CHANGE:

#### A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST)

#### CONGREGATIONS IN THE NORTHWEST REGIONAL CHRISTIAN CHURCH

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This project was conceived and executed as a survey of congregational leaders in the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), to create a grounded theory related to the connection between ecclesiological beliefs and adaptive change. The study's findings are based on data collected using a Delphi process that began with a short series of open-ended questions. Participants were asked to identify the nature and mission of the Church and to imagine their congregation in five years. Congregational pastors, elders, and board members provided data which was synthesized into common ecclesiological themes and possibilities for adaptive change. An audience review of findings provided triangulation of the data, additional insights into the data, and recommendations for the application of the study within congregations.

The theological foundation of the study includes the traditional Four Marks of the Church identified in the Nicene Creed: *one, holy, catholic* and *apostolic* (Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed AD 381), as well as four terms that represent the unique ecclesiology of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ): *unity, liberty, mission, and resistance*. The role of the Spirit in adaptive change provides an additional theological lens for the grounded theory that emerges from the data.

Findings reveal the strength of Disciples' ecclesiology in meeting adaptive challenges and the need for robust study of both Disciples' and traditional ecclesiology. A connection between ecclesiological belief and adaptive change within the congregation emerged from the data, revealing the benefit of internal consensus. Finally, the study recommends three ways to enhance ecclesiological understanding within the congregation: the importance of support for adaptive change, complimentary theories and tools for congregational leaders.



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Introduction**

In 1885, the American Christian Missionary Society began sending evangelists to a settlement on the western edge of the Washington Territory known as Seattle. Within five years a new Christian Church was started; Seattle was still very much a frontier culture (Killen and Silk 2004, 58). By 1901 that congregation had settled in the area near the University of Washington, which had been founded in 1861. By 1915 the congregation had 200 members and had constructed its first building. The congregation grew quickly, reporting 2,000 members by 1933. The congregation continued to grow along with Seattle and in 1960 built a new, 1,200-seat sanctuary. By that time the flagship congregation had planted seven more Disciples congregations in the Seattle area (Thomas 1965). That trend was not sustained, however.

Between the years 2000 and 2018, while the University District neighborhood of Seattle grew by 10 percent, worship attendance at Seattle's University Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) declined by 50 percent, as did official membership. According to a 2017 report created for the congregation by Hope Partnership, and shared with the researcher by their former pastor in May 2018, mounting facility expenses and a decrease in congregational use of the building to 6 percent of its facility caused the congregation to depend more and more on rental income. In 2018, University Christian Church closed its doors and its remaining members merged with another small congregation in North

Seattle. Dwindling Sunday worship attendance combined with mounting deferred maintenance costs (estimated at over ten million dollars) had led to a congregation that could no longer sustain itself. This story is not unique. The question arose: was it possible that this decline could have been resolved with more people and money, or was something deeper at work?

Phyllis Tickle (2008, 14) identified the roots, the current reality, and the future of a monumental shift that affects North American Christianity “socially, culturally, intellectually, politically, economically.” She described a 500-year pattern of great “rummage sales” in the Church and attempted to normalize this institutional demise as part of a great and predictable shift. That monumental shift manifests itself in the life of local congregations as many complex challenges—declining membership, decaying buildings, diversifying culture—that have no clear-cut answers and for which most clergy find themselves ill-equipped. The faithful persons who despair and often resist the upheaval of this “hinge time,” as Tickle describes it, are not easily consoled or motivated by the suggestion that it is to be expected. Perhaps University Christian Church’s life cycle was inevitable given its context. Perhaps not.

Like many mainline congregations, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregations in the Pacific Northwest are facing the challenges of the changing religious landscape: declining participation, waning influence in the community, deteriorating buildings, and shrinking budgets. The fact that many congregations feel unable to meet these challenges is an indication that the challenges themselves are adaptive in nature and go to the very heart of what it means to *be Church*. Adaptive challenges have no known



solutions and inspire uncertainty in those facing them because they are unpredictable, complex and have no clear solution (Heifitz and Linsky 2002).

This study proposes to find the connection between the ecclesiology (the theological framework related to the nature and mission of the Church) of Disciples of Christ congregations in the Northwest Regional Christian Church and their ability to navigate the adaptive challenges just identified. It is the presumption of this researcher that the way congregations embody their answer to the question “what does it mean to be the Church?” can either enable or prevent a congregation’s ability to adapt. Tickle rightly names that something new is emerging in the Church. This study attempts to discover which ecclesiological foundations might help the Church midwife what is emerging rather than go extinct.

### **Statement of the Problem**

A generation ago, theologians in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), referred to as *Disciples* throughout this text, acknowledged that ecclesiology is essential to a congregation’s identity and purpose and that identity can change over time, thereby necessitating ongoing engagement with ecclesiological beliefs. “Faithfulness calls Christians in every age to examine our understanding of the church’s identity” (Crow and Duke 1998, 24). The Commission on Theology of the Council on Christian Unity sought to answer this “most basic and all-embracing” question: “what do Disciples think it means to be church?” (Crow and Duke 1998, 13) As its authors suggest, each generation must ask this question. Based on the signs of the times, it is time to ask it again, because

the ways we have previously defined and described the nature and mission of the Church may be insufficient to meet a congregation's needs in this generation.

Defining and describing the Church's nature and mission is especially pertinent now as leaders in the field of congregational transformation (Robinson 2003; Roxburgh 2011; Bolsinger 2015; Steinke 2010) agree that the Church is in a time of sweeping change. Those same leaders suggest that the Church needs to learn new ways to meet adaptive challenges if it is to survive. Alan Roxburgh (2011, 11), pastor, teacher, writer, and consultant with more than 30 years' experience in congregational leadership, consulting, and seminary education, suggests that "we have entered a world for which the churches of North America are woefully unprepared" and that they are, in fact, "seeking to address this new...world with strategies shaped in the twentieth century." Anthony Robinson (2003, 3), a mainline pastor, consultant, and author in the Pacific Northwest, refers to the last 25-30 years as a "time of seismic shift in the religious ecology of our society," and he proposes that the response to this shift requires a change in congregational culture.

Cultural change within an organization or community is an adaptive challenge. Many congregations focus on new problems using old models and often settle for technical fixes, which prove unsuccessful. Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, leading authors in the field of adaptive change and leadership, explain the difference between technical problems and adaptive change. Technical problems can be solved with know-how that already exists within the organization; no new learning, structural or

value change is needed. Adaptive changes, on the other hand, “require experiments, new discoveries, and adjustments from numerous places in the organization or community. Without learning new ways—changing attitudes, values and behaviors—people cannot make the adaptive leap necessary to thrive in the new environment” (Heifitz and Linsky 2002, 13). Can congregations embody a congregational culture capable of continual change to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century? For congregations facing the necessity of adaptive change, their ecclesiological understandings will affect their ability to engage in adaptive change.

### **Purpose and Significance of the Study**

This qualitative research study is intended to identify common ecclesiological understandings within Disciples congregations of the Northwest Regional Christian Church, and to explore their relationship to a congregation's ability to meet adaptive challenges. The Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches (2005, 3), an organization dedicated to deepening the understanding of the nature and mission of the Church, suggests, “The self-understanding of the Church is essential for its proper response to its vocation.” Self-awareness is an important aspect of congregational culture; it manifests in the governance, mission, and ministry of the congregation. This study seeks to identify congregational self-understanding and how it relates not only to vocation, but to the necessity for change in accomplishing its vocation.

In recent years, limited studies were undertaken related to ecclesiology and the challenges facing congregations today. One study, initiated in 2005 by the World Council of Churches (WCC) (2013), primarily focused on developing a statement about the nature

and mission of the Church with a special emphasis on Christian unity. While it does recognize some of the challenges facing the Church around the world, the WCC document does not make explicit connections between ecclesial theological commitments and the Church's ability to navigate change. As a convergence text, the WCC study and document strive to find broad consensus, rather than address specific ecclesial understandings about the nature of the Church. Unity is an important aspect of the Disciples of Christ ecclesiology, but it is not the only factor.

A foundational assumption of the congregational transformation literature, to which this study is related, is that a congregation's culture (its traditions, language, attitudes, values, and behaviors) are constitutive of a congregation's identity and very often at the heart of congregational change. Robert Stephen Reid (2014, 31), professor of organizational leadership at the University of Dubuque, suggests, "The contemporary challenge for Christian congregations is not just to identify ways to implement change, but to create congregations that are continuously adaptive." A congregation's culture is an expression of its ecclesiology and a congregation's preferred ecclesiological frameworks, images, and models can subsequently aid or hinder the process of change. Chapter 2 explores these ecclesiological frameworks and their link to adaptive change.

### **Research Questions**

The researcher brings to this study pastoral experience that confirms what many scholars have posited for years: the lives of congregations are changing along with the religious landscape of the twenty-first century. By traditional measures, congregations are in decline (that is, in membership, resources, programming, staff, and missional capacity)

and they are seeking new ways to be church. The researcher posed questions to clergy and lay leaders in Disciples of Christ congregations in the Northwest Regional Christian Church about the nature and mission of the Church. In addition, congregations were asked what they imagine and hope for their congregations in the future. Specifically, they were asked:

- What is the Church?
- What is the mission of the Church?
- Where do you see your church in five years?

Responses to these questions were compiled and common themes and images were identified. Those themes were sent to participants in the form of Likert scales, rating scales based on the data, and participants were invited to rate their level of agreement with the descriptions of the nature and mission of the Church.

In addition, to discern a possible connection with traditional Christian understandings of ecclesiology, study participants were asked to define, in their own terms, the Four Marks of the Church established in the Nicene Creed (Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed AD 381). These marks (*one, holy, catholic, and apostolic*) taken together are a cornerstone of Christian ecclesiological ontology. Responses about the Four Marks were compiled and common themes and images were identified. Consensus was reached in the first round for two of the marks, and additional Likert scales were developed for the other two and sent to participants for confirmation and additional comment.

Congregational leaders were also asked to describe their own congregations in five years. This was one way to identify the changes congregational leaders foresee and how they might manage those changes. Initial responses were compiled, and a number of themes identified, which were sent to participants in a second survey to rate, in order of importance, for their congregation's five-year outlook.

Because change is highly contextual, and consensus could not be reached on the change themes identified, additional information about each congregation's attitude toward change and clarity of purpose was collected. Participants were also asked to identify and describe a challenge they recently faced, or are currently facing, and their attempts to address the change. This question sought to generate a thicker description of change in the congregation and put the responses in conversation with ecclesiological findings to create a grounded theory.

### **Context of the Study**

The Disciples congregations of the Northwest Regional Christian Church cannot be considered apart from the context and culture of the Pacific Northwest, identified by Patricia O'Connell Killen and Mark Silk (2004) as "the None Zone." Killen and Silk report that the defining feature of religion in this region is the high rate of residents who are "unchurched." The Pew Research Center (2014) confirms this, noting that in Seattle 37 percent of adults identify as "unaffiliated" or religious "nones." Additionally, mainline Protestants compose only 10 percent of the population in the Pacific Northwest. Killen and Silk (2004, 9) also state that "the Pacific Northwest has pretty much always been this

way.” The answer to the question “what does it mean to be Church?” for Disciples congregations in the Pacific Northwest will inevitably be influenced by this context.

The reality for congregations within the Northwest Regional Christian Church also reflects the trend in many congregations in the United States. Within the past ten years, four Northwest Regional Disciples congregations have closed. Some of those closings led to new congregational *plants* in the region, which have met with mixed success. Of the three endowed congregation starts, one closed within five years and another continues to struggle to be sustainable. Clergy Annual Standing documents submitted to the Northwest Regional Christian Church in December 2018 confirm that over 25 percent of congregations in the region are served by a single, part-time pastor. Can these realities be attributed only to the context of the Pacific Northwest or is something else at work in the culture of these congregations? The researcher suspects that the ecclesial ontology of these Disciples congregations may have inhibited their ability to meet adaptive challenges, leading to their eventual closure.

### **Background and Role of the Researcher**

Since my birth, the congregation has been integral to my life. Baptized and raised in a branch of the Lutheran church, active as a congregational musician in a variety of denominational contexts, and now as a settled pastor in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), I have experienced first-hand how the congregation forms individuals into a community committed to embodying God’s mission in the world. The congregation has formed and guided me and given me countless opportunities to use my gifts.

Congregations have been the heart of my discipleship and development.

Congregations are important. They embody the nature and mission of God's Church. "For most people in the United States, in fact, congregations are at the heart of individual and collective religious history" and "are essential to the religious health of the United States and central to the religious well-being of a very large portion of this country's population" (Ammerman 1998, 7). This is true for many who affiliate with congregations and those who no longer do.

I pastor a Disciples congregation in the Northwest Regional Christian Church. My congregation, like many others, is a committed group of people who are striving together to discern God's call for our shared life while we navigate the changing religious landscape. Our shared understanding of what it means to be Church guides our life together. I also hear from my clergy colleagues around the region that their congregations are facing challenges for which they feel ill-equipped. This study takes the congregation seriously and attempts to help the Church ask difficult questions about identity in its particular place in order to suggest a path forward.

The Northwest Regional Christian Church is experiencing first-hand the changing religious landscape of the United States, and many congregations in this region are facing questions of sustainability. The challenges cannot be answered by what they already know how to do. This reality requires congregations to engage in adaptive change, learn new ways of being, potentially change their congregational culture, and take risks they have not needed to take in previous generations. As Disciples theologians Michael Kinnamon and Jan Lind (2009, 98) suggest, "The church's future does not lie in its past.



Rather, it depends on Christians of every generation being able to adapt to being the church in the circumstances they confront.” Congregations and their leaders cannot rely solely on the tools and traditions of the past to sustain them into the emerging future. They must be thoughtful and intentional about creating a congregational culture that embraces change, even while remaining true to their core identity as Church.

### **Overview of Methodology**

This study explored current understandings about the nature of the Church, held by Disciples congregations in the Northwest Region, by surveying a sample of congregational leaders that included clergy, elders, and board members. Through careful reflection on the data compiled, this study sought to name the axial point between ecclesiology and adaptive change. To create a theory based on the expert opinion of a targeted group, a grounded theory approach was chosen. This qualitative research methodology engages with the real world to develop a theory from the ground up (Cresswell 2016, 263). Qualitative research methodologies used in this study include a Delphi process of iterative surveys, theoretical sampling, and an audience review of findings. The reader will find more on each of these topics in chapter 3.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

This study is particularly limited to exploring the influence a congregation’s ecclesiology has on its ability to engage in adaptive change in Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregations of the Northwest Regional Christian Church. Participant selection was limited to congregational leaders in the Northwest Region, which includes Alaska and Washington. Subjects were selected using a simple criterion:

those who are currently serving their Disciples congregation as an elder, a member of the board of trustees, or a designated, settled, or interim pastor. Pastors were asked to find a maximum of four congregational leaders to participate, and contact information was gathered.

It was most desirable to have members of each subgroup from each congregation (elders and board members) participate in the study to elicit the fullest picture within each congregation. These leaders are considered the *experts* necessary to meet the Delphi study criteria. These experts are also stakeholders directly engaged in the processes of adaptive change in their congregations. Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss (1998) recommend a minimum of ten interviews for building a grounded theory, so a total sample of five congregations, with a minimum of four leaders responding, was the initial goal. This study included 10 congregations and 32 total participants, exceeding expectations.

### **Summary**

The reality that the North American mainline Church is facing complex challenges is well documented. The ways in which the Church understands its nature and mission in the world must be reconsidered and reimagined as it lives into an uncharted future. Technical fixes, things the Church already knows how to do, will not be sufficient to navigate these new waters. Congregations must use adaptive change processes, including changing their internal culture, if they are to survive and thrive in the new landscape. A congregation's internal culture is best described in its ecclesiology. Disciples congregations are no exception.

Chapter 1 outlined the problem, purpose, and significance of this qualitative study that explores the link between ecclesiology and adaptive change in Disciples congregations in the Northwest Region. Through the use of a Delphi study rooted in the grounded theory method, data was collected from lay and clergy persons in local congregations. The data was analyzed by the researcher and triangulated by an audience review of findings with the regional Commission on Ministry (described in chapter 3).

The nature and mission of the Church underpins congregational culture. Chapter 2 explores the theological foundations of ecclesiology and the ontology of the Church rooted in the Four Marks of the Church, viewed also through the unique theological history and imagination of the Disciples. What emerges from this exploration is an ecclesial ontology that has the potential to support congregations in successfully engaging their adaptive challenges. The ministry of the Spirit in the Church and the *leap of faith* are also identified as essential for an ecclesiology that embraces change.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

What is the Church's nature and mission? This is the question that ecclesiological reflection seeks to answer. Studying the nature and mission of the Church is a task as old as the Church itself; so, to provide context for the whole study, the researcher chose a biblical and historical method to construct an ontology of the Disciples. This chapter explores the historical roots of ecclesiology in Scripture and in the Four Marks of the Church described in the Nicene Creed (Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed AD 381). A historical survey of Disciples ecclesiology follows, with particular emphasis on three periods in Disciples history: (1) the founders, (2) the period of restructure, and (3) the contemporary period. Finally, the chapter proposes two elements of ecclesiology to be particularly important in adaptive change: the leap of faith and the ministry of the Spirit.

This chapter explores ecclesiology historically and makes a constructive effort to understand Disciples ecclesiology. Through this historical investigation the researcher, an ordained Disciples minister, endeavored to discover the theological phenomenology of Disciples ecclesiology. The ontology of the Church generally, and the Disciples specifically, will be explored using a constructivist approach when developing Disciples ecclesiology.

#### **Historical and Biblical Roots**

The word for Church derives from the Greek *ekklesia*, meaning a gathered community and *logia*, meaning knowledge. This knowledge of the gathered community

is formed in an ongoing theological discourse about the Church's nature and mission. The discourse is rooted in the biblical account and the foundation established by the ecumenical Council of Nicaea.

From the beginning of the biblical account, God sought out persons to enter into covenant relationship and work in partnership to accomplish God's mission. This relationship is narrated in the Hebrew Scriptures in the accounts of the lives of Abraham and his family (Gen. 12 [NRSV]), through King David and the monarchy (2 Sam. 7), and through the prophets who cajoled and comforted the People of God. Through Jesus, Christianity became an heir of the unique communal life to which God called the people of Israel (Matt. 28). The Church in this way is a gathering of people whose life and purpose, whose very ontology is embodied in a partnership with God to fulfill God's mission in the world.

It is the gospel itself that calls the Christian Church to life. The Gospel accounts describe a group of people, the disciples and others, who were attracted by Jesus' message to follow him. In very simple terms, it could be described as a movement committed to common principles. In Acts 2, the Spirit of the risen Christ moves among his followers in mystagogical wind and flame, transforming the people gathered around Jesus into a new community. That gathered community developed apostles who carried the message and mission of Jesus from its beginning in Jerusalem to the world. The Apostle Paul's letters to the early Church (Gal., Eph., 1 and 2 Cor., Phil., Col., and 1 and 2 Thess.) described the challenges early Christian congregations were experiencing and provided inspiration for the Church to meet those challenges.

Craig Van Gelder (2000, 25), Professor Emeritus of Congregational Mission at Luther Seminary, defines the Church as “God’s personal presence in the world through the Spirit.” In this sense the Church is a social community (the communion of saints) called together by Jesus Christ, which embodies God’s presence and mission in the world through the Spirit. This is an ontological reality resistant to change, even though particular manifestations of the Church (congregations, missions, seminaries, colleges, and denominations) may understand their identity in unique and inculturated ways.

Paul’s use of the Body of Christ metaphor for the Church (1 Cor. 12) and its connection to the rite of baptism could be considered the first Christian ecclesiological framework. While the Christian Scriptures, as a whole, do not offer a clear ecclesiology as such, they do offer many metaphors for understanding the nature and mission of the Church. Some of those metaphors and images have held prominence in the Church’s development. Paul Minear’s seminal work examining the images of the Church identifies four of the most common groups of images: The People of God, the New Creation, the Fellowship in Faith, and the Body of Christ (Minear 1960).

While these large categories of metaphors are helpful in understanding the ontology of the Church, Minear himself advises an ongoing reimagining of these images, rooted in an openness to the nature of the living Word of God in describing the Church. He suggests that “...the church must perennially open its imagination to the wide panorama of New Testament imagery....In every generation the use and re-use of the Biblical images has been one path by which the church has tried to learn what the church truly is...” (Minear 1960, 25). As the Church throughout history interprets the New

Testament in its own time and place, its association with particular metaphors can change. While “what the church truly is” does not alter over time, the images the Church uses to describe it do, because of changing interpretive lenses.

### **The Four Marks of the Church**

These metaphorical images were the foundation of a developing ecclesiology in the early Church. The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, established in AD 381, defined the Church’s nature using four distinct markers: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. These marks of the Church are rooted in Scripture and biblical images and are often cited as the ontological truth of the Church. The Nicene Creed, as it is now known, is the only authoritative ecumenical statement which is accepted by most of the Church. These Four Marks are historically essential to the way the Church understands its nature and mission. Because they are broad, they have been reconsidered and reimagined throughout the Church’s history. For that reason, it is useful to briefly describe each of the marks:

- *One* refers to the distinctive unity to be found in the Church. According to Ephesians 4:4-6, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.” This is the unity for which Christ prayed in John’s gospel and which is a gift of God, sustained by the Holy Spirit. This oneness does not imply uniformity, but rather inseparability. It is a reflection of the oneness in diversity of the Triune God and, therefore, depends on the diversity of its many members.
- *Holy* is rooted in the biblical understanding of the prophetic people of God. In Genesis 12, God calls Abraham to be father of a holy people, blessed to be a blessing to all nations. This election and vocation are present in the formula, “I will be their God, and they will be my people” (WCC 2013, 11). This covenant is re-established by Jesus Christ who reconnects and reconciles all people to God. The Church is, according to 1 Peter 2:9-10, “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people.” Each Christian is imbued with gifts from the Holy Spirit to embody this prophetic identity and called in baptism to live it out in community.

- *Catholic*, from the Greek word meaning *whole* generally signifies the whole faith, as opposed to a partial faith. It means that the Church holds to the same core beliefs everywhere and at all times. This world-wide comprehensiveness is inclusive of all Christian peoples and contexts. While this catholicity leads to a tension in the Church between the local and the universal, it also recognizes that unique cultural expressions of the faith are, indeed, the true Church.
- *Apostolic* means that the Church is faithful to the message of the Gospel as transmitted to the Church through the proclamation of the apostles. Jesus chose and sent the apostles, empowered with the Holy Spirit, to continue his work of establishing God's kingdom on earth. This mark acknowledges that individual congregations do not invent the gospel, but rather receive it from the apostles, prophets, and Christ himself (Eph. 2:20). The Church proclaims the gospel in continuity with the Church from the beginning and serves as a guard against adapting too quickly to any winds of culture.

The one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church has lived into these marks in a variety of ways from the medieval period, through the Protestant reformers and into the modern era. While the specific terms may change over time, the theological and biblical roots remain constant. That is, a congregation may choose to identify their ecclesial identity as missional and global, rather than apostolic and catholic, but the meanings are essentially the same. The Marks of the Church are interdependent, intertwined and interrelated, reflecting the complexity of the ontology of the Church and the Church's struggle to remain faithful to its nature. Congregations today find themselves struggling to hold all of these ways of being and doing, while also navigating the changing religious landscape and its practical effects on the congregation.

### **A Distinctly Disciples Ecclesiology**

From its founding, the Stone-Campbell Movement, a Christian restoration movement which began in the United States during the second Great Awakening, rooted its ecclesiology in unity. What eventually became a denomination arose as a



movement resistant to the extreme Christian disunity on the American frontier in the eighteenth century. Ecclesiological understandings within the Stone-Campbell movement, and eventually the Disciples, have varied throughout its history, but some threads remain unchanged. While many Disciples turn toward structure in conversations about ecclesiology, this study is concerned with the theological characteristics of ecclesiology. As mentioned earlier, three distinct eras mark the development of ecclesiology in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ): the period of the founders, the period of restructure, and the contemporary period.

#### The Founders

Barton Stone, Thomas Campbell, and Alexander Campbell separately authored three documents that are of particular importance in discerning the ecclesiological claims of the early Stone-Campbell movement. These documents taken together provide a basis of ecclesiological thought as the movement was beginning.

Inspired by “America’s Pentecost” (Disciples of Christ Historical Society n.d.), the Cane Ridge Revival of 1801, Barton Stone (1804) and his Presbyterian colleagues crafted a clear call to Christian unity and a plea for reformation through the restoration of the Early Church. The mission of these pastors and their congregations was clear: to preach the gospel to all who would listen, to nurture believers, and to remove barriers to Christian unity.

Within this brief document, Stone (1804) and his colleagues made several claims about the nature of the Church. First, that there is one Body of Christ and all manifestations of that body should “sink into union” with one another. They also

promoted the congregational “native right of internal government,” that is, a level of local autonomy from institutional structures like the Presbytery. They encouraged each congregation to govern itself by adopting “the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus.” This meant a return to biblical models of community. Finally, they claimed that each particular congregation was “actuated,” or called, into being by the same Spirit. The themes of these statements can be summarized as unity, liberty, and restoration.

A few years later, the Christian Association of Washington, Pennsylvania, commissioned Thomas Campbell, a Presbyterian minister like Stone, to outline the rationale of the Christian Association (an interdenominational bible study group) and create a plan for Christian unity. Thomas Campbell, like Stone, had no intention of creating a new denomination. He opened his argument with one of Disciples’

best-known statements:

That the Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one; consisting of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him in all things according to the Scriptures, and that manifest the same by their tempers and conduct, and of none else; as none else can be truly and properly called Christians. (T. Campbell 1809, 18)

The document consists of thirteen main points, which include but are not limited to: (a) a fervent call to Christian unity; (b) an appeal for cooperation among congregations; (c) an admonition not to use creeds as a litmus test for acceptance into the community, but rather to adopt a clear and simple confession of faith in Jesus for admission to the Church; (d) the suggestion that the New Testament is sufficient for governance; and (e) a recognition that division among Christians is evil. Thomas Campbell expressed and advocated for “a common cause, the cause of Christ and our

brethren of all denominations” (Toulouse, Holloway and Foster 2010, 47). More than any other, this text “has set the direction for [Disciples] corporate identity” (Kinnamon and Linn 2009, 3). These works of Stone and Thomas Campbell share common themes of unity, liberty, restoration, and mission.

The movement that Thomas Campbell began continued to grow under the leadership of his son. Alexander Campbell ([1835] 1980, 56) was the first of the founders to describe a full ecclesiology, including the “institution which separates from the world, and consociates the people of God into a peculiar community; having laws, ordinances, manners and customs...immediately derived from the Savior of the world.” For Alexander Campbell, this mystical Body of Christ is ruled by the head, Christ himself, and all the members of the body are under his governance. The *true* Christian Church is comprised of all people in every place who confess Jesus to be Savior, who follow in the footsteps of the apostles and prophets, and take the New Testament Church to be their model. In this ecclesiology, unity, apostolicity, and catholicity are prominent, but restoration and liberty are essential components.

Alexander Campbell describes the structure of the united (one) Church as a “community of communities,” (A. Campbell [1835] 1980, 56) independent congregations bound together by what they hold in common, but not under the jurisdiction of another congregation or institution. These communities are then “under obligations to co-operate with one another in all measures promotive of the great ends of Christ’s death and resurrection” (A. Campbell [1835] 1980, 56). He saw in the New Testament, particularly

in Acts and in Paul's letters, this cooperation among particular communities for the benefit of the larger community.

Cooperation is a crucial mark of the Christian institution as Alexander Campbell describes it. He writes that cooperation is an essential element of humanity and that "it is a part of the economy of Heaven" (A. Campbell [1835] 1980, 58). Campbell regards the necessity for cooperation as something built into creation and essential to the ongoing work of the Church. He believed congregations could do so much more if they were united in their efforts, than if they tried to do it all alone, particularly on the American frontier. This cooperation was covenantal in orientation, embodying mutuality.

The Body of Christ image from 1 Corinthians was a vitally important image in early Disciples ecclesiology. "Christians must regard the church, or body of Christ, as one community, though composed of many small communities, each of which is an organized member of this great national organization..." (A. Campbell [1835] 1980, 59). With Christ as its head, the Church, or community of communities, could accomplish its mission of "conquest of the whole world in its prayers, aims, plans and efforts" (A. Campbell [1835] 1980, 59). This kind of community necessitates covenant and engenders unity, because no part can say to another part, "I have no need of you." From the beginning, the Body of Christ image has been essential to how Disciples understand the ontology of the Church.

Even though Alexander Campbell writes about the mystical Body of Christ, he stood in opposition to traditional theology of a visible and invisible Church. Rather, he believed the Church to exist only in a social context. He specifically rejected the

existence of an “invisible church” (Foster, et.al. 2004, 207), claiming the embodied and social entity called the Church found its best, and only, expression in the local congregation, which was autonomous but also bound by the principle of covenant to cooperation with other manifestations of the Church. For Campbell, ecclesiology is rooted in the congregation and is defined by the congregation’s relationship to the Body of Christ.

Several points of emphasis emerged from Disciples founders. The founders “shared commitments to freedom, apostolicity, unity and evangelism with an ethos of catholicity” (Dunnavant 1993, 4). Their desire to restore the first-century Church and their hope for unity bound them together in common cause. Anthony Dunnavant (1993, 6), a Disciples historian, summarized the founders’ ecclesiology this way: “the tactics of Christian primitivism were seen as the specific strategy for Christian unity, in pursuit of the objective of the evangelization of the world.” That means restoring the Church to its first century roots would achieve unity among Christians and that unity would make the mission of evangelization more effective.

Early Disciples also affirmed the words of Ephesians 4:4-5 as support for these ideals: “there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism.” Unity in diversity became the goal, with mutual love and cooperation in the midst of imperfections, for the success of the Church’s mission to convert the world. Liberty, unity, restoration and mission must be understood as working in concert to embody the true Church in the congregation. These

could be considered the Four Marks of the Church according to the early Stone-Campbell movement—a unique Disciples ecclesial ontology.

Within the Stone-Campbell movement an important undercurrent exists that is not explicitly articulated in its ecclesiology. The theme of resistance runs through much of the founders' ecclesiology. They resisted the disunity of their context in favor of Christian unity. Restoration was an approach to achieving unity, but the impulse behind it was resistance to anything that detracted from the gospel and mission of Jesus Christ. They resisted the oversight of institution, instead favoring liberty and freedom of congregations. They resisted the layers of tradition and nonbiblical additions in favor of a simple New Testament practice. They preferred to call themselves a *brotherhood*, resisting any kind of centralized structure or oversight in favor of a community of communities, living in mutual covenant with one another. Ralph Wilburn (1963c, 335) later characterized this theme when he claimed, “The Church is not an institution. It is the ‘people among the people...’ ” Even as the brotherhood became a denomination, it resisted denominationalism. This resistance ontology is essential to a Disciples ecclesiology.

By the second generation of leaders in the Stone-Campbell movement, disagreements about the main focus of their efforts began to fracture the brotherhood. The component parts of the ecclesiological framework set forth by the founders—liberty, unity, restoration and mission—were emphasized differently by the movement's various leaders, leading to divergent streams in the movement. The stream that developed into the Disciples, however, remained consistent with the founders' ecclesiology.

In the midst of the divergence, however, Frederick D. Kershner, Disciples theologian and preacher, expressed an affinity with the traditional Four Marks of the Church at the 1938 International Convention: “We [Disciples] belong to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church of Christ founded by our Lord and made known to the world through the New Testament Scriptures” (Osborn 1963b, 340). Likewise, and somewhat ironically, the belief that Christ is the source of the Church’s life (its unity, holiness, apostolicity, and catholicity) was summed up in the oft-repeated Disciples slogan: “no creed but Christ” (Foster et al. 2004, 688). While the Nicene Creed was not required to be believed by Disciples, the content of the creed was influential in Disciples thought.

#### The Period of Restructure

During the period known as Restructure, the denomination convened the Panel of Scholars, a group of Disciples theologians tasked with reexamining Disciples beliefs and doctrine in a scholarly way. The Panel was asked to “consider theologically some of the more practical issues and problems confronting Disciples of Christ” (Wickizer 1963, 8). The group met from 1957 to 1962 and generated a number of important papers on the theology of the Disciples. Ecclesiology was one of their main foci.

Ronald Osborn, Dean and Professor of Church history at Christian Theological Seminary at the time, evaluated the Disciples in light of the Four Marks of the Church, reordering the marks to reflect their importance among Disciples: unity, apostolicity, holiness, and catholicity. From the time of the Disciples founders, “Disciples have considered themselves under a mandate to labor for the oneness of believers” (Osborn

1963b, 307). A commitment to unity among all Christians was the essence of Disciples heritage. Osborn also admits that despite our legacy of work toward unity, Disciples are also guilty of the “sin of sectarianism and parochialism” (Osborn 1963b, 308).

Osborn (1963b) goes on to write about the personal and institutional nature of unity. Each individual must nurture unity within themselves. Disciples who take their tradition seriously, he suggests, must do whatever they can to draw Christians of differing Christian communities into communion and engagement in education, social action, and evangelism. At the same time, Disciples have come to appreciate the necessity of institutions that work toward unity. While the founding fathers of Disciples advocated for the elimination of all ecclesial institutions except for the congregation, Osborn advocates that modern Disciples have found an institutional aspect of Church necessary. “It is our calling, I believe, to seek for institutions which better express the oneness of God’s people...” (Osborn 1963b, 311). This represents a significant shift in the way Disciples thought about liberty and unity.

Osborn (1963b) concedes that unity is not sufficient in itself to describe the Church. He suggests that for a restorationist movement, the idea of apostolicity, or conformity to the message and mission of Jesus and the first apostles, is essential to a Disciples ecclesiology. Thomas Campbell (1809) suggested the Church “take up things just as the Apostles left them.” This was expressed in the Disciples’ attempt to embody the original pattern for the Church as presented in the New Testament. Disciples ontology manifested itself in resistance to the entities from which the Church must be restored. Unity was a means to this restoration, and liberty was essential to the fulfilment of unity.



So, the desire to be apostolic led Disciples to embrace restoration as a means to apostolicity, and unity was essential in achieving restoration. One can see how intertwined these characteristics are in the mind of Disciples.

But Osborn (Osborn 1963b, 316) encouraged the Panel of Scholars and the Disciples generally to reject Thomas Campbell's proposition that "the New Testament is as perfect a constitution for the worship, disciplines and government of the New Testament Church, and as perfect a rule for the particular duties of its members, as the Old Testament was...for its members." The restoration principle, in Osborn's opinion, only led to legalism, controversy, and frustration, and proved contrary to the commitment to liberty and unity, eventually leading to a schism among differing factions in the Stone-Campbell Movement in the early twentieth-century.

Before restructure, when Disciples talked about the apostolicity of the Church they referred to the commitment to restore first century Christianity. They emphasized the *priesthood of all believers* and the individual's responsibility and facility in reading and discerning the message of Scriptures. First generation Disciples firmly believed that the Church was built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets and that Jesus is the head. Thomas Campbell (1809) suggested, "Were we, then, in our Church constitution and managements, to exhibit a complete conformity to the apostolic Church, would we not be, in that respect, as perfect as Christ intended we should be?"

But Osborn did not view restoration as the most helpful way of describing the Disciples' commitment to apostolicity. He suggested that the Disciples' longtime preoccupation with evangelism was the best expression of the Church's apostolicity. He

identified the early Disciples' "...awesome sense of the numinous in the belief that they were preaching the apostolic gospel and administering apostolic baptism in the apostolic way and were witnessing the growth of an apostolic church" (Osborn 1963b, 327). Many organizations developed by Disciples in their early years were missionary societies, with a sense of mission rooted in the Great Commission of Matthew (Matt. 28: 16-20). It is significant, also, that the Disciples' move toward becoming a denomination was done in part to more easily facilitate the work of mission and evangelism.

Osborn (1963b) states that Disciples express their belief in the holiness of the Church through the "ordinance" of baptism and the formation of members in their baptismal vocation. Though it is connected to personal morality, in Disciples thinking the holiness of the Church stems from God's presence in and with the community created in baptism. It is God's set-apartness that the Church is to embody in the world—set apart to nurture faith, hope, and love in a world that often rejects these ideals. This understanding of holiness was later described as "the community of forgiven sinners...called to costly obedience in response to grace, to ministry in the world for the sake of the Holy One" (Crow and Duke 1998, 45). Holiness, then, is a communal commitment to the covenant of baptism and the vocation to which baptized persons are called.

Osborn (1963b, 329) goes on to say that holiness "implies a distinctive ethical quality in the lives of believers, but its primary meaning asserts the church's relationship to God. The church is his [*sic*]. Its people are his [*sic*]." Because God in Christ is the author and enabler of Christian unity, Disciples have historically

believed unity to be deeply tied to holiness, and have, therefore, committed great energy to the ministry of reconciliation and ecumenism—and in more recent years, full inclusion.

Osborn (1963b, 336) addressed catholicity last. Disciples understand the catholicity of the Church to be “...that quality of the church’s life which transcends all local and particular distinctions, personal or cultural, and which may be recognized by any Christian anywhere as authentic.” The term catholic describes a Church that is universal and inclusive of many expressions of the Christian faith. This emphasis on the general rather than the particular is congruent with the Disciples commitment to unity in essentials and liberty in non-essentials, unity without uniformity. The theme of liberty, so important to the founders, is evident in this understanding of catholicity.

Disciples experience the catholicity, or wholeness, of the Church in the congregation at the Lord’s table celebrated whenever the community assembles. As people gather around the open table of Christ, they remember that it “extends beyond our local place of worship to encircle the world and to span the ages of time, because the faith we confess binds us in a universal fellowship” (Crow and Duke 1998, 46). At the table, Disciples experience the Body of Christ in the particular gathered community, which is part of a community of communities held together in covenant, which is also part of the larger community of Christ’s followers gathered in other times and places and known as the Body of Christ.

Following the work of the Panel of Scholars, the Disciples entered a restructure process. One result of the restructure was the development of a new governing document for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), referred to as the *Design* in this text, approved in 1968 when Disciples officially became a denomination. The preamble of the Design is the most well-known section, in part because it is included in the primary Disciples worship resources as an affirmation of faith, and is used as such in many congregations:

As members of the Christian Church  
we confess that Jesus is the Christ,  
the Son of the living God,  
and proclaim him Lord and Savior of the world.  
In Christ's name and by his grace  
we accept our mission of witness  
and service to all people.  
We rejoice in God,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
and in God's covenant of love  
which binds us to God and to one another.  
Through baptism into Christ  
we enter into newness of life  
and are made one with the whole people of God.  
In the communion of the Holy Spirit  
we are joined together in discipleship  
and in obedience to Christ.  
At the Table of the Lord  
we celebrate with thanksgiving  
the saving acts and presence of Christ.  
Within the universal church  
we receive the gift of ministry  
and the light of scripture.  
In the bonds of Christian faith  
we yield ourselves to God  
that we may serve the One  
whose kingdom has no end.  
Blessing, glory, and honor  
be to God forever. Amen. (Office of General Minister and President 2017)

Ecclesiological themes are a significant part of the preamble. The Church's mission of "witness and service to all people" is placed near the beginning, emphasizing the importance of mission to Disciples ontology. The importance of baptism and communion (table of the Lord) in the formation of identity and the expression of mission is obvious as well. God's covenant is essential in creating the Church, and the Holy Spirit is the source of the Church's sustainability. The oneness and catholicity of the Disciples is expressed as the "universal church" and the "whole people of God." Apostolicity is expressed through an emphasis on carrying on the mission of Jesus in service and witness to the world. The first article of the Design goes on to articulate Disciples ecclesiology more precisely:

Within the whole family of God on earth, the church appears wherever believers in Jesus the Christ are gathered in His name. Transcending all barriers within the human family, the one church manifests itself in ordered communities bound together for worship, fellowship, and service; in varied structures for mission, witness, and mutual accountability; and for the nurture and renewal of its members. The nature of the church, given by Christ, remains constant through the generations, yet in faithfulness to its nature, it continues to discern God's vision and to adapt its mission and structures to the needs of a changing world. All dominion in the church belongs to Jesus, its Lord and head, and any exercise of authority in the church on earth stands under His judgment. (Office of General Minister and President 2017)

The themes of Disciples ecclesiology and the classical Four Marks of the Church are both present in this statement, in the descriptions of catholicity, mission, apostolicity, transformation and unity. Covenant continues to be an important element of a Disciples ecclesiology, as well. Perhaps most pertinent to this study is the affirmation that the Church "continues to discern God's vision and to adapt its mission and structures to the needs of a changing world" (Office of General Minister and President 2017). As the movement that described itself as a brotherhood became a denomination, the current of

resistance appears to have diminished. The move away from a movement or brotherhood toward a denomination was seen as a necessary change in structure and consistent with the New Testament. The move enabled continued faithfulness to the Church's mission amid the changing patterns of the world.

While the language Disciples used to describe their ecclesiology shifted away from the founders' strong commitment to restoration, the themes of unity, liberty and mission remained. The Disciples, in the period of restructure, presented a more nuanced understanding and appreciation of the traditional Four Marks, as well as the ecclesiological commitments of the founders. That theological sensitivity continued into the contemporary period of Disciples ecclesiological development, which introduced some new images for understanding the Church, while still staying rooted in its ontology.

#### The Contemporary Period

At the end of twentieth century, Disciples began to take notice of the cultural trends in the changing American religious landscape and they felt the pressure to respond in new ways. The Commission on Theology of the Council on Christian Unity (Crow and Duke 1998, 3) developed a study for congregations and other expressions of the Church, expressly designed to answer a basic, but important question: "what do Disciples think it means to be church?" The authors, Paul Crow and James Duke, Disciples theologians and educators, recognized this question of ecclesiology as the most basic question for congregations; the answer undergirds all other pressing questions of finance, program and mission.

That study affirmed the Disciples' "commitment to faith in God's covenant of love in Jesus Christ and to ministry in Christ's name and by his grace" (Crow and Duke 1998, 14), amid the challenges for congregations at the turn of the twentieth-century. It called Disciples to ongoing transformation to fulfill its calling as God's Church. It also affirmed a definition of Church that resonated with Disciples theology up to that point:

The church is that community called into being by the Gospel, which is God's covenant of love in Jesus Christ, and given its life through the power of God's Spirit in order to praise and serve the living God. All those who accept this calling – of whatever race, nationality, or culture – are joined together as one people commissioned by God to witness by word and deed to God's love for the world. (Crow and Duke 1998, 19)

In this statement can be found many of the theological commitments of both traditional Stone-Campbell ecclesiology and the work of the Panel of Scholars. The authors also affirmed the inclusion of Disciples in the universal Church of Jesus Christ, which is corporately identified by (a) baptism, (b) the Lord's Supper, (c) a common confession of faith in Jesus, (d) a commitment to ethical living based on scriptural imperatives, and (e) a shared experience of the Holy Spirit.

The most recent denominational statements on the nature and mission of the Church are the identity, vision, and mission statements developed by the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Vision Team, initiated in 2009 by General Minister and President, Sharon Watkins (Cummins 2009, 270). The identity statement declares, "We are Disciples of Christ, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. As part of the one Body of Christ, we welcome all to the Lord's Table as God has welcomed us" (Christian Church [Disciples of Christ] n.d.). The mission of the Disciples (Christian Church [Disciples of Christ] n.d.) is "to be and to share the good news of Jesus Christ, witnessing, loving and serving from

our doorsteps ‘to the ends of the earth’ ” (Acts 1:8). And the vision, based on Micah 6:8, states that the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) desires “to be a faithful, growing church that demonstrates true community, deep Christian spirituality and a passion for justice.” Again, one can identify the Four Marks of the Church (one, holy, catholic, and apostolic); the traditional Disciples themes of unity, liberty and mission; and a resurgence of resistance in the use of the word “movement.” The Body of Christ remains the primary image for Disciples ontology, and is embodied most obviously at the table.

A distinctly Disciples ontology of the Church provides an ecclesiological framework for meeting the adaptive challenges congregations are facing. Disciples incorporate the Four Marks of the Church through the lens of a resistance movement committed to the unity of the Church and the mission of Jesus Christ. The way Disciples talk about the nature and mission of the Church continues to develop over time, but the essentials remain. The various expressions of the one Church, the community of communities, are connected by covenant, a relationship of “grateful mutuality” (Kinnamon and Linn 2009, 13). A congregation deeply rooted in this ontology is a community that can face adaptive challenges with confidence.

Throughout Disciples history, the Body of Christ image described in 1 Corinthians 12, has held prominence in the Disciples’ ecclesiological imagination. The Church as the living Body of Christ “means that each generation of the church is to become the contemporary incarnation” (Howland 1977, 34). This image embodies the ontological themes important to disciples: unity, liberty, covenant, and mission. A robust engagement with this image at the congregational level may form a community that is, in



the words of Ralph Wilburn (1963a, 242), “perennially transformable.” Congregational leaders who desire to explore this image through the lens of new science and living systems theory may gain insights useful for adaptive action. This recommendation is explored in chapter 5. The creative and free functioning of the Body of Christ depends on a commitment to understand and express the depth and breadth of that image for the congregation.

### **Ecclesiology and Adaptive Change**

This study seeks to put ecclesiology in conversation with adaptive change principles and identify an ecclesiological framework that empowers congregations to face the complex challenges of congregational life today and into the future. Richard Hamm (2001, 8), former Disciples General Minister and President, notes that congregations “must be able to change in response to their cultural context and to adapt their mission, structures, and style to serve current needs in the current cultural context.” Mission, structure and style are component parts of a congregation’s culture. And culture is one of the hardest things to change in an organization, because it is a reflection of identity. Pastor and author David Lose (2018) suggests that is true because “change makes people nervous that they aren’t just losing a way of doing church but actually their whole identity as the church.” But Heifetz and Linsky (2002, 13) suggest that “without...changing attitudes, values, and behaviors—people cannot make the adaptive leap necessary to thrive in the new environment.” It is difficult for leaders to mitigate feelings of loss within the organization, especially when it is

almost impossible to see how a new situation will be better than the current one. For these reasons, engaging in an adaptive process feels like a leap of faith.

For Christians, this is a familiar concept. The Bible offers examples of individuals and communities who made a leap of faith. Several biblical figures stepped into an unknown and emerging future, like Abram, who followed God's instructions to set out for an undisclosed land that God would show him (Gen. 12). Likewise, Noah built an ark at God's behest long before any rain started to fall (Gen. 6). Moses initially resisted God's invitation to free the people of Israel from bondage in Egypt because he felt unprepared for the task. But he responded to the call and led the people through the Red Sea to freedom (Exod. 14). In the New Testament, Simon Peter and his fellow fishermen left their nets to follow an itinerant rabbi and form a new community (Luke 5). And the Apostle Paul, transformed by a mystical experience of Jesus, left his old life in Jerusalem and began a new career as an apostle and church planter (Acts). The Bible is replete with examples of those who took the leap of faith required to engage in adaptive processes to fulfil God's mission in the world.

To take the leap of faith, congregations must create a culture in which taking this leap is natural. Steven Reid (2014, 33), a leader in organizational communication studies, claims that "the contemporary challenge for Christian congregations...is to learn how to embrace change rather than resist it. The need for them...is to become continuously adaptive..." Similarly, Disciples theologian Ronald Wilburn (1963a, 242), in refuting the plausibility of restoring the first century Church, suggested that

Disciples should instead be “perennially transformable,” living in a dynamic relationship with the world, rather than striving to recapture a time that has passed. Yet, how can a congregation become “continuously adaptive” and “perennially transformable,” especially when adaptive change and transformation threaten their identity?

In addition to reconnecting with the ontology of the Church, congregational leaders who aspire for their congregations to possess those qualities expressed by Reid and Wilburn must embrace the dynamic work of the Spirit. The Spirit is the sustaining presence of Christ in the Church. Barton Stone believed that the constitutive principle of the Church was “the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in each believer and member of the church” (Dunnivant 1993, 93). But the founders of the Stone-Campbell movement more generally had an underdeveloped doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Except for a handful of theologians, early Disciples “effectively ruled the Holy Spirit out of present history by restricting his [*sic*] operation to the influence of the word as found in the Bible” (Osborn 1963b, 334). Limiting the work of the Spirit to the realm of Scripture created a skepticism within Disciples regarding the guidance or power of the Holy Spirit in the congregation. Even into the 1960s, Disciples had not done much theological inquiry into the work of the Spirit; this is evident in the governing documents, in which the Holy Spirit is not a prominent theme.

For many Disciples at the time of the restructure, however, the Church, Christ, and the Spirit were inseparable. Ray Lindley (1963, 190), a Panel of Scholars contributor, recognized that “the Holy Spirit is Christ alive now in his church,” and is essential in the

“free functioning of the body of Christ.” Disciples believe that the Spirit of Christ gave birth to the Church on Pentecost and that the living Christ, which is the power of the Holy Spirit, is living in his body, the Church. A robust understanding of the role of the Spirit in the life of the Church helps congregations make the leap of faith and sustains them in adaptive change. Disciples theologian Dwight Stevenson (1963, 51) remarks about the importance of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church:

The church as redemptive community is given to mankind by the spirit of God, but this living church directed by the Spirit in ever new, emerging situations must fashion its own organization and it must keep on revising that organization to meet the needs of the growing program of the church and the changing character of the secular order. (Stevenson 1963, 51)

Craig Van Gelder (2000, 43), author and congregational consultant, writes, “The developmental work of the Spirit needs to be affirmed and sought by the church in our changing context.” One cannot consider what it means to be Church, or the ways the Church navigates change apart from the Holy Spirit’s leading. Phyllis Tickle (2014, 117) suggests that “...religious and spiritual upheaval may, in fact, characterize the Spirit’s most essential work....The Spirit—that is, God—is about movement/disruption and change/transformation.” A congregation that desires to be “perennially transformable” (Reid 2014, 33) or “continuously adaptive” (Wilburn 1963a, 242) would be well-served by the perspective that the adaptive challenges they face are an invitation by the Spirit to a leap of faith, rather than simply a problem to be solved. A way forward might be as simple as asking, “What might the Holy Spirit be calling us to be and do?”

## Summary

In this project, several theological lenses are important. The theological underpinning is the ontology of the Church, that is, those things that are “believed everywhere, always, and by all” (Commonitory of Vincent of Lérins AD 434). The Four Marks of the Church—one, holy, catholic, apostolic—have been one way in which the ontology of the Church has been described. These marks continue to be foundational in the study of ecclesiology, even as time and context affect the particular ways the terms are defined.

The ecclesiology of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is informed by the traditional Four Marks but also by its own, yet related, marks – liberty, unity, mission and restoration. The question of ontology and mission has inspired Disciples throughout its history to reimagine the way in which it describes the nature and mission of the Church. The Body of Christ has consistently been the prominent image in Disciples ecclesiology. The interplay among these concepts undergirds the Disciples’ vision, mission, and identity as it lives into God’s emerging future.

Finally, an ecclesiology that embraces change is one that relies on the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The changing religious landscape of the twenty-first century invites all congregations and manifestations of the Church to reconsider their ecclesiological commitments and discern their evolving mission in light of the enlivening and disruptive presence of the Spirit. In this season of seismic change in the culture around the Church, the Church must listen even more intently to the leading of the Spirit. The Spirit that gave

birth to the Church in the first century still unites it in a common identity and purpose, and leads the Church in fulfilling God's mission.

The next chapter describes the methodology of this study. Because this study is concerned with the embodiment of ecclesiology in Disciples congregations and the real experiences of those congregations in shared life and mission, a grounded theory study was an appropriate choice. Chapter 3 describes the methodology used for the study, the study itself, and the demographics of the participants. The data collected using the described methodology will be described and analyzed in chapter 4.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

This chapter reviews the methodology used to explore (1) current understandings of the nature and mission of the Church held by Disciples congregations in the Northwest region and (2) the connection those understandings have with the ability to engage in adaptive change in the congregation. Because this study sought to create a theory based on the expert opinion of a targeted group, grounded theory was the design chosen for the research. Methodologies used in this study included a Delphi process, theoretical sampling, and an audience review of findings.

#### **Research Methods and Design**

##### Grounded Theory

The methodology for this study was determined by its driving question: what is the relationship between a congregation's ecclesiology and its ability to engage in adaptive change? The changes the Church is facing merit an examination on the ground in the congregation as it navigates change. Grounded theory, a research methodology, focuses on process and change over time and can be a tool for understanding how reality is socially constructed. "Grounded Theory studies emerge from wrestling with data, making comparisons, developing categories, engaging in theoretical sampling, and integrating analysis" (Charmaz 2005, 510). As qualitative research experts Richards and Morse (2002, 56) explain, "The explicit goal of Grounded Theory studies is to develop theory—theory derived from, and grounded in, the data." Those theories are typically

small-scale and well-focused. Grounded theory studies are also often rooted in experiences in which a change is expected.

Grounded theory, as a research method, enables the researcher to “generate a theory that explains a process, an action, or an interaction” (Cresswell 2016, 263). The researcher is engaged with the real world and looks for emerging patterns in data from which a theory can be developed. “Grounded theorists portray their understandings of research participants’ actions and meanings, offer abstract interpretations of empirical relationships, and create conditional statements about the implications of the analyses” (Charmaz 2005, 508). The analysis is an ongoing interplay between researcher and data, and provides the scaffolding for the theory. Grounded theory methodology is a suitable framework for a constructive theology that links ecclesiology and the adaptive changes happening in congregations today.

Particularly important to this study is the constructivist approach to grounded theory research, which emphasizes the phenomenon to be studied rather than the methods of studying it (Charmaz 2005, 509). The researcher does not approach the topic with an already established theory. Rather, this approach gives “close attention to empirical realities and our collected renderings of them—and locating oneself in these realities” (Charmaz 2005, 509). It acknowledges (1) that what the researcher sees and hears depends upon his or her interpretive frame and (2) that what a researcher knows shapes what he or she finds. The researcher of this study has experience in congregational theology and adaptive change, and this helped to give shape to the framework as it developed. This approach also lends itself well to theoretical sampling, in which the



researcher must be flexible and reflect closely on the data, to discern the theory as it emerges and solicit additional data as needed.

Grounded theory is rooted in the sociological theory of symbolic interactionism, which can be used as an inquiry framework (Patton 2015, 133). Developed in the twentieth-century by George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer, this theory suggests that individual development is a social process, and that people change as a result of interacting with objects, events, ideas, and other people. Individuals also assign meaning as a way of determining how to act (Patton 2015, 133). Congregations are social entities. Ecclesiology is developed within the congregation and is often expressed with symbols and images, as noted in chapter 2. An individual's conception of the Church's nature and mission can change over time through interaction with others (in particular contexts) by exposing them to new symbols or images. For example, "family" can be a popular metaphor for the congregation, or "family of God" for the Church, but as one grows older, and perhaps experiences brokenness or abuse in his or her family, this metaphor may become too limiting, and need be replaced with another image, like "community." This aspect of grounded theory also makes it a suitable research method for this study.

Finally, symbolic interactionism is concerned with emerging understandings of symbols that give meaning to people's interpersonal and communal interactions (Patton 2015, 133). Within the congregation, individuals interact with tradition, each other's ideas and theologies, and with the world outside the Church as they discern what the

Church is to be and do. As Patton (2015, 134) suggests, "...the study of the original meaning and influence of symbols and shared meanings can shed light on what is most important to people, what will be most resistant to change, and what will be most necessary to change if the...organization is to move in new directions."

### Delphi Process

Within the grounded theory methodology, the Delphi method is a data collection technique used to survey a group of experts through an iterative, multi-stage process in order to arrive at a convergence of opinion. The Delphi technique offers a flexible and adaptable tool, with which to gather and analyze data through a variety of methodologies.

The Delphi process is named after the Oracle of Delphi of Greek mythology. Olaf Helmer (1967, 4), developer of the method, explains in a paper prepared by the RAND Corporation, that, as the name implies, the Delphi method is future-oriented. As Chia-Chien Hsu and Brian Sandford (2007, 1) suggest, "The Delphi Method is well suited as a method for consensus-building by using a series of questionnaires delivered using multiple iterations to collect data from a panel of selected subjects."

In addition, Delphi was an appropriate choice for this study because of the anonymity it provides to respondents. Studying the congregation means studying a "human community filled with people whose lives must be treated with respect" (Ammerman et al. 1998, 9). This format allows the researcher to maintain confidentiality, thereby protecting the individual(s) in community and limiting any negative impact on the life of the congregation. This anonymity also affords the researcher an unobstructed view of the data upon which to reflect.

The Delphi process is also easily conducted at a large geographical distance, aided by the use of electronic communication and exchange of information via email and online surveys. Because this study solicited participation from an entire region that covered hundreds of miles, the use of electronic communication was essential. And, because face-to-face interaction was not necessary for the Delphi process, respondents had flexibility to think deeply about their responses and the freedom to respond at their own pace. Since participants did not need to meet in a group, there was a very low possibility that their answers would be influenced by other participants. This allowed the researcher to control the feedback process and create a well-organized summary of each iteration for subjects to consider.

The Delphi process requires prompts or questions to the participating field of experts, consisting of at least two rounds, and sometimes three or four. The first round is typically a series of open-ended questions. A second round presents anonymized responses and themes for commentary and reactions, which may reflect agreement or disagreement with responses from the first round. The goal is to arrive at some level of consensus. Respondents are given the opportunity to affirm or modify their responses as they interact with the anonymized input of their fellow participants.

### **Subject Selection and Sample**

This study was particularly interested in discovering the connection between ecclesiology and adaptive change in Disciples congregations in the Northwest region. Therefore, participant selection was limited to appointed congregational leaders in the Northwest region, which includes congregations in Alaska and Washington State.

Subjects were selected using a simple criterion: those who, at the time, were serving their Disciples congregation as an elder, a member of the board of trustees, or the designated, settled, or interim pastor of the congregation. Disciples polity identifies people in these categories as the primary leaders in the congregation. Letters of invitation were sent to each congregational pastor in the Northwest region and a participant list was generated from positive responses. Participating pastors were asked to find four current congregational leaders to participate, and contact information was gathered for them as well.

It was most desirable that each participating congregation put forth at least one person serving as the pastor, one elder, and one board member to participate in the study, to achieve the fullest picture possible of each congregation. These are considered the experts necessary to meet the criteria of the Delphi study because they are all affirmed and installed in leadership positions by their congregations. These experts are also stakeholders directly engaged in the processes of meeting adaptive challenges in their congregations. Corbin and Strauss (1998) recommend a minimum of ten interviews to build a grounded theory. A total sample of five congregations, with a minimum of four leaders responding, was the initial goal.

Actual participation exceeded the initial goal in total numbers, so that ten congregations are represented in the study. Ten clergy representing nine congregations participated, as well as 21 lay persons from nine congregations. Two congregations were represented only by the pastor(s), one congregation was represented by two lay people and no clergy, and other congregations had one clergy person and between one and four

lay persons actively participate. In all, approximately 25 percent of congregations in the Northwest Regional Christian Church participated in the study on some level.

Table 1 shows the breakdown per congregation of the participants in the Delphi survey process. Congregations are identified by regional areas (NW is Northwest, SW is Southwest, CENT is Central, and EAST is East area). Congregations were assigned a random number and individuals were given an additional identifying number. Clergy persons are always designated as person 1, lay persons 2-5. For example, “NW1.1” represents the pastor of Northwest area congregation 1. “NW1.2” is a lay leader in Northwest area congregation 1.

**Table 1. Study Participants**

Identity code	Clergy	Lay	General demographic data
CENT1	1	2	was collected in survey 1
CENT2	1	2	
EAST1	1	0	(appendix F), and is
SW 1	1	4	presented in figures 1, 2
SW2	1	3	
NW1	1	1	and 3. Appendix I contains
NW2	1	4	
NW3	2	0	a complete list of each
NW4	0	2	survey participant and their
NW5	1	4	

demographic data. Demographic data of note includes that (1) most participants have been involved in Disciples congregations for more than 15 years; (2) only one person identified as belonging to the Millennial generation and no respondents represented Generation Z; and (3) women’s participation was twice that of men. The implications of these data will be explored in chapters 4 and 5.

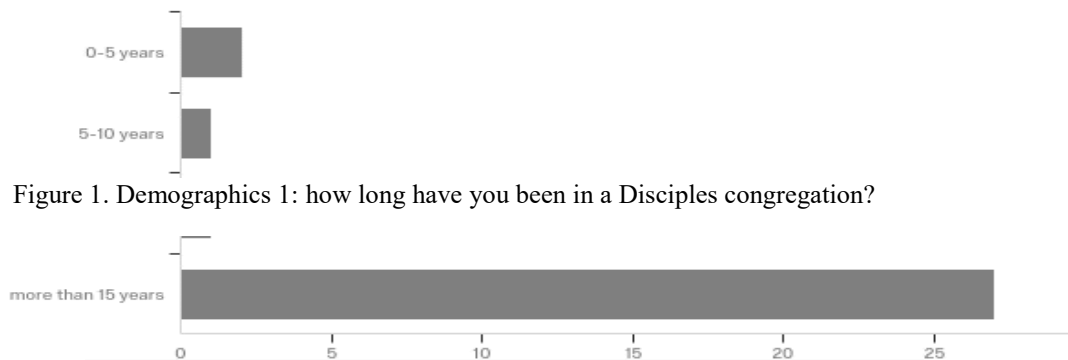


Figure 1. Demographics 1: how long have you been in a Disciples congregation?

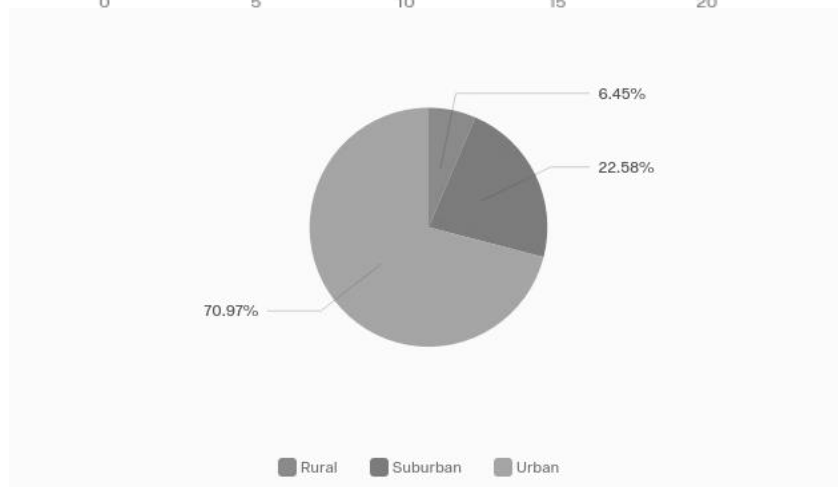


Figure 2. Demographics 2: which best describes your congregation's location: rural, suburban or urban?

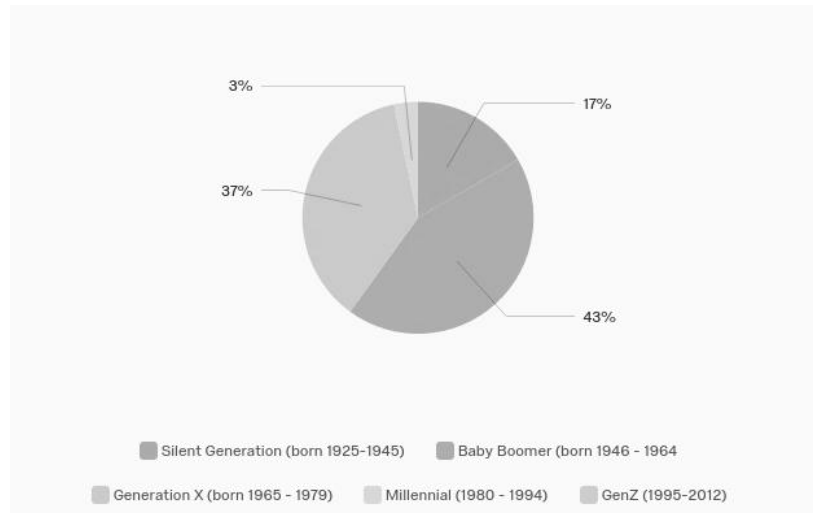


Figure 3: Demographics 3: to which generation do you belong?

### Survey Process and Data Analysis

The fundamental questions in this research study had to do with the future of the Church and what will enable congregations to live into the emerging future. One key to adaptive change is addressing cultural changes in the congregation. At the heart of congregational culture is ecclesiology: what does it mean to be Church? And, what is the Church to do?

After ascertaining initial demographic information, the first round of the Delphi process consisted of an open-ended questionnaire. As Hsu and Sandford (2007, 2) suggest, “The open-ended questionnaire serves as the cornerstone for soliciting specific information about a content area from the Delphi subjects.” These questions were refined through feedback collected from the researcher’s congregation prior to approval by

Seattle University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The inquiries for the first round included:

- 1) What is the Church?
- 2) What is the mission of the Church?
- 3) Describe where you see your church in five years.

Johnny Saldaña (2016, 55) suggests six coding methods for use in grounded theory methodology: *in vivo*, *initial*, *focused*, *axial*, *process*, and *theoretical coding*. *In vivo*, *initial*, and *focused* coding processes (defined in the glossary) were selected for use in questions 1 and 2. After deep reflection on the data, responses were filtered into a series of thematic statements based on the language used by the respondents. A Likert scale was developed featuring these statements for both questions. Question 3 was coded using *in vivo*, *initial* and *process* coding because this question in particular was future-oriented and contained action-oriented language including gerunds. A Likert scale was developed, which included the predominant themes from question 3 responses.

Survey 2 (appendix G) sought consensus on the ecclesiological statements from the first round. The Likert scales developed from first-round questions 1 and 2, regarding the nature and mission of the Church, sought a level of agreement with each ecclesiological theme. Additionally, respondents were asked to define, in their own words, the four traditional Marks of the Church as a means of comparison between historical ecclesiological ontology and a uniquely Disciples ecclesiological ontology.

Survey 3 (appendix H) sought a final consensus on ecclesiological understandings and on adaptive change, as it is experienced in the congregations themselves. Consensus



on the need for change was confirmed. A Likert scale based on question 3 of survey 1 was developed listing nine kinds of change congregations envision in five years. Respondents were asked to rank the nine possible changes in order of priority for ensuring sustainability in their own congregations. Although consensus was sought, it was not expected, because change strategies are specific to the congregation and its context.

This study sought to identify the relationship between a congregation's ecclesiology and its ability to meet adaptive challenges, engage in adaptive process, and navigate adaptive change. The data received from survey 1, question 3 (describe where you see your church in five years), and its accompanying Likert scale, failed to yield responses addressing congregations' attitudes toward change or their ability to navigate change. For that reason, additional information was sought.

Theoretical sampling, another tool in the grounded theory methodology (Patton 2015, 111) was used to collect information regarding each congregation's "attitude for change" and "clarity about purpose" (Vandergrift and Morse n.d.). Participants were asked to rank their congregation's current status regarding these items using continuum scales (appendix I) developed by Jean Vandergrift and Rick Morse at Hope Partnership, a General Church Unit of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) whose work focuses on congregational vitality and change. These continuums were chosen for this study because they are in regular use within Disciples congregations as benchmarks of missional and transformational capacity.

Finally, participants were invited to describe a change process that had occurred recently or was occurring at the time of the survey. The purpose of this additional inquiry was the desire to build a grounded theory based on what is actually happening in these congregations, in addition to their aspirations about what might happen in five years. The link between hope and action is essential. Congregations may have hope for the future and aspirations for their communities, but connecting those aspirations to the actions necessary to achieve them is where many congregations stall in the adaptive process.

### **Survey Protocols, Safeguards, and Administration**

The surveys were created and hosted online using the Qualtrics survey platform made available to Seattle University students. For each survey, participants received an email providing information and a unique link to the survey that tracked progress and also allowed participants to pause and return to the survey or send reminders to participants via email to complete surveys. To enable coding, answers were transferred to Microsoft Excel files and kept in a password-protected folder on a password-protected cloud drive.

On November 6, 2018, participants received the first round of questions. To access the questions, participants had to click an “I Consent” button after reviewing the consent form (appendix C). The form explained:

- purpose of the study
- risks and benefits
- anonymity and confidentiality protections
- participant rights

The consent form also explained that their participation in the study was completely voluntary and that they could cease participation at any time. Participants received two weeks to complete each survey.

Survey 1 was sent via Qualtrics to 40 recipients on November 6, 2018. Of those who initially agreed, 31 respondents completed the survey. The second survey was sent via Qualtrics to 31 participants on November 16, 2018, and all participants responded. The final survey was sent on December 3, 2018 to 31 participants. Two participants did not complete the survey in the time allotted. In total, 29 responses were completed.

### **Audience Review of Findings**

Triangulation, collecting data from multiple sources, is used to test for consistency (Patton 2015, 661). Data triangulation is necessary because no single method adequately solves the problem of rival explanations. Each method reveals different aspects of the data and the researcher's reflection on that data. While data triangulation methods do not yield a single picture, they can help the researcher understand when and why differences appear. To fulfill the need for data triangulation, an audience review of findings was conducted: it is a process of "reflexive triangulation," in which "audience reactions constitute additional data" (Patton 2015, 670).

The Northwest Regional Christian Church's Commission on Ministry (COM), a group of active and retired clergy and lay people directly involved in the life of the region's congregations and development of future leaders, served as a focus group to reflect on the findings. This group, which is drawn from all areas of the region, with representation from urban and rural locales and a variety of congregational contexts,

reflected on the congregational survey results. The COM has established group processes, including confidentiality, and has built trust to ensure a richness in focus group participation and results. Members of the COM are voted into office by the Northwest Regional Christian Church at its biennial Regional Assembly. For this reason, members are considered experts. Those experts focused deliberations of the data on the unique challenges facing Disciples congregations in our region, and the applicability of the grounded theory developed from the data. They were invited to discuss surprises they found in the data or findings, note places of agreement and disagreement with the researcher, suggest ideas for further research, and reflect on implications of the findings on the future of the congregations in the Northwest Regional Christian Church.

It should be stated that at the time of the audience review, the researcher was chair of the COM. Permission to engage in the focus group process was given by the group prior to the researcher being elected to this position. The chair holds no power over commission members; he or she is elected by the Regional Minister and voted into office by the Northwest Region at its Regional Assembly. The chair does, however, work closely with the Regional Minister to organize quarterly meetings. The chair has limited influence in establishing the agenda for those meetings and in the ordination, commissioning, and standing of clergy persons in the region.

A letter of invitation (appendix D) was sent via email to all members of the COM, as was as a consent form (appendix E) similar to the participants' Consent to Participate form. On March 16, 2019, the researcher moderated the discussion of the data at the COM meeting. The conversation was recorded and a summary of the discussion was

created. This summary was sent back to participants two days later, on March 18. To ensure its accuracy, participants were asked to review the summary and respond with an affirmation of accuracy or offer amendments. The discussion was then coded using in vivo and initial coding. Outcomes of the audience review can be found in chapters 4 and 5.

### **Data Storage**

All data was initially stored in the researcher's Seattle University Qualtrics account. Data was cut and pasted into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for coding and for information sharing with the audience review participants. All Excel documents were kept in a password-protected file in a password-protected cloud account. All identifying information about participants was redacted from the printouts made available to the audience review participants. Following study completion, all Excel documents and printouts were destroyed. An audio recording of the audience review of findings was kept in a password-protected file in a password-protected cloud account and was permanently deleted upon the study's completion. All data is stored on a password-protected Google drive to which only the Principal Investigator (PI) has the password. An additional password was created specifically for access to the data to facilitate a two-step authentication process. Prior to being stored on the Google drive, data was encrypted using Microsoft BitLocker software.

### **Summary**

This chapter outlined the methodology and data collection practices used in the study. Grounded theory provided the best methodology for the research project; it

consisted of a Delphi study, theoretical sampling, and an audience review of the findings. The Delphi approach provided a methodology suited to a survey of experts in the field from a large geographical area. The Delphi study offers a flexible framework, allows for focus on the participants, rather than the researcher, and lets a picture emerge from the field. Theoretical sampling was used to fill in the gaps to create the most thorough grounded theory possible.

The execution of the Delphi process itself made as much room as possible for the participants to dictate the direction of consensus building. Throughout the process, care was taken to ensure anonymity. Additionally, the study was designed to be easily replicated by other researchers interested in answering similar questions in their own ministry context. The next chapter presents the study findings.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

#### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the data findings collected in the Delphi process for this study that took place over the course of two months (November and December, 2018) and in the audience review of findings, conducted in March 2019. Findings are laid out in a three-part format. First, the findings related to ecclesiology and the consensuses reached on the theological matters are presented together to establish one lens for considering the data. Presented next are the findings related to adaptive change in the congregation, as described by the participants, and the implications regarding the nature of change in the congregation. The ecclesiological and adaptive change findings are then used in concert to further fine tune the grounded theory presented in finding 4. Three individual congregations were examined in detail to create a grounded theory about the link between ecclesiological convictions and a congregation's ability to engage in adaptive change processes. Finally, the results of the audience review of findings are presented.

#### **Ecclesiological Findings**

Consensus was sought in regard to ecclesiology on three levels: consensus across the Northwest Regional Christian Church, consensus with the traditional Four Marks of the Church, and consensus within each congregation. Survey 1 (appendix F) questions pertaining to ecclesiology were intentionally open-ended and received a variety of answers. The first question focused on the nature of the Church and the second question on the mission of the Church. Using in vivo, initial, and focused coding, themes were

synthesized and developed into generalized statements. The themes, number of nominations for each, and a sampling of in vivo statements for survey 1, question 7 (what is the Church?) can be found in table 2.

**Table 2. Emergent themes from survey 1, question 7: what is the Church?**

Theme	Nominations	Verbatim in vivo data (representative sampling)
The Body of Christ	6	Body of Christ; mystical connection with all Jesus followers; collective body of believers around the globe
A community formed around Jesus Christ and his mission	10	a community of people who've accepted Jesus; manifestation of the ongoing work of Jesus; representative of Jesus mission; we who decided to follow Jesus; where we live out the call of Christ; respond to Christ's great commission
The People of God	6	people following God's way; God's people; God's people working for God's priorities
A community of faith	4	community of faith; gathered and called community; live out our faith in community
A spiritual community	4	Spiritual community; mystical connection; united in the spirit
A movement for wholeness	2	movement for wholeness

Table 2 lists the themes in the order they were listed in the Likert scale for survey 2 (appendix G). Participants were asked to rate how strongly they agreed or disagreed that each statement defined the nature of the Church. Those themes and the responses to them can be found in table 3, listed in order based on mean. The standard deviation would suggest a slightly different ordering.



**Table 3. Likert scale responses regarding the nature of the Church.**

Definition of Church	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean	Standard deviation
Community formed around Jesus Christ and his mission	22	8	0	0	1	4.61	.79
Community of Faith	14	16	1	0	0	4.42	.55
Body of Christ	17	11	1	0	2	4.32	1.03
Spiritual Community	13	15	2	1	0	4.29	.73
Movement for Wholeness	13	15	6	0	0	4.29	.77
People of God	11	13	5	0	2	4.00	1.05

The same process was used for survey 1, question 8: what is the mission of the Church? The themes, number of nominations for each, and a sampling of in vivo statements for the question appear in table 4.

**Table 4. Emergent themes from survey 1, question 8: what is the mission of the Church?**

Theme	Nominations	Verbatim data (sample representation)
Follow the example and teaching of Jesus, continue his mission	17	follow Christ's example; be and share the Good news of Jesus Christ; message of Jesus; continue Jesus ministry"
Gather for worship and formation/study/practice	25	pray, listen and study; worship, learning, nurture; worship; serious study; walk with each other; strengthen our spiritual lives
Serve the community/world	21	be the good news; change the world with acts of love; ministering to the needy; serve and love our neighbors
Welcome/affirm/include all people	14	welcoming; inclusive and affirming of all people; full participation of all as equal members
Share our faith/bring others to Christ	14	bring people into relationship with God; sharing our faith; bringing others to Christ; share God's love with all
Work for social justice/engage in social action	5	action in the world; justice; Liberating as Christ liberated; a movement for healing in a fragmented world
Live out God's mission	8	reveal and reflect God's love; live out the principles of God; engage in God's mission; provide God's way; act as the hands and feet of God; be the good news of God's grace
Be wise and generous stewards	5	stewardship; giving to Food Lifeline and Backpack ministries; provide a place; give generously; living a life of service and giving

Again, table 4 lists the themes as they were listed in the Likert scale for survey 2. Participants were asked to rate how strongly they agreed or disagreed that each statement defined the Church’s mission. Those themes and the responses received can be found in table 5, listed in order based on mean and standard deviation, which are congruent.

**Table 5. Likert scale responses regarding the mission of the Church.**

Definition for the mission of the Church	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean	Standard deviation
Follow the example/teaching of Jesus, continue his mission	28	3	0	0	0	4.90	0.30
Welcome/affirm/include all people	27	4	0	0	0	4.87	0.34
Serve the community/world	24	7	0	0	0	4.77	0.42
Work for social justice/engage in social action	21	8	1	1	0	4.61	0.50
Live out God’s mission	20	10	1	0	0	4.58	0.54
Be wise and generous stewards	14	17	0	0	0	4.45	0.55
Gather for worship and formation/study/practice	12	18	1	0	0	4.35	0.56
Share our faith/bring others to Christ	4	21	6	0	0	3.94	.071

Because the Four Marks of the Church are so essential to ecclesiology historically and serve as an ontological cornerstone according to the Vincentian Canon, “believed everywhere, always and by all” (Commonitory of Vincent of Lérins AD 434), the second

survey invited participants to consider the traditional Four Marks of the Church and define them in their own words. This was a theoretical sampling question that sought to answer whether these ontological concepts that describe the Church have purchase in Disciples congregations in the Northwest Regional Christian Church.

In vivo, initial, and focused coding were used to analyze the responses. Agreement with the responses to the first open-ended questions was sought. Consensus was reached on only two of the Four Marks (catholic and apostolic) in the responses to the survey 2 questions. Two dominant themes, illustrated in table 6, emerged immediately for both marks, with many respondents suggesting both themes in their answers.

**Table 6. Emergent themes for definitions of *catholic* and *apostolic*.**

Mark	Theme	Nominations
Catholic	Universal body	18
	Inclusive of all	13
Apostolic	Tradition received from Jesus and apostles	19
	Ongoing mission	17

The remaining two marks (one and holy) needed further consensus building; however, a few common themes emerged from survey 2. A Likert scale was devised for them and presented in survey 3. The themes and number of nominations for each can be found in table 7.

**Table 7. Emergent themes for definitions of *one* and *holy*.**

Mark	Theme	Nominations
One	Body of Christ	12
	Unity in diversity	6
	One family of God	5
	Unified mission that transcends denomination	4
Holy	Sacred way of living and being	20
	Church has a special relationship with God	4
	Set apart, chosen for a unique mission	3

### **Finding 1**

Most congregational leaders who participated in the study hold similar beliefs about the nature and mission of the Church. These also reflect the historical themes of Disciples ecclesiology. Combined with responses regarding the Four Marks of the Church (tables 6 and 7), an ecclesiology that enables adaptive change emerged.

The researcher took those thematic definitions and created the following statement of ecclesiology (statement 1 below). This statement is based on the responses to the open-ended questions from the first round and the consensus established in the Likert scales of the second round. One can see within this definition both ontological and missiological concepts, as well as congruence with the historical Disciples ecclesiology as described in chapter 2.

Statement 1: The Church is a spiritual community of faith, gathered in the name of Jesus Christ to continue his mission. The Church follows Jesus' teachings by affirming and including all people. This movement for wholeness serves the community and the

world and works for social justice by engaging in social action. The Body of Christ gathers for worship and formation, generously and wisely stewards its gifts, and shares the good news with others.

A second ecclesiological statement was developed by the researcher based on the definitions of the Four Marks of the Church from the first round of questions and the Likert scales of the third round.

Statement 2: The Church is the Body of Christ, unified in its diversity and universal and inclusive of all. The Church embodies a sacred way of living and being, inherited from Jesus Christ and the Apostles. It continues Christ's mission to the world.

One can see the similarities between the two statements: the Body of Christ is the predominant image in both and inclusion is very important to the way the congregations understand their being and mission. Jesus Christ and his mission are central to the life of these congregations, and they espouse a firm commitment to serving their communities, particularly those in need, as part of a sacred way of living and being.

## **Finding 2**

These combined statements of ecclesiology, reflective of the data, describe an ecclesiological ontology that could serve as a foundation for adaptive change.

First and foremost, a Disciples ecclesiology is one in which ontology and missiology are inseparable. Congregations cannot describe what it means to be Church apart from the mission they have inherited from Christ and the Apostles. Mission is accomplished in part through a sacred way of living and being—a holiness not derived from individual piety, but from communal action.

Inclusion and affirmation of all people is at the core of Disciples identity. This is part of the quest for unity and reflective of many participants' understanding of oneness and catholicity. The Body of Christ image reinforces this disposition within the congregation in that all are gifted and needed for community. This inclusion sometimes extends outside of the congregation to include other Christians, other religious faiths, and non-religious organizations. Openness to difference, recognition of interdependence, and the ability to embrace others is necessary to a congregation that seeks to navigate adaptive change. Inclusion is embodied weekly at the open table of communion and is a core element of Disciples' congregational culture.

Ecclesiology was described by all congregations without reference to structure. This was surprising but affirms a Disciples resistance ontology. Disciples have always resisted the imposition of institutional structure, preferring to be identified as a brotherhood (relationship-oriented) or a movement (decentralized), rather than a denomination. When Disciples did become a denomination, it was primarily done to more effectively accomplish the mission. The data in this study reveal a strong affiliation with relational expressions of ecclesiology, in the Body of Christ and People of God images, rather than structural concerns. Embracing and embodying this relational ecclesiology allows congregations to make adaptive changes with an emphasis on mission and relationship, without being overly concerned about structure and institution. It also pushes them to look beyond structural frameworks as one-size-fits-all solutions to their adaptive challenges.

## Adaptive Change Findings

Survey 1 included the question “where do you see your congregation in five years?” The tremendous variety of responses warranted extensive coding and deep reflection to extract the nine dominant themes shown in table 8.

**Table 8. Emergent themes from survey 1, question 9: where do you see your congregation in five years?**

Theme	Nominations	Verbatim data (sample representation)
Increase membership/reach new people	6	do not anticipate new members; I see our church growing; thriving with people and activity; reach a whole new group of people
Down-size property/facility	4	whatever physical structure stands here; May not be in our current building; we will dwindle down...can't support our building; closing the church...become a mission site
Expand our embrace of diversity	4	changing demographics; church building welcoming to all; expanding our diversity
Become a spiritual “hub” for our community	8	using our building for community events; reach out and serve neighbors; a place for community events, concerts; some type of interfaith worship center; create a community hub in times of crisis
Grow our community outreach/social action	15	meet the needs of less fortunate; contribute to the community around us; working for justice; devotion to justice issues; serving others in a different way”
Build more community relationships	7	use our facility to be a community partner; bigger presence in our community; vital member of our community; work at being more visible in community; people don't know who we are
Clarify our purpose and mission	2	change our process and be a vibrant church; move away from Golden-Rule Christianity; our structure will be changing
Embrace innovative worship elements	3	a place where worship is welcoming to all' updates in worship music and format
Develop new/younger leaders	3	fewer positions of authority held by older white men and increasing inclusion; more opportunities for younger members



The nine themes represented in table 8 emerged from in vivo, initial, and process coding techniques. They were then applied as Likert scale statements for participants to rank in response to the question “what does your congregation need to do to be sustainable in the next five years?” The statements were assembled in random order to mitigate any influence over responses. Table 9 illustrates the number of participants who ranked each theme as most important (first and second), and least important (ninth).

**Table 9. Likert scale responses to survey 3, question 1: what does your church need to do to be sustainable in five years?**

Theme	Ranked #1	Ranked #2	Ranked #9	Mean	Standard deviation
Become a spiritual “hub” for our community	8	2	0	3.52	2.18
Increase membership/ reach new people	7	2	0	4.17	2.46
Clarify our purpose and mission	5	2	1	5.03	2.61
Develop new/younger leaders	4	5	1	4.31	2.34
Build more community relationship	2	7	0	3.86	1.80
Expand our embrace of diversity	2	1	3	5.28	2.12
Grow our community outreach/social justice efforts	1	6	1	4.72	2.39
Embrace innovative worship elements	0	3	2	5.90	2.04
Down-size our property/facility	0	2	23	8.21	1.83

A complete table of responses to the question from table 8 (where do you see your congregation in five years?) can be found in appendix J. Complete Likert scale rankings related to table 9 appear in appendix M. Mean and standard deviation were calculated based on complete responses.

Although consensus was not reached for any individual theme based on standard deviation, points of significant agreement exist. First, most congregational leaders (80 percent) in the Northwest Region who participated in the survey do not consider downsizing their property to be essential for their sustainability in the next five years. This number was significantly higher than the researcher expected. Congregations also do not consider changes to worship style or format to be a high priority for their sustainability. This is a significant shift away from the worship wars that preoccupied many congregations in recent years.

Second, it appears that “becoming a spiritual hub for the community” is something several congregations are considering in the next five years, ranking it slightly higher than “increasing membership.” This was a surprise to the researcher and will also be addressed below in the audience review of findings. “Spiritual hub” is an ambiguous phrase and was interpreted uniquely by everyone who mentioned it in their response. It could mean, as one respondent suggested, using the “facility to become a community partner” (CENT2.1). It could also mean “creating a community hub in times of crisis” (NW2.3) or becoming “some type of interfaith worship center” (NW3.2). Another congregation envisions becoming a “neighborhood hub” for the “spiritually curious” and those looking for “community connections” (NW5.1). It is not surprising that these

congregations do not consider downsizing their property an essential part of their sustainability, because being a neighborhood or spiritual hub implies the necessity of a physical location. This also reflects the ontological characteristics of inclusion, unity, and resistance to the prevailing culture.

### **Finding 3**

All congregations in the study anticipate some kind of significant change in their congregations in the next five years. The change they anticipate is highly contextual.

This finding is consistent with adaptive change theory. In the adaptive change process the challenge might not be particularly unique, but the solution will always be unique because the people within the system must solve the problem and the change must be rooted in the specificity of the system. A congregation cannot simply take an existing framework, lay it over their challenge, and expect an adaptive change to occur. In their work on adaptive action and self-organizing systems, Glenda Eoyang and Royce Holladay (2013, 56) write, “No two situations are the same, so reactions to change will be most effective when they are adapted to fit each immediate situation.” That means that each of the congregations that identified becoming a spiritual hub as a possibility in the future will embody that in unique ways related to the unique characteristics of the congregation and its context. The freedom to address change at the congregational level in dynamic interdependence with a congregation’s context will be explored in chapter 5 through a reimagining of the Body of Christ image.

One of the questions this study seeks to answer is the relationship between a congregation’s ecclesiology and its ability to meet adaptive challenges, engage in

adaptive processes, and navigate adaptive change. The data received from survey 1, question 9 (where do you see your congregation in five years?) and the accompanying Likert scale in survey 3, did not yield responses addressing a congregation's attitude toward change or its ability to navigate change. For that reason, additional information was sought. Theoretical sampling was used to collect information regarding each congregation's attitude for change and clarity about purpose, as well as descriptions of a change process within each congregation that had occurred recently or was occurring at the time of the survey. These questions were asked in survey 3 to build a grounded theory based on what is currently happening in these congregations, in addition to what the respondents envision could or should happen in five years.

Using benchmarks from the measurement tools from Hope Partnership for Missional Transformation (appendix I) as guides, respondents were asked to rank their congregation's attitude for change and clarity about purpose. Responses, found in tables 10 and 11, shed light on how leaders currently assess where their congregations stand in both areas. These benchmarks further illuminate responses to adaptive change questions in the survey.

Most congregations identify themselves in the advanced stages of development in their attitude toward change. That means they are open to change, ready to respond to God's mission for themselves and their community, willing to deeply engage in tough conversations about the future of their congregation, and willing to actively connect with people outside the Church.

**Table 10. Status of congregations regarding attitude toward change (survey 3, question 4).**

Stages of the Transformational Continuum: attitude toward change (verbatim from Vandergrift and Morse n.d., appendix I)	Affirmative Responses
<i>Stage 1:</i> The congregation is reluctant to consider change. It believes that change could lose membership. Success is doing the same thing every year.	2
<i>Stage 2:</i> The congregation is willing to accept incremental change. They will write documents to promote change, but fail to implement first steps. They slow the change through committee's and board action.	6
<i>Stage 3:</i> The congregation is not hostage to pleasing membership, but not certain which direction it should go. They are willing to consider new ideas, however, with some skepticism.	8
<i>Stage 4:</i> The congregation is willing to discuss BOLD change. They are now asking questions of their neighbors about their needs, and employing imagination about ways they might connect. They are seeking competence in employing change.	4
<i>Stage 5:</i> The congregation sees that God is constantly creating the world, and embrace change as connecting to God's mission. They are willing to try new things, and remain flexible.	9

Participants rated their congregation on the “clarity about purpose” continuum (Vandergrift and Morse n.d.) (Appendix I) in a very similar pattern. On this issue, 30 percent of respondents believe their congregations to be in the lowest level of development regarding clarity of purpose, while 70 percent of respondents believe their congregations have a well-developed clarity of purpose, are willing to engage in difficult conversations, are trying to find ways to connect and engage in mission, and are ready to make and enact a plan.

**Table 11: Status of congregations regarding clarity of purpose (survey 3, question 5).**

Stages of the Transformational Continuum: clarity of purpose (verbatim from Vandergrift and Morse n.d., appendix I)	Affirmative responses
<i>Stage 1:</i> The congregation has not reviewed its purpose practically since its inception. Any mission statement is generic, and no attempt is made at contextual relevance. Participants believe the church exists to please them.	3
<i>Stage 2:</i> The congregation surveys members regarding the direction they feel the church should go. Any attempts to modify the vision of the church require connecting to its historic past.	5
<i>Stage 3:</i> The congregation is willing to hire a consultant to help them determine their purpose and will usually dismiss the outcomes of their recommendations. They are energized by recreating the past, and it is evident in any process they try to engage.	1
<i>Stage 4:</i> The congregation is willing to deeply engage in conversations about "why" the church exists. They are willing to discuss specific ways to connect, and deepening commitment to "write something down." They are talking with people outside of the congregational system.	13
<i>Stage 5:</i> The congregation has clarity about God's mission for their community and are fully committed to engaging that mission. Every participant is aware of the congregation's purpose.	7

Finally, in survey 3, participants were invited to think of a particular challenge their congregation had faced recently (in the last five years) or is currently facing.

Description of the challenge was prefaced by a series of questions designed to get participants thinking about adaptive change. The questions required them to respond “yes” or “no” to a series of adaptive change qualities regarding the challenge:

- Was it difficult to identify?
- Did it require changes in values, beliefs, roles, relationships, and approaches to work?
- Did it require the work of solving the problem to be done by the people with the problem?

- Did it require change in numerous places; across organizational boundaries?
- Did people resist acknowledging the problem?
- Did it require experiments and new discoveries to solve?
- Did it take a long time to implement?

Responses to these questions varied widely, and in some instances a respondent checked “yes” to most of the boxes and then described a technical problem rather than an adaptive challenge. In hindsight, while it may not have changed responses, the researcher believes this question should have been asked differently (e.g., including the description of adaptive change in the question) in order to ascertain the degree to which respondents can identify an adaptive challenge.

Descriptions of congregational challenges varied widely, as was anticipated. Some respondents addressed technical problems, including replacing an employee (SW2.2), building maintenance (SW1), and selling a parsonage (NW5.3). Other respondents described, in detail, significant adaptive changes, including becoming “Open and Affirming” (CENT2.1), merging two congregations into one new congregation (NW2.2), and developing new programming to meet the needs of the neighborhood (CENT1.2).

Table 12 pulls together all of the threads of ecclesiology and adaptive change for each congregation that had participants in every survey. This was used to determine the degree to which there is internal consensus in each congregation regarding ecclesiology, vision, and adaptive challenges.

**Table 12. Congregational profiles based on survey responses.**

Congregation identity code	Nature of the Church	Mission of the Church	Five-year vision	Recent challenge
CENT1	Church is the people; representatives of Jesus; Body of Christ; part of a bigger whole	proclaim good news; make disciples; minister to the needy; accept all cultures	develop new leaders; build community relationships; expand our diversity	Church does not reflect community/ community outreach; engaging with neighbors in positive ways
CENT2	people gathered in the name of Jesus Christ; collective body of believers around the globe	follow Jesus; live/share good news; care for others, spiritual formation; reach new people	expand our embrace of diversity	becoming officially open & affirming
EAST1	“Ekklesia;” body of Christ; united in the spirit	reveal/reflect God’s love; include and affirm all people; reach out; teach, learn, pray, worship	build more community relationships	connecting with families, changing realities of family life
SW1	gathering of people of God, body of Christ; follow Jesus and his way; mystical connection with other followers; inclusive	gather at the table; grow, service; continue Jesus’ ministry; serve/help all people, inclusive worship, accepting of all; serve one another & community	clarify our purpose and mission; develop new/young leaders; become a spiritual “hub” for our community	multiple adaptive challenges; water leak/maintenance
SW2	gathered community of faith, sign of the kingdom; movement for wholeness; living justice, kindness, humility; serve neighbors, seeking God’s guidance	share good news of JC, witness, love, serve; grow faith; include all, affirm; share God’s love with all; welcome; represent God in broken world.	become a spiritual hub; clarify our Purpose and mission; develop new/younger leaders	creating day spa/ new ministry to unsheltered neighbors; accountant/ staffing



Congregation identity code	Nature of the Church	Mission of the Church	Five-year vision	Recent challenge
NW1	place where communities connect, grow, serve; live out the call of Christ	follow Christ's example; live faithfully; do justice; include all; value diversity; love God/love neighbor	become a spiritual hub	interpersonal conflict
NW2	people God calls into mission; grow in faith; body of Christ in the world; express God's love; share worship, service; follow God's way	God's mission; reach new people; follow Jesus; service; worship/formation; accept all;	clarify purpose and mission; increase membership/reach new people; become a spiritual hub	leadership grappling with sustainability question; merging two congregations into one; changes in worship style
NW3	institution; local congregation; ongoing work of Jesus	touch lives with justice and love; live out teaching/ministry of Jesus;	grow community outreach/social justice efforts; become a spiritual "hub" for community	open & affirming process – started and stopped twice before finishing; old regime deadlocked with new ideas
NW4	place of refuge; shared beliefs/practices; extended family; God's people, serve community; worship and pray; advocate for peace	provide support and guidance to members; movement for healing; radical welcome, reconciliation, ecumenical, service, formation	increase membership/reach new people	individual power play with bylaws; enhancing definition of elder duties
NW5	Body of Christ; spiritual nurture; place for gathering & learning; the building; people gathered for worship; local faith community; representative of Jesus' mission	share Jesus' message, space for spiritual growth; help those outside the church, build community; nurture fellowship; spiritual growth	become a Spiritual "hub" for our community; increase membership/reach new people; develop new/younger leaders	becoming open and affirming; sell parsonage; budget shortfall/decreased giving; lack of leaders

#### **Finding 4**

The link that emerges between ecclesiology and adaptive change is that the more consensus a congregation has about its nature and mission, the more agreement there is on the adaptive action the congregation needs to take in the future.

This finding can be seen more clearly by focusing in depth on three congregations with substantial participation in the study. Each of these congregations was represented in the study by its lead pastor and three to four lay leaders. They were chosen as representative because of the depth of their responses and the trends they highlight in the data.

#### **Congregation NW2**

Congregation NW2's descriptions of the nature and mission of the Church were quite diverse, but there were a few points of consensus. Four of five respondents defined the nature of the Church as a "spiritual community" and "the community formed around Jesus Christ and his mission." Obviously, a sense of community is important to their identity. All respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the Church is also "a movement for wholeness." All respondents from NW2 agree that the most important mission of the Church is to "welcome, affirm, and include all people"; four out of five respondents strongly agree. Community, relationship, and inclusion seem to be core to their sense of being and mission. There was also solid consensus on three of the Four Marks of the Church, the surprising exception being how they defined *one*.

Participants from congregation NW2 identified several possibilities for their congregation in the next five years. More participants used the word "hope" in their

responses than any other congregation. Participant NW2.1 envisions a place “that is working for justice,” a “place for community events...a place for worship that is welcoming to all...and offers opportunities to learn and grow in faith.” “Helping others” (NW2.3) and “providing services” (NW2.4) in a variety of ways was a common theme among several NW2 respondents. Yet another respondent envisions an active, thriving congregation where members “are directly involved” and “don’t want to miss anything” (NW2.5).

When asked to rank the actions necessary for becoming sustainable, respondents identified “clarify our purpose and mission” as the most important next step (rated first by two respondents and second by one respondent). Increasing membership and reaching new people was rated most important by two respondents. All respondents were in agreement that the least important action they need to take is to downsize their property/facility. Considering this congregation’s significant current challenge sheds light on these responses.

When asked to describe a challenge they have faced and how they are addressing it, a single theme appeared among three of the five respondents: merging two congregations into one. NW2 is the new congregation formed from an existing congregation and the remnant from the church described in chapter 1. The challenge is a big one and there are many aspects to address, both technical and adaptive. One respondent identified changes in worship, which may be related to the merging of congregations, but this was not explicit. Another respondent identified a question raised in a leadership gathering: “whether we would still be around in a few years if we

continued to do everything the same.” This question may have been part of the conversation leading up to the merger, but again, that was not explicit.

The congregational leaders of NW2 recognize there is room to grow in their attitude toward change and their clarity of purpose. All respondents ranked the congregation on the middle to low-end of the scale for attitude toward change. But when asked about the congregation’s clarity of purpose, three of five respondents ranked it on the higher end of the scale, affirming that “the congregation is willing to deeply engage in conversations about ‘why’ the church exists” (Vandergrift and Morse n.d.). Interestingly, both respondents who identified “clarifying purpose and mission” as the most important next step for their congregation, also identified their congregation at stage 4 on the clarity about purpose continuum. This is difficult to reconcile without further inquiry. Clearly, these leaders recognize there is work to be done in continuing to clarify their purpose, which is essential work in synthesizing two congregations into one cohesive and sustainable community.

### **Congregation SW1**

For the leaders of congregation SW1 there is no theme on the nature of the Church with which all participants strongly agree. The “Body of Christ” and the “Community formed around Jesus Christ and his mission” have the strongest level of agreement, with four out of five respondents who strongly agree. Consensus on the mission of the Church was found in responses to “follow the example and teaching of Jesus” and “welcome, affirm and include all people” to which five out of five respondents strongly agree. Regarding the traditional Four Marks of the Church, this

congregation's leaders expressed a wide diversity of responses, only finding consensus on *apostolic* as the "apostles teachings received from Jesus." Generally, this congregation's ecclesiology appears deeply related to its sense of mission. In its limited consensus, the congregation appears only marginally internally aligned.

When asked to describe their congregation in five years an important theme emerged. One respondent envisions a congregation "continuing to struggle" to discern "the greater missional calling God is issuing to the church" (SW1.1). One participant sees a congregation that "will have found some new ways" to be of service (SW1.2). Another sees a congregation "at a crossroads," in need of "increasing our membership" or "dwindling down" to the point of not being able to support its building (SW1.3). Another respondent sees the congregation in "a state of flux," with a choice between continuing to be a "vital member of our community" or "ceasing to exist" (SW1.4). One respondent believes that "our structure will be changing" (SW1.2). One thing is clear, they know they need to change, but do not have a vision for what that could be.

When ranking what the congregation needs to do in the next five years, two items received multiple positive responses: "clarifying our purpose and mission," and "developing new/younger leaders." Somewhat surprisingly, "clarifying purpose" was ranked as least important by one respondent. One wonders how a difference like that impacts the effectiveness of the leadership team. All of the other four respondents rated "downsizing our property/facility" as least important for sustainability.

The congregational leaders of SW1 are inconsistent in their responses to the congregation's attitude toward change and clarity of purpose. They are almost evenly

split on both issues, with half ranking the congregation on the lowest end of the spectrum and half ranking it on the highest end of the spectrum in both categories. This reveals further internal inconsistencies.

When asked to describe a challenge that the congregation has faced or is facing, the lay leaders' responses were in striking contrast to that of the pastor. All four lay leaders describe a technical problem: water damage to the building and subsequent maintenance. Due to deferred maintenance, a leak led to flooding, which led to the closure of a room and significant repairs. This is not too surprising. Heifetz and Linsky (2002, 57) suggest that a group usually strongly prefers a technical problem that is easy to solve, and that allows for a simple, straightforward solution, to one that requires hard work or adaptation on the group's part. This comes into keener focus through the pastor's response.

The Pastor (SW1.1) describes a congregation that struggles to see past "we've always done it this way." In the pastor's opinion, a number of significant adaptive challenges are on the horizon for this congregation, including (1) "moving away from the dysfunctional committee system toward a ...more agile, spontaneous" structure; (2) "becoming socially connected and engaged in community of mission" including partnering with ecumenical, interfaith, and non-faith organizations; (3) moving beyond "worship styles that have been perpetuated with cosmetic changes...in order to allow...leaders to create a church more responsive to their needs...engaging Millennial and Gen-Z people"; and (4) "lack of motivation to address a visible problem by experimenting with other possible ways of being church." The pastor does not mention

the facility repairs, but describes the need for significant change in structure, worship, leadership, and mission.

Congregation SW1 lacks significant consensus about the nature and mission of the Church beyond an accent on mission. Leaders are unclear about the congregation's attitude toward change and clarity of purpose. Most leaders are focused on a technical problem that is facility-focused, while the pastor (SW1.1) is focused on substantially adaptive challenges which, if deferred, may result in the congregation "ceasing to exist." Their ecclesiology is mission-oriented, and one could infer that they consider their facility vital to their ability to do mission. If the leadership of this congregation want to continue to be a presence in its community, clarifying their purpose and developing new and younger leaders would most likely assist them in addressing both their technical problem and the adaptive changes on the horizon.

### **Congregation SW2**

All respondents from this congregation identified the nature of the Church primarily as the "People of God," and a "movement for wholeness," with all four respondents strongly agreeing. "Body of Christ" was not far behind with three out of four strongly agreeing. It is worth noting that all of these responses are relational in nature and decentralized. All four respondents strongly agree that the mission of the Church is "following the example and teaching of Jesus and continuing his mission," "working for justice/engaging in social action," and "living out God's mission." This congregation's respondents were also in nearly absolute agreement in their understanding of the Four Marks of the Church.

These theological commitments are apparent in their vision for their congregation in the next five years. The respondents see the congregation “thriving in a changed culture and landscape” (SW2.1), “connecting all facets of our community into deeper and deeper meaningful relationships” (SW2.4), and “serving the homeless, providing space and hospitality to all” (SW2.5). Relationality permeates most of their responses. The leaders believe the congregation is on the most developed end of the spectrum in both attitude toward change and clarity of purpose.

When asked to rank next steps to being sustainable in five years there was a fair amount of diversity in respondents’ answers. But the themes of their ecclesiology are apparent. Two respondents agree that becoming a spiritual hub for the community is the most important step in sustainability. Developing new/younger leaders was also ranked at the top for two of the respondents. Half of the respondents identified downsizing the facility as the lowest priority. But that was ranked close to last by all respondents.

When asked about a congregational challenge, three of four respondents identified the opening of a “day spa,” or service center, for unsheltered persons in their community. They each described a process of working with the existing congregational structure, presenting a proposal, educating the congregation, as well as surveying their neighbors and seeking community support. An openness to deep conversations in the congregation about mission eventually led to unanimous support for the ministry. This, combined with an influx of new congregational participants who have a passion for serving the unhoused, led to the shelter opening within a few weeks of the proposal. They are already on the way to developing new leaders and becoming a “spiritual hub” in their



neighborhood. Congregation SW2 validates finding 4 of this study in its internal ecclesiological consensus and its ability to successfully engage in adaptive action.

### **Audience Review of Findings**

The findings described in this chapter were presented to the Northwest Regional Christian Church's Commission on Ministry (COM) on March 16, 2019 for an audience review of findings. The audience review was used as a form of data triangulation and an opportunity to affirm or challenge the researcher's findings, and consider the implications of the findings for the Northwest Regional Christian Church. Seven out of nine members of the COM participated in the review and anonymity was guaranteed as part of the consent form. A recording of the audience review was reviewed by the researcher and then summarized. This summary was sent to the participants for affirmation or correction. The audio was deleted after the summary was viewed and affirmed by all the participants. The data was then coded using in vivo coding to establish some themes.

The participants in the audience review raised additional questions, expressed some surprises in the data, and noted ways in which the findings could be used in their work with congregations and congregational leaders. Four important themes emerged within the audience review: (1) demographic questions, (2) identity formation, (3) the connection between a congregation's building and its identity and mission, and (4) the tension between aspirational hopes and reality. These are summarized below and influenced the recommendations presented in chapter 5.

## Demographic Data

The COM took note of several elements of the demographic data. First, they were curious about the significant absence of Millennial and Generation Z participants. They agreed that this reflects the leadership of most of the congregations within the Northwest Regional Christian Church, while also suggesting that it may not be indicative of congregational participation more generally. It does, however, reflect the national trend of declining participation in religious communities among these age groups, documented in recent studies by Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center 2014), the Public Religion Research Institute (Cooper, et al 2016), and the Barna Group (Barna 2017). Many congregational bylaws require Elders and Board of Trustees members to be official members of the congregation. Such requirements may also keep Millennial and Generation Z individuals, who often resist traditional membership, from participating in the formal leadership.

Concern was also raised when considering the long tenure most study participants have had in a Disciples congregation. Eighty-seven percent of respondents identify being in a Disciples congregation for 15 years or more. The audience review participants expressed concern that the voices of those who have been affiliated for a shorter amount of time were not included. In their opinion, the sample majority is a very thin slice of Disciples participation generally. The majority respondent was an urban, female baby boomer who has been a member of a Disciples congregation for 15 years or more. The audience review participants wondered how more diversity in the sample might have

affected the outcome. This is important as congregations consider the best ways to engage their constituents in conversations about ecclesiology and adaptive change.

### Identity Formation

Identity formation was an important theme in the audience review. Members of the COM showed particular concern that formation in Disciples identity did not appear in any of the responses as a priority in mission. They proposed asking congregations for more details about their “formation, study and practice” as a possible next step. COM participants worry that efforts to become a spiritual hub might lead congregations further away from a Disciples identity. One suggested, “Forming themselves as Disciples is not a priority.” Another suggested that “unless they have an understanding of their own identity,” congregations would struggle to differentiate themselves. This is not true for all COM members, as one participant stated that the elders of their congregation had recently initiated a study of Disciples identity. In the researcher’s opinion there is not enough substantive data on this particular topic to make any definitive claim.

### Connection Between Building and Mission

The other identity-related theme grew from an insightful critique of responses to survey 1, question 7: “what is the Church?” A total of eight respondents, rather than defining the Church, listed the name of their congregation as an answer to the question. The researcher assumed this was a misunderstanding of the question. But one member of the audience review wondered if this suggested that when some participants are asked “what is the Church?” the first thing that comes to mind is their local congregation, and given the number of nominations, it should have been included in the Likert scale. This

certainly would be congruent with a Disciples understanding of the congregation as the primary embodiment of Church. They suggested an additional theme for the Likert scale (survey 2, question 1) of “a named place.” This could shed additional light on the relationship congregations have with their place and facility, and should be kept in mind in additional studies.

This discussion of place led the group to consider more deeply the connection between building and mission. One participant suggested, “Buildings have potential for becoming community spaces”; thus, some congregations may view their buildings as means to becoming financially sustainable through rentals or connecting with neighbors who don’t have their own places, rather than being a drain on financial resources. In response to congregation SW1’s data, another suggested, “Maybe this church feels their building is a mission center, and without the building they have no mission.” This may explain the very high percentage of congregations that ranked “downsize facility” as the least important next step, data that initially surprised most participants in the audience review.

One member of the COM was surprised that “family” was not a theme listed in table 2. This individual suggested that her home congregation would also agree with most of the themes listed, but would be more likely to refer to the Church as “a family.” Upon reflection, several other participants agreed that this was surprising. The researcher’s own congregation uses this metaphor often, as well. But the “family” metaphor was not a significant theme, only mentioned in two initial responses, so was not present in the Likert scale.

## Tension Between Aspirations and Reality

Surprise was expressed again in relation to the data in table 9, regarding what churches need to do to be sustainable in five years. One member of the COM who works closely with congregations in the Search and Call process (the process of finding a new pastor, which requires a congregation to create a profile and goals) was surprised that “increasing membership and reaching new people” was not ranked number one by most respondents. In this person’s experience, increasing membership is always one of the five primary goals congregations list on their Search and Call profiles when they are seeking a new minister. This individual had never seen a congregational profile that listed “become a spiritual hub for our community,” or a related theme, as a goal. Another participant, who is a congregational pastor, commented that the “spiritual hub” idea wasn’t mentioned in the congregation’s profile that he received as a candidate; however, it was part of his letter of call in the form of an expectation that his job would include making community connections and increasing participation in congregational events, not necessarily worship.

In further reflection on this issue, the participants suggested that Search and Call committees are primarily concerned with technical problems, rather than thinking about adaptive change. On their official profiles, they may be prioritizing things that have worked in the past or seeking an effective pastor-manager. The COM wondered together how anxiety in the system, as congregations are preparing their profiles, might inhibit them from digging deeply into conversations about what they really need. One participant commented, “We resist and can’t adapt well in anxiety.” Perhaps there are implications

here for how the COM and regional minister work with congregations in Search and Call, and the kind of training the Northwest Regional Christian Church should require of intentional interim ministers who support and guide that process.

Finally, in reflecting on responses regarding openness to change and clarity of purpose, one respondent suggested that the percentage of congregations at the high stages of development “seems too high.” The group reflected together and wondered whether it was related to the status or role of the participants within their congregation. Participants represented the leadership of the congregation and were selected by the pastor. These may be the most highly involved and engaged people in the congregation and they might tend to be more optimistic about the congregation’s future.

The participants in the audience review believe, and the researcher concurs, that survey 1 responses were more aspirational in nature than based in the reality on the ground. One member of the COM stated that in his or her work with congregations, “I see the aspirational, but when I push them on what they’re going to do...they don’t have an answer.” An overly optimistic orientation of the congregational leaders could be detrimental to the change process, especially if they are unable to turn those hopes into reality. This person precisely identified the place in the process in which congregations get stuck, thus validating the importance of the study’s findings to survey participants dealing with real challenges on the ground.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented the findings of the Delphi survey process that was initiated to obtain answers to the questions presented in chapter 1. Survey 1 consisted of

open-ended questions designed to let congregational leaders express their beliefs about the nature and mission of the Church, as well as where they see their congregations in five years. Based on these responses, themes were synthesized based on participant responses and levels of agreement and disagreement were sought.

In surveys 2 and 3, consensus on the themes found in survey 1 were sought using Likert scales. Additional theoretical sampling questions were added to more fully ground the findings and develop the grounded theory. In regard to the issues of ecclesiology, consensus was sought on three levels: (1) consensus among congregations in the Northwest Regional Christian Church; (2) consensus with the traditional Four Marks of the Church as a benchmark of ontology; and (3) consensus within individual congregations. Varying degrees of consensus emerged on these three levels.

Consensus was not established in regard to the future of the congregations and the challenges they face. However, this was expected due to the highly contextual nature of change. A connection between ecclesiology and adaptive change emerged most clearly by examining individual congregational responses to all of the survey questions.

A summary of this project's major findings is as follows:

- Finding 1: Most congregational leaders who participated in the study hold similar beliefs about the nature and mission of the Church, which also reflect the historical themes of Disciples ecclesiology. Combined with responses regarding the Four Marks of the Church, an ecclesiology that enables adaptive change emerged.
- Finding 2: Statements of ecclesiology, reflective of the data, describe an ecclesiological ontology that could serve as a foundation for adaptive change.

- Finding 3: All congregations in the study anticipate some kind of significant change in their congregations in the next five years. The change they anticipate is highly contextual.
- Finding 4: The link that emerges between ecclesiology and adaptive change is that the more consensus a congregation has about its nature and mission, the more agreement there is on the adaptive action the congregation needs to take in the future.

Chapter 5 presents concluding thoughts on the study and recommendations for further research. Recommendations are intended to assist Disciples congregations and their leaders as they attempt to meet the adaptive challenges they face in order to be both faithful to their nature and mission, and sustainable in the years to come. These recommendations synthesize the theological frameworks presented in chapter 2 with the findings in chapter 4 and offer a way forward for congregational leaders.



## CHAPTER 5

### RECCOMENDATIONS AND CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

#### **Introduction**

This study sought to discover the link between ecclesiology and adaptive change in Disciples congregations. To do so, a grounded theory methodology was engaged using Delphi methods, as well as theoretical sampling, to ask participants about their ecclesiological beliefs, the anticipated future of their congregations, and their experience of change within their congregations. The Delphi was designed to determine points of consensus among the participants. The points of consensus and disagreement were viewed through the lens of traditional ecclesiology, as well as a unique Disciples ecclesiology. This closing chapter presents actionable recommendations based on the theological discoveries and findings from the study, as well as some concluding thoughts on the study itself and the potential it holds for future use in other contexts.

The following recommendations are primarily intended for Disciples congregations and their leadership, as well as for regional manifestations of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The recommendations are based on the ontology of the Church described in chapter 2, as well as the findings presented in chapter 4 and are influenced by the reflections of the audience review of findings conducted with the Northwest Region's COM. The recommendations may be helpful for COMs in other Disciples regions and their work with congregations, pastors, and candidates for leadership. It is the hope of the researcher that the study's findings are helpful also for

congregational leaders of non-Disciples ecclesial communities who are facing similar challenges.

## **Recommendations**

### **Recommendation 1**

Congregations should participate in a process that engages the questions of this study, through a tool developed specifically for their use.

In chapter 4, finding 4 revealed that the shared ecclesiology within a congregation affects its ability to engage in adaptive action. Leadership and participants within a congregation necessarily should be talking to one another about their understanding of the nature and mission of the Church and working toward establishing a common ontological understanding. Ideally this would be rooted in a thorough understanding of the Four Marks of the Church (Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed AD 381) and in Disciples ecclesiology. Additionally, they should be discussing and dreaming together about their shared future. Table 11 revealed that only one participating congregation is open to hiring a consultant or following through on a consultant's recommendations. Given the declining resources available to congregations for hiring consultants, a tool that congregations can manage on their own is preferable. To create a useful tool for congregational use, the context and strengths of the particular congregational setting must be considered, as well as those things that make for healthy community change. Finally, the tool must be congruent with a Disciples ontology, as described in chapter 2.

Organizational change expert, Margaret Wheatley (2007), suggests several critical characteristics for determining how to proceed within an organization that desires to be a

healthy community of change. The principles of particular interest in developing a congregational tool based on the questions of this study include the following: (1) people discover meaning, each other, and shared meaning via conversation (Wheatley 2007b); (2) inviting new people into the conversation changes the conversation (Wheatley 2007c); and (3) everyone must feel they've had a voice in creating the change (Wheatley 2007a).

The audience review revealed concern over the limits of participation in the study and a desire for lay persons who are not leaders to be included. Wheatley's principles cited in this text support the value of that inclusion. Conversation can be a powerful tool for communities engaging in change, but the conversation should be well-structured and include as many voices from within the congregation as possible. This approach to community change also embodies the Body of Christ image important to a Disciples ontology. A wide-reaching conversational tool would also draw on the wisdom already present in the organization, rather than the recommendations of a consultant.

In light of these considerations, the researcher recommends the creation of an Appreciative Inquiry tool, based on the questions posed in the study. Developed in the 1980s by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a strengths-based process for facilitating change and is attuned to both adaptive change principles and self-organizing systems theory (described later in this chapter) and is, therefore, congruent with the other recommendations made in this chapter. AI is an organization-wide conversational model for discovering narratives and practices within an organization that are creative and life-giving. It is collaborative, relational, and

participative. AI is, likewise, designed to move an organization beyond problem-solving focused on deficiencies, to a posture of openness, gratitude, and creativity. AI is not a one-time event, but rather it is a “way of continually forming an interpretive community that can...perceive, think, and create with the most life-giving resources” (Branson 2004, 23). By regularly engaging in AI, a congregation can become continually adaptive, forming new habits by focusing on the positive.

One of the foundational beliefs of Appreciative Inquiry is that it is more important for a congregation to become an “interpretive community” (Branson 2004, 23) rather than to focus solely on coming up with solutions to specific problems. Echoing Wheatley’s principles, AI practitioner Mark Lau Branson suggests that conversation is one of the most powerful tools a congregation has at its disposal (Branson 2004, xiii). AI assumes that the interpretive work of discovering and forming meaning is the work of the congregation, an assumption congruent with the characteristics of adaptive change and Disciples ontology.

AI assumes that what the organization focuses on becomes its reality, suggesting that if a congregation is perpetually occupied with solving technical problems it will have little to no capacity for adaptive change. Engaging in the work of adaptive change can sometimes be very inexact, and so AI also assumes that the outcomes of the process should be useful to the organization (Branson 2004, 34), practical, and aspirational.

AI is structured around the 4-D model of appreciative inquiry (Figure 4), developed by David Cooperrider, Diana Whitney, and Jaqueline Stavros (2003): “Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny.”

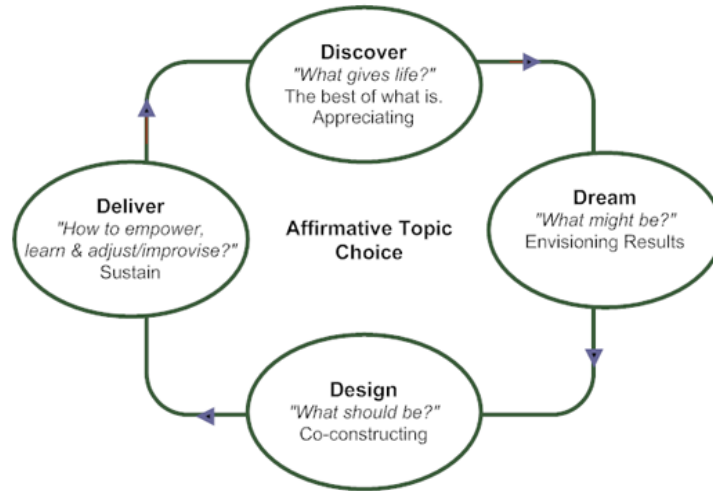


Figure 4: 4-D model of Appreciative Inquiry. Graphic from Appreciative Inquiry Australia, “4-D Cycle,” August 16, 2010, <http://appreciativeinquiry.com.au/forum-2010/background/invitation/4d-cycle/>.

A tool for congregational use on the topics of this study would attend to the first “D.” The process after that would be up to the individual congregation to design and complete. Centered on ecclesiology and adaptive change as the “affirmative topic choice” (Appreciative Inquiry Australia n.d.), those first discovery questions could be:

1. Reflecting on your whole experience with this congregation, remember a time when you felt the Church was truly being the Church? What happened? How did you feel? What did you do?
2. A. What is the Church? Or, What does it mean to be Church?  
B. What is the mission of the Church? Or, What is the Church to do?
3. What are the essential, unique qualities of our Disciples identity?
4. Where do you see our congregation in five years?

These are only possible first-round questions that meet the AI criteria. They would require revision and fine-tuning via testing with congregational leaders. Once the

questions had been determined, the leadership would create a strategy for training those who would lead conversations, as well as a plan for implementing the AI process with the congregation. It would require a team of leaders who understand the process well and are committed to seeing the process through. Again, this may seem counterintuitive to pastors and congregational leaders who feel urgency about technical problems. But time and conversation are essential to developing a “perennially adaptable” (Wilburn 1963a, 242) congregational culture.

### Recommendation 2

Congregational leaders, pastors, and lay persons should engage in robust theological study of the unique Disciples ontology and missiology, including its primary image, the Body of Christ, and the role of the Spirit in the future of the Church.

The traditional Four Marks of the Church, found in the Nicene Creed (Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed AD 381), are the cornerstone of ecclesiology. They have a long, effective history in the Church and are considered by most ecclesial communities to be the core of the Church’s ontology. The Disciples have historically affirmed these marks of the Church, not as a test of faith, but as foundational to understanding the nature and mission of the Church. The researcher recommends congregational leaders and pastors engage in robust study of Disciples ontology: its foundation in the traditional Four Marks; its primary image, the Body of Christ; and the theology of the Holy Spirit.

Some Disciples, claiming a non-creedal identity, reject the content of the historical creedal statements of the Church, rather than engaging with them and learning

from them. This is, in the researcher's opinion, a potentially detrimental result of Disciples resistance ontology. Embracing the study of Disciples ecclesiology, may lead to a study, if not embrace, of the Four Marks, which together undergird the identity, purpose, and core values of the Church and enable greater ecumenical understanding. The oft-quoted "Christians only, but not the only Christians" (Foster et al 2004, 688), reveals our connection to these concepts as part of our commitment to Christian unity.

Congregations who reconnect and rediscover their unique Disciples identity encounter a history and tradition that could support the work of adaptive change. Congregations who embrace this core ontological identity, which remains unaffected by external changes, can remain centered and rooted even as they attend to their challenges and problems in unique and contextual ways. The researcher believes that if congregational leaders align the culture of the congregation to a solid Disciples ontology, the roof leak or the decline in membership in their congregation will not lead to existential catastrophes; rather, their ontological and missional identity will serve as an anchor in the storm and a compass on the journey.

In addition, a reimagining of the Body of Christ image, the primary biblical image for Church in the Disciples tradition, provides an opportunity to create a congregational culture which is "continuously adaptive" (Reid 2014, 33). Exploring the Body of Christ through the lens of self-organizing systems theory has the potential to profoundly benefit congregations engaging in adaptive action. Tod Bolsinger (2015, 41) suggests, "Just as an organism must adapt in order to thrive in a changing environment, so organizations need

to adapt to the changing world around them without losing their core identity, their reason for being, their core values and purpose.”

The Body of Christ image is the primary image for Disciples ontology; it encompasses unity, freedom, and mutual interdependence of covenant, for the purpose of continuing Christ’s mission. As was mentioned in chapter 2, considering this image through the lens of self-organizing systems theory could assist congregational leaders in envisioning the possibilities of adaptive action.

Self-organizing systems theory, also known as complex adaptive systems theory, grew out of general systems theory which came to prominence in the mid-twentieth century, but widened in influence in the 1970s and 80s. Today, scientists from all disciplines are exploring this theory for use in their particular fields. Exploring the body of Christ as a self-organizing system supports the Disciples’ unique ecclesial ontology described in chapter 2.

The Body of Christ is an image of a living organism. A body is a self-organizing system with particular characteristics that make it adaptable and resilient. Paul Minear (1960, 194) describes the Apostle Paul’s image as one that throughout his letters “is not a single expression with an unchanging meaning.” Rather, the image itself within the Apostle Paul’s own writing is “extremely flexible and elastic.” Minear (1960, 190) explains the image in this way: “in every spiritual gift there must be oneness in source and goal, a oneness that was itself manifested by the variety in the gifts themselves.” Furthermore, “each person is not only a member of the one body in Christ; he is also, within the same body, a member of all the other Christians and all of them are members



of him” (Minear 1960, 194-5). The Body of Christ is unified in plurality and interdependent with essential paradoxes. These same characteristics are found in self-organizing systems.

Many contemporary organizational development experts reference this scientific theory in describing the characteristics of an organization engaging in adaptive action. One of the most notable scholars, Margaret Wheatley (2006, 78), describes the characteristics of the theory as a “dynamic inter-connectedness,” within the system and with its environment. A vibrant partnership with the environment develops new resourcefulness within the organization. Most importantly, if the organization has a clear identity, the entire system can develop greater unity and stability, while becoming itself more fully.

Reflecting on the Body of Christ image from 1 Corinthians, one can see this “dynamic inter-connectedness” (Wheatley 2006, 78). The unique gifts that each member of the body possesses are given for the “common good” (1 Cor. 12:7). The Apostle Paul writes that no part of the body can say it has no need of the other parts, and no part can claim it is not part of the body because it has a unique gift. Paul admits that there are stronger and weaker parts, but all are essential to the functioning of the body. Diversity is necessary to the body. “If all were a single member, where would the body be” (1 Cor. 12:19)? The whole body represents Christ, and each part of the body is activated by the Spirit of Christ, regardless of whether it is a foot or an eye. The body does not develop into something other than the body. And if any part suffers, the whole body suffers.

In a living system like a body, this process of becoming itself is termed *autopoiesis*. A self-organizing system “will choose a path into the future that it believes is congruent with who it has been. Change is never random; the system will not take off in bizarre new directions....A living system changes in order to preserve itself” (Wheatley 2006, 85). This is counterintuitive to many congregational leaders who often fear the losses of change and its effects on identity. But the idea of autopoiesis is congruent with the Apostle Paul’s image of one body with many members who possess unique gifts, whose diversity is essential to its functioning. Through the Spirit, its diversity strengthens the body to work for the common good. For congregations who feel the impulse toward restoration and resistance, this perspective could help them reframe change and progress as natural characteristics of Christ’s body.

As a self-organizing system, the Body of Christ has great capacity for adaptation, creativity, and resilience. Just as bodies change over time, so does the Body of Christ. Its health and sustainability rely on the spiritual gifts present in the body working together and with the environment in a dynamic and creative way. Remembering and embracing their ontological identity creates a foundation in congregations for the important work of recognizing when they are “poised between death and transformation” (Wheatley 2006, 87-88). To recognize opportunities for transformation or adaptive challenges within this self-organizing living system, pastors and congregational leaders must be educated about adaptive change theory, the basis of recommendation 3.

Finally, in chapter 2 the ministry of the Spirit was identified as an essential element of an ecclesiology that enables adaptive change. Disciples historically have

devoted little time to developing a pneumatology (the study of the Holy Spirit) and have limited the role of the Spirit to revelation of the written and spoken Word. The Disciples' approach to theology is predominantly reasonable, empirical, and pragmatic, with little interest in what might be termed charismatic or "speculative theology" (Foster et al. 2004, 403).

This lack of interest in, or understanding of, the Spirit's role in the Church's future is evident from the data collected for this study. The Holy Spirit is mentioned in only 3 responses from study participants. One individual envisions his or her congregation thriving in a changed future because its members are "listening for the Spirit's urgings" (SW2.1). Another participant understands mission as "guided by the Holy Spirit" (EAST1.1), and imagines his or her congregation in the future as a place that "promote[s] spiritual growth as we acknowledge the gifts and fruits given us by the Holy Spirit" (EAST 1.1).

Richard Hamm (2001, 135) envisions Disciples leaders who are "energized, joy filled and Spirit led," as well as a Church that engages in serious theological discernment while maintaining the "unity of the Spirit." Disciples theologian, Dyron Daughrity (2008, 116), suggests that "the Holy Spirit has made a radical comeback," and that pneumatology is now at the "forefront of Christian thinking." He suggests that the Disciples are undergoing a "pneumatological awakening" in the twenty-first century (Daughrity 2008, 123).

The data does not prove this awakening in Disciples congregations. What is needed is an embrace of the Holy Spirit as an active force in the community. As

Van Gelder (2000, 15) suggests, the Church is “the Spirit of God dwelling in the midst of a people who are created and formed into a unique community,” an organization called and led by the Holy Spirit, who is the advocate given by Jesus to remind his followers of all that he had taught them (John 14:26). As suggested in chapter 1, an understanding of the Spirit’s work in the Church needs to be affirmed and sought by congregational leaders. Congregational leaders might begin by exploring what is said about the Spirit in the Disciples’ governing documents. A congregation that desires to engage in adaptive action would be well served by a sound congregational pneumatology that enables them to embody the dynamic and creative presence of the Spirit as they live into an emerging future.

These pieces (the ontology of the Church, the unique Disciples ontology, the Body of Christ as a self-organizing system, and the ministry of the Spirit in the Church) taken together, create a firm theological foundation for leaders engaging in adaptive action. Each congregation will need to discern the degree to which these interventions are necessary and find appropriate opportunities for learning, discourse, and action related to the adaptive possibilities in their context. The third recommendation suggests a way forward.

### Recommendation 3

Pastors and congregational leaders should receive education and training in adaptive change theory and practice, particularly the Adaptive Action cycle (Eoyang and Holladay 2013), to move beyond aspirations to action.

It is clear from the findings that most participants in the study recognize the need for some change within their congregations over the next five years, even if they are not able to describe exactly what that might be. The data collected in the surveys and the audience review raised the concern that pastors and congregational leaders may not have the skills necessary to identify adaptive challenges or to move their congregations beyond hope for change into actual change. This is supported by the literature (Bolsinger 2015; Roxburgh 2011; Van Gelder 2000), as well as conversations the researcher has had with colleagues in the past several years.

Additionally, congregational participants often claim they want to change but engaging in adaptive action proves to be difficult for them. Peter Steinke (2010), an expert in congregational systems, names this difficulty. While hope can “carry a congregation over the threshold of ‘can’t,’ ” he writes, “change is not the preferred future for congregations” (Steinke 2010, 56). Few clergy are capable of identifying adaptive challenges, and they are even less able to “institute change on a system level” (Steinke 2010, 57). Others recognize the need for adaptive change but fail to take a leap of faith, preferring the comfort of managing technical problems. This is a significant obstacle to congregational sustainability.

Congregational leaders need training in adaptive change and how to manage it. This training should include learning the characteristics of both technical problems and adaptive challenges, and skill building for navigating adaptive change. Pastors and congregational leaders are already good stewards of *what is* in the congregations represented in this study, and most are capable technical problem solvers. Many of those

leaders can also envision *what could be*, even *what needs to be*. But a barrier exists between the aspirations they have for their congregations and their ability to (1) clearly identify the adaptive challenges their congregations face and (2) navigate their organizations through adaptive action. Acquiring the skills necessary for leading change takes time, practice, and support: resources that often feel in short supply.

Heifetz and Linsky (2002) offer perhaps the best primer on adaptive change theory for organizational leaders, although there is a growing list of books, websites, and other resources available on the subject. Theoretical knowledge is important; developing practical tools is just as important. This researcher recommends the Adaptive Action cycle developed by Eoyang and Holladay (2013) because of the simplicity of their process, which focuses on three questions:

- What?
- So what?
- Now what? (Eoyang and Holladay 2013)

Eoyang and Holladay (2013, 35) acknowledge that “if you’re dealing with a complex situation, the last thing you need is a complicated model...you need something that clarifies and simplifies a mess of data as quickly and clearly as possible.” While their work is not specifically designed for congregations, the tools they offer are grounded in adaptive change principles and complex adaptive systems theory, and are easily accessible to pastors and congregational leaders. The Adaptive Action cycle compliments a Disciples ontology which values unity in diversity, the freedom of congregations to make decisions based on their context, and a dynamically functioning Body of Christ.

Step one, asking “what?” helps leaders “see beyond the confusion and ‘busy-ness’ to appreciate the opportunities that emerge from complexity” (Eoyang and Holladay 2013, 35). The first step in the cycle invites leaders to assume a posture of inquiry, looking for patterns in the system and naming their reality. Leaders seek out multiple perspectives in order to get a multi-dimensional picture that will inform future cycles of adaptive action (Eoyang & Holladay 2013, 38). They engage the Body of Christ, unified in its diversity, and value the unique perspective and gifts of each member of the congregation.

Step two invites leaders to ask “so what?” of the patterns they discover in step one (Eoyang & Holladay 2013, 67). It is a hermeneutical process with which pastors, in particular, are experienced. In this second stage of the process, leaders make meaning of the patterns and generate options for action. This stage encourages leaders to think about the individual, the whole, and the greater whole (e.g., the person, the congregation, and the neighborhood) and explore the dynamic interdependence of the congregation and its environment, gathering the gifts of the community of communities.

In the third step, the “now what?” phase of the process, the information collected in step one and the analysis of step two are employed in planning and implementing real action (Eoyang and Holladay 2013, 85). Many organizations, including congregations, stop after the second phase, unable to move beyond what they have observed and what they hope for their communities. Possibilities remain possibilities. For the cycle to work, the last step has to be taken, even if it fails. Adaptive action helps a congregation become “continually adaptive” (Reid 2014, 33) because it is a cycle: every question leads to the

next question (figure 5). Action leads to changes in the system, which creates the necessity of asking new questions.

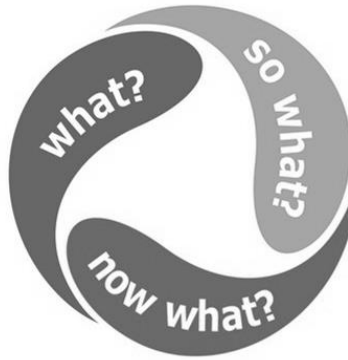


Figure 5: Adaptive Action cycle. Graphic from Human Systems Dynamics Institute, “Adaptive Action,” Accessed April 1, 2019, <https://www.hsdinstitute.org/resources/adaptive-action.html>.

Pastors and congregational leaders who have facility with a pattern such as this, possess the tools necessary to identify adaptive challenges, develop adaptive processes, and lead their congregations through meaningful adaptive action. Gaining confidence with these principles and the processes that support them is a first step toward developing a healthy organizational culture and eventually increasing adaptive capacity and resilience in the midst of change.

A summary of this project’s recommendations is as follows:

- Recommendation 1: Congregations should participate in a process that engages the questions of this study, through an appreciative inquiry tool developed specifically for their use.
- Recommendation 2: Congregational leaders, pastors, and lay persons should engage in robust theological study of the unique Disciples ontology and missiology, including its primary image, the Body of Christ, and the role of the Spirit in the future of the Church.



Recommendation 3: Pastors and congregational leaders should receive education and training in adaptive change theory and practice, particularly the Adaptive Action cycle (Eoyang and Holladay 2013), to move beyond aspirations to action.

These recommendations, taken together, have the potential to set a congregation on a path toward successful adaptive action. But they provide no guarantee. Each recommendation requires sustained commitment and engagement from leadership within the congregation. This may not be appealing to congregations who are feeling stressed by the technical problems they face. It may seem more difficult to sustain a process than to solve a problem. But it is the belief of the researcher that congregations that desire to flourish in this changing religious landscape would be well served in that hope by engaging in these recommendations.

### **Conclusion**

This study began with the researcher's desire to help congregations and their leaders not only survive in a season of change, but to thrive. The researcher suspected that a congregation's beliefs about the nature and mission of the Church have an effect on its ability to engage in adaptive action. It is well-established across fields of study that the world is in the midst of a seismic change. Something new is emerging in the Church, but it is difficult to discern the way forward. The solutions of the past are not as viable as they once were; moreover, congregational leaders are unprepared for recognizing adaptive challenges and engaging in adaptive action. In order for congregations to develop adaptive capacity, the culture of the congregation must support that work; at the heart of congregational culture is ecclesiology.

Disciples congregations desire to embody their identity and mission in the world and many are struggling to do that in new ways. Richard Hamm (2001, 1) wrote, “For this church, and all mainline churches, the past thirty years have been traumatic....We have gone through a period of blame and self-doubt, wondering if there is some fatal flaw in the ‘Disciples way.’ ” This may be true, but congregations can no longer afford to spend time on blame and self-doubt. While it is true that congregations have a life cycle like any other organism or organization, congregations that spend their time focusing on internal problems and finger pointing will miss opportunities for change that can help them adapt to the changing religious landscape and remain faithful to their identity and mission.

This study reclaims the ontology of the Church, the ways the Church understands and embodies its nature and mission, which have been “believed always, everywhere, and by everyone” (Commonitory of Vincent of Lérins AD 434). The Four Marks of the Church (one, holy, catholic and apostolic) represent one way the Church describes itself. While these marks proved necessary for Disciples, they were nonetheless insufficient. A distinctly Disciples ontology embraces a unique set of markers—unity, mission, liberty, and resistance. Covenant is an essential element of Disciples ecclesiology, which values both resistance to formal structures and strong mutual relationships. This element of resistance can either enable or prevent adaptive change depending on how it is embodied. Thoughtful and robust study of the Disciples’ ecclesiological framework can equip a congregation for adaptive change by grounding a congregation in a truth about the

Church. While this truth cannot be fundamentally changed by the shifting religious landscape, it does afford congregations the freedom to be creative as they meet the challenges of their emerging future.

Future studies could include similar research with congregations that have recently closed or are in the process of closing, as no such congregations were included in this study. Examining congregations at the end of their organizational life cycle would provide further insight into the link between ecclesiology and adaptive change. Additionally, case studies of particular congregations could examine in depth the ecclesiological beliefs and adaptive processes within particular congregations. These, in turn, could provide insight into how useful the recommendations of this study prove to be.

Finally, this researcher does not intend for this to be the final word on ecclesiology and adaptive change in Disciples congregations. True to the Disciples way, this is intended to be the beginning of robust conversations in congregations and among congregational leaders—with the denomination, and beyond—about congregational culture, the ontology of the Church, and the challenges facing congregations in the twenty-first century. Tod Bolsinger's (2015, 33) dire warning to "adapt or die," is becoming increasingly real for congregations. It is clear that hope and aspirations alone will not be enough for a congregation that desires a different future than the congregation described in the introduction of chapter 1. Real hope for the future resides in rediscovering the Church's ontology, reimagining the Church in today's context, and

reconceiving the Church's mission. The Spirit is calling forth the best of the gifts of the Body of Christ to embody its identity and mission in the present age and co-create the future God has in mind.

## GLOSSARY

**adaptive challenge.** A challenge in which there is no known solution. Challenges are often complex and difficult to solve. Adaptive challenges are the particular, contextual realities that lead to adaptive change.

**adaptive change.** Adaptive change as it is used in this study comes from the work of Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky (2002) and refers to change that is (a) hard to identity, (b) requires experimentation and new learning to accomplish, and (c) requires adjustment from a number of places in the organization. Adaptive change alters the fundamental culture of a system or organization.

**adaptive process/adaptive action.** Specific choices and actions congregational leaders may take to address adaptive challenges; in time the actions lead to an adaptive change in the organization.

**COM.** This is an abbreviation for the Northwest Regional Christian Church's Commission on Ministry.

**Disciples.** This is as an abbreviation for *Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)* throughout the text.

**ecclesiology.** Theological discourse on ecclesiology can take two distinct, but related paths: theological discourse on the nature and mission of the Church and/or the ecclesial structures of the institution. For this study, ecclesiology is understood to be the theological framework related to the nature and mission of the Church.

**initial coding.** A coding technique which breaks down the data in small parts, closely examines them and compares them for similarities and difference. It requires deep reflection on the part of the investigator.

**in vivo coding.** A first-round coding technique for grounded theory, in which the investigator creates a code or short phrase from actual language in the data.

**missiological.** Missiology is the study of the Church's mission. The missiological aspect of ecclesiology, therefore, refers to the facet of the Church's nature having to do with its mission, or actions in the world. This, too, is considered through the lens of the Vincentian Canon.

**Northwest region.** The *Northwest Regional Christian Church* will also be identified as the Northwest region. This describes Disciples polity and is distinct from the Pacific Northwest as a geographical region.

**ontological.** Ontology is the study of the Church's being. In this study, ontological refers to the nature of the Church's being. The Vincentian Canon, "what has been believed everywhere, always, and by all," developed by Vincent of Lérins around 434 CE, is useful in understanding this. Rather than using it as a test of orthodoxy, the researcher uses this Canon as a measure for what constitutes the true "being" of the Church.

**process coding.** A coding technique that looks closely at action words in the data.

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APPENDIX A  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

October 15, 2018

Rev. Kara Markell  
School of Theology and Ministry  
Seattle University

Dear Kara,

Thank you for completing all required revisions for protocol FY2019-006 “Ecclesiology and Adaptive Change: A Qualitative Study of Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Congregations in the Northwest Region,” now approved until June 15, 2019. You may begin your study at any time.

IRB approval expiration for student principal investigators aligns with anticipated graduation dates, and continuing approval depends on registered status at Seattle University. The SU IRB cannot provide oversight for research studies by non-active SU affiliates, such as alumni or unregistered students.

Carefully read the following post-approval policies, for which your faculty adviser is jointly responsible to ensure that you follow. Always use the most updated forms on our website.

- If you want to make any changes to the protocol during the course of the study, including an extension due to a later graduation date, you must submit an IRB Modification Request before implementing the change. You may not initiate any modifications without written IRB approval.
- If you conclude data collection and will no longer work with or contact participants (i.e., data analysis stage only), you may submit a Downgrade to Exempt request, eliminating the requirement for further IRB oversight.
- If you do not request a downgrade, then before graduation or at least a week before approval expires (June 15, 2019), you must submit an IRB Closeout Report, so we can officially close the protocol to remain in compliance with Federal and SU human subjects protections policies. In the report you will clarify what will happen to any identifiable data (e.g., will be retained/stored by faculty adviser) as described in the approved protocol.
- Finally, if for any reason, you should not continue working on the project, please notify the IRB immediately, so we can mark the protocol as withdrawn.

Sincerely,  
Andrea McDowell, PhD  
IRB Administrator  
Email: mcdowela@seattleu.edu  
Phone: (206) 296-2585

cc: Dr. Sharon Callahan, Faculty *Advise*

APPENDIX B

STUDY INVITATION LETTER: SURVEY PARTICIPANT

14025 90<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE  
Kirkland, WA 98034

October 15, 2018

Dear Colleague in Ministry –

I am writing to you with an invitation to participate in a study of congregations in our region. The study is in fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Ministry program at Seattle University's School of Theology and Ministry.

This study, entitled "Ecclesiology and Adaptive Change: A Qualitative Study of Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Congregations in the NW Region," will examine the connection between the lived ecclesiology of the congregation as expressed by its leadership and the congregation's ability to engage in adaptive change processes. The first survey will consist of three open-ended questions. Two to three additional surveys will be sent via email to participants at approximately two-week intervals.

All surveys will be completed online through Qualtrics and participants will receive notifications directly from Qualtrics. All participant information will be kept strictly confidential and responses will be anonymized in the study report.

Your participation will be a valuable addition to the research, and findings could lead to greater understanding of ourselves as Disciples congregations and our ability to thrive in the changing religious landscape. There are several ways you can help: 1) You can participate in the study, 2) you can nominate four leaders (ideally two elders and two board members) from your congregation to participate in the study, and 3) Share with those leaders that you have nominated them and encourage their participation. If more individuals would like to participate they are welcome to do so. This will provide a fuller snapshot of your congregation's ecclesiology.

If you are able to participate in the study please respond via email (below) with email contact information for all participants by October 30, 2018. The first survey and a consent form will arrive via email shortly thereafter.

Thank you for considering! If you have any questions about the study, please contact me.  
Blessings and Peace,



Rev. Kara Markell  
[kmajmarkell@gmail.com](mailto:kmajmarkell@gmail.com)  
425-615-5755, cell



APPENDIX C  
SURVEY PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM



**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**  
**Survey Participant**

- TITLE:** Ecclesiology and Adaptive Change: A Qualitative Study of Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Congregations in the Northwest Region
- INVESTIGATOR:** Rev. Kara Markell, School of Theology and Ministry, 425-615-5755
- ADVISOR:** Rev. Dr. Michael Reid Trice, School of Theology and Ministry, 206-296-5332
- PURPOSE:** You are being asked to participate in a research project that seeks to investigate the connection between ecclesiology and adaptive change. You will be asked to complete 3-4 online surveys which will take approximately 30 minutes each.
- SOURCE OF SUPPORT:** This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Ministry degree in at Seattle University, School of Theology and Ministry.
- RISKS:** There are no known risks associated with this study.
- BENEFITS:** There are no individual benefits to participation, although the research will be useful for congregational leaders and pastors in the NW Region and beyond.
- INCENTIVES:** You will receive no gifts/incentives for this study. Participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you.
- CONFIDENTIALITY:** Your name and email address will be collected for the purpose of setting up the survey contact list. Your responses will be anonymized. Your name will never be used in any public dissemination of these data (publications, presentations, etc.). All data will be stored on a password-protected Google drive to which only the PI has the password, with an additional password created specifically for access to the data to act as a two-step authentication process. Prior to being stored on the Google drive, data will be encrypted using Microsoft BitLocker software. For use with the Focus Group, all data sources will be identified by their coded number only. All direct identifiers will be permanently destroyed upon the completion of data collection. Human subjects research regulations require that data be kept for a minimum of three (3) years. When the research study ends, any identifying information will be removed from the data, or it will be

destroyed. All of the information you provide will be kept confidential.

**RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:** Your participation in this study is *voluntary*. You may withdraw your consent to participate at any time without penalty. Your withdrawal will not influence any other services to which you may be otherwise entitled.

**SUMMARY OF RESULTS:** A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request. The anticipated project completion date is June 2019. For a summary, please contact Rev. Kara Markell, kmajmarkell@gmail.com.

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT:** I have read the above statements and understand what is being asked of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason, without penalty. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that should I have any concerns about my participation in this study, I may call **Rev. Kara Markell** who is asking me to participate, at **425-615-5755**. If I have any concerns that my rights are being violated, I may contact Dr. Michelle DuBois, Chair of the Seattle University Institutional Review Board at (206) 296-2585.

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Participant's Signature

Date

---

Investigator's Signature

Date

APPENDIX D

STUDY INVITATION LETTER: COMMISSION ON MINISTRY

14025 90<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE  
Kirkland, WA 98034

March 5, 2019

Dear Colleague in Ministry –

I am writing to you with an invitation to participate in a “group of experts” to reflect on the data collected in my doctoral study. The study is in fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Ministry program at Seattle University’s School of Theology and Ministry.

This study, entitled “Ecclesiology and Adaptive Change: A Qualitative Study of Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Congregations in the NW Region,” will examine the connection between the lived ecclesiology of the congregation as expressed by its leadership and the congregation’s ability to engage in adaptive change processes.

As a member of the Commission on Ministry, you are invited to participate in a Group of Experts conversation, which will review the findings and offer reflexive feedback. This will take place at the scheduled COM meeting March 15-16, 2019.

Your participation will be a valuable addition to the research, and findings could lead to greater understanding of Disciples congregations and their ability to thrive in the changing religious landscape. All participant information will be kept strictly confidential and responses will be anonymized in the study report. No direct or indirect identifiers will be collected for use in the study.

If you are able to participate in the “group of experts” please read and retain the enclosed informed consent form and save for your own records. **If you attend the meeting designed to ask you to respond to my research findings, you have consented to the process. You can leave anytime during the meeting, and no identifiers or sign in sheets will indicate your participation in the group of experts.**

Thank you for considering! If you have any questions about the study, please contact me.  
Blessings and Peace,



Rev. Kara Markell  
[kmajmarkell@gmail.com](mailto:kmajmarkell@gmail.com)  
425-615-5755, cell

APPENDIX E

CONSENT FORM: COMMISSION ON MINISTRY



**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**  
**Commission on Ministry**

- TITLE:** Ecclesiology and Adaptive Change: A Qualitative Study of Christian Church  
(Disciples of Christ) Congregations in the Northwest Region
- INVESTIGATOR:** Rev. Kara Markell, School of Theology and Ministry, 425-615-5755
- ADVISOR:** Rev. Dr. Michael Reid Trice, School of Theology and Ministry, 206-296-5332
- PURPOSE:** You are being asked to participate in a research project that seeks to investigate the connection between ecclesiology and adaptive change. You will be asked to participate in a discussion to analyze collected data.
- SOURCE OF SUPPORT:** This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Ministry degree in at Seattle University, School of Theology and Ministry.
- RISKS:** There are no known risks associated with this study
- BENEFITS:** There are no individual benefits to participation, although the research will be useful for congregational leaders and pastors in the NW Region and beyond.
- INCENTIVES:** You will receive no gifts/incentives for this study. Participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you.
- CONFIDENTIALITY:** Your responses will be anonymized. Your name will never be used in any public dissemination of these data (publications, presentations, etc.). An audio recording will be kept of the group conversation for review and coding. This will be stored in a password protected computer file, on a password protected computer. Only the PI will have access to this file. Human subjects research regulations require that data be kept for a minimum of three (3) years. When the research study ends, any identifying information will be removed from the data, or it will be destroyed. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in a focus group setting; however, we ask all participants to respect others' privacy and keep all information shared confidential
- RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:** Your participation in this study is *voluntary*. You may withdraw your consent to participate at any time without penalty. Your withdrawal will not influence any other services to which you may be otherwise entitled.

**SUMMARY OF RESULTS:** A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request. The anticipated project completion date is June 2019. For a summary, please contact Rev. Kara Markell, kmajmarkell@gmail.com.

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT:** I have read the above statements and understand what is being asked of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason, without penalty. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project. **My participation in the discussion serves as my consent.**

I understand that should I have any concerns about my participation in this study, I may call Rev. Kara Markell who is asking me to participate, at 425-615-5755. If I have any concerns that my rights are being violated, I may contact Dr. Michelle DuBois, Chair of the Seattle University Institutional Review Board at (206) 296-2585.



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Investigator's Signature

03-05-2019

Date



APPENDIX F

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS: SURVEY 1

## **CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

**TITLE:** Ecclesiology and Adaptive Change: A Qualitative Study of Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Congregations in the Northwest Region

**INVESTIGATOR:** Rev. Kara Markell, School of Theology and Ministry, 425-615-5755

**ADVISOR:** Rev. Dr. Michael Reid Trice, School of Theology and Ministry, 206-296-5332

**PURPOSE:** You are being asked to participate in a research project that seeks to investigate the connection between ecclesiology and adaptive change. You will be asked to complete 3-4 online surveys which will take approximately 30 minutes or less.

**SOURCE OF SUPPORT:** This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Ministry degree in at Seattle University, School of Theology and Ministry.

**RISKS:** There are no known risks associated with this study.

**BENEFITS:** There are no individual benefits to participation, although the research will be useful for congregational leaders and pastors in the NW Region and beyond.

**INCENTIVES:** You will receive no gifts/incentives for this study. Participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** Your name and email address will be collected for the purpose of setting up the survey contact list. Your responses will be anonymized. Your name will never be used in any public dissemination of these data (publications, presentations, etc.). All data will be stored on a password-protected Google drive to which only the PI has the password, with an additional password created specifically for access to the data to act as a two-step authentication process. Prior to being stored on the Google drive, data will be encrypted using Microsoft BitLocker software. For use with the Focus Group, all data sources will be identified by their coded number only. All direct identifiers will be permanently destroyed upon the completion of data collection.

Human subjects research regulations require that data be kept for a minimum of three (3) years. When the research study ends, any identifying information will be removed from the data, or it will be destroyed. All of the information you provide will be kept confidential.

**RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:** Your participation in this study is *voluntary*. You may withdraw your consent to participate at any time without penalty. Your withdrawal will not influence any other services to which you may be otherwise entitled.

**SUMMARY OF RESULTS:** A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request. The anticipated project completion date is June 2019. For a summary, please contact Rev. Kara Markell, kmajmarkell@gmail.com.

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT:** I have read the above statements and understand what is being asked of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason, without penalty. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that should I have any concerns about my participation in this study, I may call **Rev. Kara Markell** who is asking me to participate, at **425-615-5755**. If I have any concerns that my rights are being violated, I may contact Dr. Michelle DuBois, Chair of the Seattle University Institutional Review Board at (206) 296-2585.

- I consent to participate
- I do not consent to participate

How long have you been in a Disciples Congregation?

- 0-5 years
- 5-10 years
- 10 - 15 years
- more than 15 years

Which best describes your congregation's location

- Rural
- Suburban
- Urban

Which best describes your current status?

- Lay person
- Active Clergy
- Retired/non-active clergy

To which generation do you belong?

- Silent Generation (born 1925-1945)
- Baby Boomer (born 1946 - 1964)
- Generation X (born 1965 - 1979)
- Millennial (1980 - 1994)
- GenZ (1995-2012)

What is your gender identity?

- Male
- Female
- gender fluid
- prefer not to answer

What is the Church?

What is the mission of the Church?

Describe where you see your church in five years.



APPENDIX G

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS: SURVEY 2

Q1. For each definition of the nature of the church listed below, select how strongly you agree or disagree with that definition.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
The Body of Christ	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A community formed around Jesus Christ and his mission	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The People of God	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A Community of Faith	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A spiritual community	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A Movement for Wholeness	<input type="radio"/>		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q2. For each item below, rate how strongly you agree or disagree that it is an essential part of the mission of the Church.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Follow the example/teaching of Jesus, continue his mission	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gather for worship and formation/study/practice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Serve the community/world	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Welcome/affirm/include all people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Share our faith/bring others to Christ	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Work for social justice/engage in social action	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Live out God's Mission	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Be wise and generous stewards	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q3. The church has traditionally been described by four "marks" - One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic - found in the Nicene Creed. In the space below each word, describe how you understand that term in relation to the Church. If you don't know please indicate that.

#1: ONE

Q4. #2: HOLY

Q5. #3: CATHOLIC

Q6. #4: APOSTOLIC



APPENDIX H

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS: SURVEY 3

Q1. What does your congregation need to do to be sustainable in five years?

Rate the most important as 1, next important is 2, etc. Please rate all entries.

- Increase membership/reach new people
- Down-size our property/facility
- Expand our embrace of diversity
- Become a spiritual "hub" for our community
- Grow our community outreach/social justice Efforts
- Build more community relationships
- Clarify our purpose and mission
- Embrace innovative worship elements
- Develop new/younger leaders

Q2. Think of a challenge your congregation has faced recently or is currently facing. Check "yes" for the descriptors below that are true of that challenge and "no" for those that are not.

	Choose one	
	yes	no
Was difficult to identify	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Required changes in values, beliefs, roles, relationship, and approaches to work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Required the work of solving the problem to be done by the people with the problem	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Required change in numerous places; across organizational boundaries	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People resisted acknowledging	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Required experiments and new discoveries to solve	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Took a long time to implement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q3. Briefly describe the challenge from question 2, what you did to address it, and the outcome.

Q4. Select the description that describes your congregation's attitude for change.

- The congregation is reluctant to consider change. It believes that change could loose membership. Success is doing the same thing every year.
- The congregation is willing to accept incremental change. They will write documents to promote change, but fail to implement first steps. They slow change through committee's and board action.
- The congregation is not hostage to pleasing membership, but not certain which direction it should go. They are willing to consider new ideas, however with some skepticism.
- The congregation is willing to discuss BOLD change. They are now asking questions of their neighbors about their needs, and employing imagination about ways they might connect. They are seeking competence in employing change.
- The congregation sees that God is constantly creating the world, and embrace change as connecting to God's mission. They are willing to try new things, and remain flexible.

Q5. Select the description that describes your congregation's clarity of purpose.

- The congregation has not reviewed its purpose practically since its inception. Any mission statement is generic, and no attempt is made at contextual relevance. Participants believe the church exists to please them.
- The congregation surveys members regarding the direction they feel the church should go. Any attempts to modify the vision of the church require connecting to its historic past.
- The congregation is willing to hire a consultant to help them determine their purpose and will usually dismiss the outcomes of their recommendations. They are energized by recreating the past, and it is evident in any process they try to engage.
- The congregation is willing to deeply engage in conversations about "why" the church exists. They are willing to discuss specific ways to connect, and deepening commitment to "write something down." They are talking with people outside of the congregational system.
- The congregation has clarity about God's mission for their community and are fully committed to engaging that mission. Every participant is aware of the congregation's purpose.

Q6. Which of the following best describes your understanding of the church as "one"?

- Body of Christ - Universal Church
- Unified Mission which transcends denomination
- One family of God
- Unity in Diversity
- None of the above

Q7. Which of the following best describes your understanding of the church as "Holy"?

- The church is set apart, chosen for a unique mission.
- The church has a special relationship with God
- A sacred way of living and being
- None of the above

APPENDIX I  
TRANSFORMATIONAL CONTINUUM

Transformational Continuum. Developed by Jean Vandergrift and Rick Morse at Hope Partnership for Missional Transformation.

The Transformational Continuum	1. Congregation for 'US'	2	3	4	5. Congregation for God's Mission
<b>Attitude for Change</b>	The congregation is reluctant to consider change. It believes that change could loose membership. Success is doing the same calendar every year.	The congregation is willing to accept incremental change. They will write documents to promote change, but fail to implement first steps. They slow change through committee's and board action.	The congregation is no longer hostage to pleasing membership, but not certain which direction it should go. They are willing to consider new ideas, however with some skepticism.	The congregation is willing to discuss BOLD change. They are now asking questions of their neighbors about their needs, and employing imagination about ways they might connect. They are seeking competence in employing change.	The congregation sees that God is constantly creating the world, and embrace change as connecting to God's mission. They are willing to try new things, and remain flexible.
<b>Clarity about Purpose</b>	The congregation has not reviewed it's purpose practically since its inception. Any mission statement is generic, and no attempt is made at contextual relevance. Participants believe the church exists to please them.	The congregation surveys members regarding the direction they feel the church should go. Any attempts to modify the vision of the church require connecting to its historic past.	The church is willing to hire a consultant to help them determine their purpose and will usually discuss the outcomes of their recommendations. They are energized by recreating the past, and it is evident in any process they try to engage.	The congregation is willing to deeply engage in conversations about "why" the church exists. They are willing to discuss specific ways to connect, and deepening commitment to "write something down". They are talking with people outside of the congregational system.	The congregation has clarity about God's mission for their community and are fully committed to engage that mission. Every participant is aware of the congregation's purpose.
<b>Institutional Viability</b>	The congregation is nostalgic about its past glory days when the church was full. Much of their identity is wrapped in the building. The building takes priority in financial considerations. There is widespread concern for finances, and program is not funded. The church is in numerical decline.	The congregation realizes they can no longer function as always. They are beginning to release some permanent funds for program development. There is concern they cannot do that forever. The congregation actively seeks other forms of income from building use etc.	The congregation is now willing to consider downsizing, and willing to let go of the building which may have been their main tie to the past, in order to achieve viability. They recognize that being together is still important, but that	The congregation has had some success, and is creative in finding ways to sustain it. They are willing to let go of things like buildings to accomplish their mission. The church is starting to hold some funds in reserve for "rainy days". There is higher energy within the congregation to support the church program financially.	The congregation shows some signs of numerical growth with people of their community. The building is seen as a means of facilitating mission, and open widely to community use. Financially, the church believes that they have all they need, and will sacrifice in some areas to support the church program financially.
<b>Leadership</b>	Leadership is focused on pleasing members. There is a small core group that makes most decisions, usually outside of the normal decision making table. The pastor is considered an outsider, especially around financial matters. All leaders feel overworked, with little recognition. There is a high level of disillusionment. The primary leadership style is transactional.	Leadership moves towards following by-laws and constitution to avoid conflict. Leadership may shift to establishing goals, but these will be based on institutional viability, not connected to mission.	Leadership has restructured the decision making process to small more effective groups. Decisions are made by consensus rather than voting. Streamlined governance is to allow people to engage directly in mission, rather than meeting quorum.	Leaders have a "can do" attitude. They are celebrating successes with the congregation. Leaders are developing spiritual practices and seek guidance based on discernment.	Leaders are united by purpose and work as a team. Leaders rotate frequently, and are placed in positions based on spiritual giftedness. The primary focus of leadership is to connect the church to God's mission. Leaders rely on inspiration rather than motivation. The primary leadership style is Transformational.
<b>Interpersonal Issues</b>	Relationships are co-dependent or distant. There is a sense of who is in, and who is tolerated. There are often long term hurts and disagreements. There are often power issues that come to play in the church. Things are seen as win-loss.	Most of the congregation is indifferent to anyone except their friends. There is initial interest in visitors, but most people are not willing to invest in more than greeting "strangers". Communication is closed, often worship time is not published openly since everyone should know.	The church is making movement towards open communication and hospitality. There is follow-up for visitors. Announcements and invitations are freely given to invite people to engage church programs. It is starting to engage emotional language.	The congregation is learning the value to engaging in mission together. People appreciate and enjoy working together in settings outside of the church. There is high trust in leadership. People appreciate the giftedness of people who may not be the same as the rest of the church.	The congregation values healthy relationships and open communication. It is a safe place to have open disagreement. People openly express their affection for each other. Relational development is usually a part of worship, either in the passing of the peace, or in prayer time.

APPENDIX J

SURVEY PARTICIPANTS DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

**Demographic data of survey participants.**

Identity Code	Years in Disciples congregation	Location	Status in congregation	Generation	Gender identity
CENT1.1	more than 15	Rural	Active Clergy	Generation X	Male
CENT1.2	more than 15	Urban	Lay person	Baby Boomer	Male
CENT1.3	more than 15	Urban	Lay person	Baby Boomer	Male
CENT2.1	more than 15	Suburban	Active Clergy	Generation X	Female
CENT2.2	0-5	Suburban	Lay person	Generation X	Male
CENT2.3	more than 15	Urban	Lay person	Generation X	Female
EAST1.1	more than 15	Rural	Active Clergy	Baby Boomer	Male
NW1.1	more than 15	Urban	Active Clergy	Generation X	Male
NW1.2	more than 15	Urban	Lay person	Generation X	Male
NW2.1	5-10	Urban	Active Clergy	Baby Boomer	Female
NW2.2	more than 15	Urban	Lay person	Silent Generation	Female
NW2.3	more than 15	Urban	Lay person	Baby Boomer	Male
NW2.4	more than 15	Urban	Lay person	Baby Boomer	Female
NW2.5	more than 15	Urban	Lay person	Baby Boomer	Female
NW3.1	more than 15	Suburban	Active Clergy	Baby Boomer	Male
NW3.2	more than 15	Suburban	Active Clergy	Baby Boomer	Female
NW4.2	more than 15	Urban	Lay person	Silent Generation	Female
NW4.3	more than 15	Urban	Lay person	Baby Boomer	Female
NW5.1	more than 15	Urban	Active Clergy	Generation X	Female
NW5.2	10 - 15	Urban	Lay person	Generation X	Female
NW5.3	more than 15	Urban	Lay person	Generation X	Female
NW5.4	more than 15	Urban	Lay person	Silent Generation	Male
NW5.5	more than 15	Suburban	Lay person	Millennial	Female
SW1.1	more than 15	Urban	Active Clergy	Generation X	Male
SW1.2	more than 15	Suburban	Lay person	Silent Generation	Female
SW1.3	more than 15	Urban	Lay person	Baby Boomer	Female
SW1.4	more than 15	Suburban	Lay person	Baby Boomer	Female
SW1.5		Suburban	Lay person		
SW2.1	more than 15	Urban	Active Clergy	Generation X	Female
SW2.2	more than 15	Urban	Lay person	Baby Boomer	Female
SW2.4	0-5	Urban	Lay person	Silent Generation	Female
SW2.5	more than 15	Urban	Lay person		Female



APPENDIX K  
SURVEY 1 RESPONSES

## Verbatim responses to Survey 1, questions 7 & 8

Identity Code	Q7: What is the Church? *name of congregation redacted for anonymity	Q8: What is the Mission of the Church?
CENT1.1	We are representatives of Jesus Christ, called to take the good news of God's redemptive grace to the world in word and deed. Being the Church means that we are part of something bigger than ourselves and view ourselves as part of a whole.	To proclaim, do, and be the good news of God's redemptive grace in a broken and hurting world. The church is called to make disciples (i.e. teach and encourage others to follow that teachings of Jesus) and bring people into relationship with God and fellow disciples.
CENT1.2	The body of Christ with fellowship among other Christians striving to bring unbelievers to accept Christ into their lives and minister to the spiritual needs of the community and support outreach to the world.	Bringing others to Christ no matter where they are in their life's journey. Ministering to the needy and accepting all cultures as children of God.
CENT1.3	The church is not 'a building.' It's people, living out their lives in a way that would be pleasing to God. You don't turn it on at 10 am and off at noon. It goes with you throughout the day, living, breathing, trying to follow in the footsteps of Christ. We should take the words we hear Sunday morning with us. We should always try to put God first in everything we do. The statement "WWJD?" should be our watchword. We need to inject Him into our everyday lives, let Him lead us.	Our mission statement is: "We are a multi-cultural polka-dotted church, liberating as Christ liberated changing the world with acts of love, believing Jesus will connect all the dots."  A church is a congregation that is open to all. We believe that God has placed us here to witness and to serve the entire community. No matter where a person comes from, he or she can find a home here.
CENT2.1	People who gather in the name of Christ	To be people who through their lives individually and communally live, share, and celebrate the Good News, which is following Christ's example of demonstrating God's love, compassion, grace to people through loving, serving, caring for people's spiritual and physical needs.
CENT2.2	*Christian church	Follow the teachings of Jesus, strengthening our spiritual lives, and sharing our faith by being a loving presence in our community.
CENT2.3	*Christian Church	We are an intentional community of faithful disciples seeking to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ. We are dedicated to strengthening or spiritual lives and actively sharing our father with others. We seek ways to express our faith and engage in God's mission.

EAST1.1	*Christian Church	We see our Church as a dynamic community of faith seeking to reveal and reflect God's love inclusive and affirming of all people. Guided by the Holy Spirit, we will reach out with a good heart to our community and beyond, teaching and learning with others how to pray fervently, worship expectantly, give generously, forgive graciously, serve faithfully, and live truthfully.
NW1.1	Currently, *Christian Church I've also served urban congregations in L.A., Ft. Worth, and KC, MO	Our vision statement - we are a welcoming people, following Christ's example by journeying to encounter the Holy, live faithfully, and do justice. Our purpose statement - We are a community of diverse, progressive Christians which gathers on Capitol Hill for spiritual formation that compels us to action. We also have an Open and Affirming Commitment that includes our inclusion and recognition of equality all of AP: people of color, ages...sexual orientation, gender or transgender..
NW1.2	With a capital "C" the Church is where communities are able to connect, grow, and serve. There are many things for which the Church must atone and unfortunately it has yet to fully look at all the harm it has done. An organization where we can live out the call of Christ and yet there are many whose ears have grown deaf. At [name redacted for anonymity] Christian Church we understand that we are perfectly imperfect and that we are called together for spiritual formation which compels us to action in the world.	Again with the capital "C," the Church is called to be a place of refuge, spiritual growth, and action in the world. Many have lost the message of Jesus as they focus on what is in it for them. At APCC it is best expressed in our Opening and Affirming Commitment... we "that truly values and celebrates diversity... We are open to, and affirming of, the full participation of all as equal members in this one body... We shall love God... and love our neighbor as we love ourselves."
NW2.1	The church is the people God has called into being so that God can work through us in order to make God's presence known in the world. We gather to worship God in thanksgiving, to grow in faith and devotion, and to support one another as disciples. We carry this with us in our daily lives so we can witness to God's loving presence in the world.	The church's mission is to live out God's mission. God's mission is to bring all people back into relationship with God, other people, and all creation.
NW2.2	*Christian Church	To witness to the love of God revealed in Christ through worship, learning, nurture, stewardship and service, especially in the Lake City and NE Seattle area, but including the larger community and world.

NW2.3	To be a spiritual community. At our best, we share opportunities for spiritual growth, worship, and service to the community. At our worst, we get locked up in church politics, partisan patty cake, and are too sure we have the right answers. Best part of being in a smaller church is we can try different approaches to serve God and neighbor.	To provide worship open to all. To provide routes to spiritual formation to all. To pray, listen, and study. To serve God and Neighbor.
NW2.4	People following God's way in helping each other through his word, his teachings, his will.	To provide God's way through his disciples to others in the community.
NW2.5	To be God's people working for God's priorities in the world.	To be the visible body of God, to act as the hands and feet of God, to show the world how Jesus lived and how God would have us all live.
NW3.1	An institutional manifestation of the ongoing work of Jesus.	To touch the lives of people with grace, kindness, justice and love in the name of Jesus. We are to live out the principles of God. In particular those principles that are apparent in the life, teachings and ministry of Jesus.
NW3.2	First Christian Church*	To serve as Jesus served and called us to serve. (I'm on my phone and don't have access to the actual mission statement, but that's the gist of it.)
NW4.2	A place of safe refuge where I can be away from the burgeoning crowd. A place to feel comfortable about my beliefs & practice, renew & affirm my beliefs. A community of people who are generally honest, thoughtful, courteous and considerate. An extended family.	To provide support and guidance for the lives we lead. To provide an understanding of Jesus and how the stories of old relate to the current everyday life. To be there - when all else falters & provide a stream of ways to manage our own lives & thoughts in this rapidly changing world. To be consistent in the realm of chaos & influences.
NW4.3	The church is all God's people coming together to find meaning and make sense of a difficult world. We leave behind the clutter and chaos of daily lives to listen for God's vision for us as individuals and as a community of faith. We act together as one family regardless of our political beliefs to help each other and to find ways to serve our community. Through worship and prayer we prepare ourselves to be better listeners and to advocate for peace and spread love everyday.	We must be a movement for healing in a fragmented world. We must practice a radical welcome Jesus taught to ALL people everywhere. There is one God and all are welcome to the table. We must embrace the mystery of God through reconciliation, ecumenical worship and service. We must demonstrate through our service the life and work of Jesus; and we must teach our children about the power of love and the satisfaction of living a life of service and giving

NW5.1	it means to be the body of Christ in the world, providing a place of spiritual nurture for people of faith and to inspire service to the community around us and to the world	to share Jesus Christ in word & action and provide a place where the spiritually curious can encounter God and grow in faith
NW5.2	A place for people to gather for the common bond of learning the teaching of the Bible and building a community of faith.	To help others outside of the church building and build a community inside/outside of the walls of the church.
NW5.3	*Christian Church.	Our mission is to be a nurturing fellowship, committed to making Jesus Christ known, sharing our faith in God and offering service, spiritual growth, and a peaceful haven in our complex world.  Our core values are spirituality, acceptance, community, love and caring.
NW5.4	*Christian Church - Seattle, WA	Our mission is to be a nurturing fellowship, committed to making Jesus Christ known, sharing our faith on God and offering service, spiritual growth and a peaceful haven in our complex world
NW5.5	To be a representative of Jesus's mission and to be a part of carrying out his mission.	To spread the message of love, acceptance, and social justice that Jesus promoted.
SW1.1	Church is -a- gathering of the people of God; an aspect of the body of Christ that is neither the body in its entirety, yet it is still the body of Christ expressed in a local and corporeal sense.	To gather at Christ's table, responding to the gracious calling of God, and to grow into the hands and feet that will extend that table beyond the walls and into the world.
SW1.2	To be the Church means that we, who decided to follow Jesus, to study Jesus ways, and to work together to make our group conform as much as possible to Jesus' Way, we, who have joined up with the Kingdom of God, that one we pray for regularly, 'your kingdom come: your will being done on earth as it is in heaven,' are the Church. There is a mystical connection with all of Jesus' followers both active and gone before, for one cannot be Church alone.	The mission of the Church is to continue Jesus' ministry. Acts begins by telling readers that the first book (Luke) was about everything Jesus began to do and teach. Jesus' body, the church now has the responsibility to continue that doing and teaching. It requires serious study and discipline to get it as right as we possibly can. Jesus fed 5000; we at FCC Bremerton regularly exceed that number in our giving to the Foodline and Backpack ministries.
SW1.3	We are God's people welcoming all who enter our building. All are invited to take communion.	To serve all people and offer them communion. Our mission is to serve those not just in our community but in our country and the world. We are accepting of all.

SW1.4	The Church is a community of people who have accepted Jesus as their savior and strive to live according to His teachings...	The mission of our Church is to serve one another, our community, and our world in a manner which would be pleasing to Jesus - to help those who need help; to teach those who ask for knowledge; to love one another.
SW2.1	A gathered and called community where we explore our faith, live out our faith in community in service of those who are in need, A sign of the kingdom in the heart of the city	to grow our faith, to serve and love our neighbors, to provide shelter for the weary, the lost, the abandoned and the doubters, to be open to all people from every walk of life, and to affirm their lives, to walk with each other on our faith journeys
SW2.2	First Christian Church*	
SW2.4	What so attracted me to the Disciples was the bold statement of being a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. I endeavor to practice this motto of love through Jesus the Christ daily; and every day is most challenging.	Again, I resonate with the mission statement of Disciples: "To be and share the Good News of Jesus Christ, witnessing, loving and serving from our doorsteps to the ends of the earth." This is why I choose to be a Disciple.
SW2.5	Simply, it is living out our favorite Micah quote: "Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God." To do this we follow Jesus' example, work together to serve others, love our neighbor, know who our neighbor is, love our enemies, letting them bring out the best in us, not the worst. We welcome all into through our doors, work and pray together (and individually), forgive. We live as individuals with various opinions, talents, hopes and in all things ask God's guidance.	Simply it is to share God's love with all that we meet, to welcome all who come, to love our neighbors, our enemies and all that we meet. To represent God in this broken world.

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**Responses to Survey 1, question 9.**

Identity code	Q9: Describe where you see your church in five years.
CENT1.1	I see a very different expression of our congregation five years from now than we currently have today. With the changing demographics of our community, I see us changing to more closely reflect the community in which we serve. I see fewer positions of authority held by older white males and increasing inclusion of women and Hispanic members.
CENT1.2	I believe we will continue to meet the needs of the less fortunate in our community. I do not anticipate any large growth since as new members come, others leave not our church but our community.
CENT1.3	I see my church still doing the Full Plate Dinners Monday evenings, Youth group on Wednesdays, Handbell choir, nesting still another church, using our building for many different community events/services, making layettes for the hospital and quilting/crafting days,
CENT2.1	I see our church continuing to reach out and serve our neighbors in various ways. I see our church continuing to find ways to use our facility to be a community partner.
CENT2.2	I see our church growing over the next five years. I also see us being a bigger presence in our community.
CENT2.3	I see the church growing in community outreach with members who are excited to live out God's plan.
EAST1.1	Encourage worship, prayer, Bible studies, fellowship and service in our Congregation Promote spiritual growth as we acknowledge the gifts and fruits given us by the Holy Spirit Work at becoming more visible in the community as we all share the challenges that face us Build a bridge of concern and commitment to our local youth Promote the love of Christ Jesus through our ecumenical relations, locally and globally Establish our Church building as a safe and usable facility, welcoming to all
NW1.1	We embrace the challenge to serve in a community where I estimate less than 1% of CH residents to worship any given week. In five years, we will continue our change process and be a vibrant church with meaningful ministries, worship and community experience. Journey is a primary theme for us. We are currently experiencing an influx of new residents attending and expanding our diversity. 5 years, whatever physical structure stands here, we will be a vibrant congregation always adapting.
NW1.2	Continuing to minister and worship on Capitol Hill... living out the call to embrace all... focused on how best we can contribute to the community around us, in Seattle, and across the world.

Identity code	Q9: Describe where you see your church in five years.
NW2.1	I see our church being a place in the local community that is known for being a place that is working for justice for the marginalized; a place for community events such as local musical offerings; a place for hosting relevant topics about justice and environmental concerns; a place where worship is welcoming to all and offers different opportunities to learn about and grow in Christian faith
NW2.2	I am not certain that our "new" church will still be sustainable in five years, but I hope we will be seen by then to be a significant member of the Lake City community, particular known for our service to the community, and our devotion to justice issues, and our warm and welcoming church community.
NW2.3	The people in worship when I got here will be dead. I would like to see us reaching people who don't know how to do church, or have been beaten-up with the gospel. I would also like to see us continuing to serve the hard pressed in our neighborhood, and creating a community hub in times of crisis.
NW2.4	Hope to see the church helping others in the community and providing services throughout many ways. <i>Taking a stand in civic matters, educating, feeding, helping</i> others in Gods way.
NW2.5	Hopefully, thriving with people and activity. I would want us to have multiple avenues of active mission work that members are directly involved in. Members feel like whatever the church is doing, be it worship or education or service, it is vital to their lives and they don't want to miss anything.
NW3.1	I see our church continuing its outreach to the community. We may not be in our current building, but we'll still be carrying on the work of Jesus.
NW3.2	We have such potential. IF, and that's a big if, we can grow awareness of who we are and what we do, we will be a vibrant, loving, giving faith community. We are already that, but we're declining. So, we'll need to let others know they can find meaning in this place. We may be multi-faith, as we welcome others into some type of interfaith worship center. We may be merged with another mainline congregation. But, we must adapt or die.
NW4.2	Providing a consistent place to be & understand the word of God while addressing changes with the growing generations. that may be thru updates in music & format while keeping the word at the front & promoting safe & sensible living.
NW4.3	We are a small but mighty church. I hope we will continue to be active in service to our community and that we will be leaders in the Poor People's campaign to address systemic racism, systemic poverty and environmental degradation. We believe we can grow by embracing social justice activism and that we can reach a whole new group of people disenchanted by evangelical religious politics. To maintain our level of commitment, we need folks to be inspired and join our church.



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Identity code	Q9: Describe where you see your church in five years.
NW5.1	I imagine us continuing to transform how we seek to connect our neighbors with God and becoming more of a neighborhood hub, both for the spiritually curious and for those who are interested in community connections
NW5.2	Our church is a good balance of older/younger generation. I feel the children attending our church will keep things going. I do feel like we have a hard time acquiring new attendees, but I also think that could be because people don't really know we are there!
NW5.3	The dynamics of the congregation will be different. I anticipate my generation will be preparing to become the church "elders" and take on additional responsibilities. Our youth congregation will continue to grow and we will offer more opportunities for the younger members. I don't know if the number of members will change much, but I anticipate the make-up of the congregation will change.
NW5.4	About where we are today; a smaller, but active and committed congregation; hopefully more externally focused and finding service opportunities in our community.
NW5.5	Still working with the community to do what we can to help. Continuing with a strong education program and promoting social justice issues and inclusiveness in our community.
SW1.1	I see mainline expressions continuing to struggle, as too many congregations -- particularly those outside of "a bible belt" socio-political geography that at least reinforces church membership and participation -- continue to embody Ammerman's "Golden Rule Christianity" in spite of the fact this outlook continues to find itself further separated from the lived reality of younger generations and disengaged from the greater missional calling God is issuing to the church in the here and now.
SW1.2	In five years we will have found some new ways to be leaven in Kitsap, as we have been with the beginnings of community service groups like Kitsap Habitat and Benedict House. We will continue to be a very generous congregation as we continue ministering as outlined in Matthew 25. Our structure will be changing. We will have competent music staff, and we will be having a great year-Clint's 7th, which is often the most productive year in a ministry. There will be joy!
SW1.3	I see our church at a crossroads. We are becoming an older generation and are drawing in very few younger members. We only have eight children in our church and only two attend Sunday School. If we do not start increasing our membership, we will dwindle down to where we cannot support our building and we will have to make a decision to close or sell our big building and close our church or find a small building and continue our church.
SW1.4	I believe that we are in a state of flux. If we choose wisely, I believe we can be a vital member of our community - meeting and helping people where they are and growing our (and their) faith. If we do not choose wisely, we probably will cease to exist in five years. None of us would consciously choose the latter, but some of us also struggle with change.

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Identity code	Q9: Describe where you see your church in five years.
SW2.1	thriving in a changed culture and landscape. Still focused on "listening for the Spirit's urgings"
SW2.2	
SW2.4	I see First Christian Church Olympia WA as a spiritual hub for all whose hearts are moved to compassionately care for the poor and marginalized of our community; connecting all facets of our community into deeper & deeper meaningful relationships as we lean into the challenges of this turbulent time of our species evolutionary journey into fullness..
SW2.5	I see several scenarios: First, a congregation that continues to serve the homeless, providing space and hospitality to all, with new folks in leadership and action roles. Second, continuing as a congregation serving others in a different way. I don't begin to know what that might be. Third, would see the congregation closing as a church and becoming a mission site. Many in the community are already becoming involved in volunteering and donating funds for our mission with the homeless.

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APPENDIX L  
SURVEY 2 PARTIAL RESPONSES

**Partial responses to Survey 2, questions 3-6.**

Identity Code	Q3: Define <i>one</i>	Q4: Define <i>holy</i>	Q5: Define <i>catholic</i>	Q6: Define <i>apostolic</i>
CENT1.1	No matter how many iterations of Christian communities we may find, they are all part of the same church.	Set apart for the work of sharing, doing and being the good news of God's indwelling love.	Universal: there is a place for everyone	Inheriting a tradition of faith and service going all the way back to the original apostles.
CENT1.2	One Christ, one God, one Holy Spirit. One body of God made of up all.	Giving God all praise and glory for everything.	Not sure.	Living our life delivering the good news of Jesus to all. Bringing the word of God to others.
CENT1.3	A single unit or body. We are all the same in our beliefs, regardless of our denominational leanings. God set certain people apart to do his work; we should be that people, too.	God-given or God-breathed. Following Jesus; He set His apostles apart for a special, unique purpose. One Father, One Spirit, One Son.	I've always understood this to be One church, many denominations, but one belief in the same God. It includes all races and beliefs.	We're trying to continue/do what the original Apostles did in ways of teaching/spreading the gospel. Unlike some churches, our denomination doesn't say we are a direct line from the original apostles.
CENT2.1	I believe the Church is "one," in that it is an earthly manifestation of the spirit of Christ. It is essentially "one," even though it is not uniform.	The Church is "set apart." It is unique in its mission and identity.	The Church is catholic in the sense that it is universal.	I affirm that the Church is Apostolic in that we are all followers of Christ, therefore all sent ones by Christ.
CENT2.2	One God	From God	Every one. Inclusion	Not sure. Maybe from the apostles
EAST1.1	One body of believers; united in the Body of Christ	Holy in terms of dedication and consecration to God	Universal body of believers throughout the ages	Perpetuated by the teachings of Christ's Apostles
NW1.1	One speaks to the single body of the Universal Church. While communities of faith differ in many ways, the pronoun "we" remains more	Holy speaks to the Church's life having the presence of God as it creator and sustainer. I am confident that such an endeavor as church, left solely	Catholic speaks to the universal, all inclusive nature of the Church. Across time and space, all faithful parts are included as one.	Apostolic speaks to the Church's nature of representing and re-presenting the Gospel life in love known in and through Jesus. It is

Identity Code	Q3: Define <i>one</i>	Q4: Define <i>holy</i>	Q5: Define <i>catholic</i>	Q6: Define <i>apostolic</i>
	accurate than to speak of "us" and "them."	to human devices, would have ceased to exist long ago. Instead, by the Spirit of Love, the Church lives. It is our task of faith to be of its life.		dynamic and on the move in the world, living and serving in his Way. The body (Church) acts to embody the Way.
NW1.2	While having many members and expressions of faith, we are all made one in the unconditional love of God. This is why when a part of the larger church takes a path other than expressing that unconditional love it pains all who consider themselves Christian.	The church is set apart from the ordinary and should remind us of the holiness found all around us. While appearing separate on the surface it is anything but that. When we seek to disengage our faith from our everyday life it can lead to the destruction of appropriate boundaries.	Again the expression of the variety found in God's oneness with all. It reminds us that all expressions are not the same yet have value in the world around us. When presented as Catholic we can experience restriction in that variety by narrowly defining way we come to God.	God's word is made manifest in the creation of humankind and is revealed in the lives of all. It is not just the recorded stories found in scripture, limited to those which have been recorded, edited, and curated. Each is an expression of God and thus carries a valuable story to be told.
NW2.1	What makes the church One is the reality that all people are related by virtue of being God's creation. The church is One in it's responsibility to live out God's mission, although, how that is accomplished will have many different forms.	Holy is to be set apart for God's mission.	I think Catholic (universal) emphasizes that God works through all peoples and contexts to bring about God's mission.	The church is a Sent people meaning that we are called to live out our faith in all aspects of our life. There is to be no separation for the Christian between sacred and secular and the ways in which we live because God's realm encompasses all of creation.
NW2.2	I believe that it is God's will that the Church be One, which Jesus also prayed for, meaning that the Christian church as a whole needs to be ecumenical and work toward reconciliation between various church bodies- we	I am not certain what the term "Holy" means in this context, except that the Church has a special connection to God, and is an expression of God and the Holy Spirit in the world.	I really do not know what this means, although I know it is a broader meaning than referring to the Roman Catholic church. It may refer to the wholeness and inclusiveness of the Church.	I assume that "apostolic" refers to the mission of the church to go into all the world to spread the gospel, but may also refer to the handing down of traditions and leadership way

Identity Code	Q3: Define <i>one</i>	Q4: Define <i>holy</i>	Q5: Define <i>catholic</i>	Q6: Define <i>apostolic</i>
	represent the whole Body of Christ, with a variety of gifts, etc.			back to the beginning of the church in Jesus' time.
NW2.3	I believe there's a difference between unity and uniformity. The challenge is to not let our differences get in God's way.	I have a daily practice of prayer, meditation, and study, and I'm still none too certain what "Holy" is. But in all this work within a congregation of cranky old people, we get to dope this out. Some of the best things in church happen without committees or budgets.	The work of church that's universal is to love God, and to love one's neighbor. The rest is mere governance and other committee meetings.	Our spiritual ancestors include some wonderful people, but also some good examples of bad examples. My job is not to set off another war between protestants and Rome, or Islam, or whoever.
NW2.4	Each person works for God.	Spiritual work of God's people.	Faith	God's word prevails.
NW2.5	United, one under God	Attending to things of God, not things of this world	I think the small-c catholic means united or universal	In the tradition of the apostles, bringing people to faith and living out the ways of Jesus
NW3.1	I understand this to mean "one church" in teachings, sacraments, etc. But we are so segmented and, increasingly, polarized in the US today that denominations and congregations within them are not of one on hardly anything. United Methodists may split; many congregations have.	The church is "holy" because Jesus founded it. He'd be ashamed of how it has turned out for the most part. I recently found a Facebook group named "Christians Tired of Being Misrepresented" which appears to be populated by those who seek to focus the church on the mission of Jesus.	Catholic as in "universal." Not so in today's world. Progressive Christians have more in common with progressive Muslims and Jews than with fundamentalist evangelical Christians.	The apostles propagated the church. Professing this without an understanding of the languages and cultures of the early Christian world is folly yet we've done this for generations. Indeed, though many of our pastors have studied church history from these perspectives they still repeat the creed.

Identity Code	Q3: Define <i>one</i>	Q4: Define <i>holy</i>	Q5: Define <i>catholic</i>	Q6: Define <i>apostolic</i>
NW3.2	We are to be united in our love for one another, for God's people, in our care for all of Creation. We may be divided by our denominational politics (and even our religions), but our goals, our journey, the love of God bring us together.	Our sacred ways and duties bring us before God and keep our eyes upon the One we serve; we need to remember why we do what we do; our words & deeds are often our own, but, as followers of Christ, we should endeavor to be "living for Jesus, a life that is true"	Little "c" - universal - God is for everyone; God's love embraces everyone. We may come to God via different pathways, our journey in Jesus' footsteps being just one, but it is still a journey to God.	This is difficult, as the apostles were sent out to make disciples of all nations. Christians have often been overly zealous in their efforts to "make disciples," as evidenced by the Crusades. I imagine Jesus was more of a mind that we go and share the good news of God's love & grace for all people.
NW4.2	one - of one body, one mind set with a common understanding and goal	sacred, honored	universal, all encompassing	promoting the beliefs as presented by the apostles; living as an apostle
NW4.3	One body of Christ which means together we believe that Jesus was the child of God who became human to teach and lead us into a better understanding of God's love.	We celebrate a holy union, communion sacred faith with Christ to God	Do not know	We share the good news of Jesus' amazing life
NW5.1	there is one church in the world, that is the body of Christ, which is manifested in many forms and traditions	we were gifted at Pentecost with the Holy Spirit and seek to foster awareness of that which is holy all around us	the Church is universal - it includes all who consider themselves followers of Jesus Christ (also I grew up "big C" Catholic so it always connotes to me a sense of 'being in communion with' one another; for Disciples of Christ that also includes Christians across all traditions and denominations)	we have a mission that has been passed on to us from the very first followers of Jesus
NW5.2	Everyone is welcome	I do not know	I do not know	I do not know

Identity Code	Q3: Define <i>one</i>	Q4: Define <i>holy</i>	Q5: Define <i>catholic</i>	Q6: Define <i>apostolic</i>
NW5.3	I understand the "one" church to consider what Christians have in common and their belief in one God.	I understand the word "holy" to mean set apart for a special purpose by and for God.	I don't know.	I understand the term "apostolic" to mean the Church is founded, in large part, on the teachings of the apostles.
NW5.5	All together, working as one.	Being the best role model or example of God's love. Living out his example.	Unsure	Being a follower of God.
NW6.1	This refers to the overall unity of the church - that even though we may have split into numerous denominations and iterations of Christianity, we are still all following Jesus and are therefore "one."	This refers to the fact that the church is following God, and therefore exists as a holy space. There is intentionality in church that we are providing a space for spirituality to flourish.	I associate "universal" and "all-embracing" with this term, which to me means embracing all people and all of creation as a welcome and integral part of the church.	This refers to continuing the traditions of those who came before us, and recognizing that we are not the first ones to try to do church and we won't be the last.
SW1.1	If we are the one body of Christ, then the oneness of the church goes without saying. If we think of ourselves as the resurrecting body of Christ, then it is inevitable that we are all one, even as we are diverse and different in countless ways.	While we are no more or less holy than any other aspect of God's beloved creation, we make the church holy by choosing to embrace that holiness as a guide for how we live, worship, etc.	While some take the universality or catholicity of the church to be exclusionary (particularly with regard to interfaith or non-faith matters), I choose to understand catholicity as simply being another expression of oneness.	Seeing this as grounded in a hierarchical understanding of authority and a preference for mythic historicity, I find the apostolic nature of the church to be not only unhelpful, but potentially harmful. God is able to raise up apostles from the rocks!
SW1.2	Eph 4: 4-6: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God. We are unified by our relationship to God which is taught and demonstrated by Jesus. And Jesus said his purpose is to proclaim the Kingdom of God. Lk. 4:43.	Holy means we are set apart from the world because we are Kingdom people. (I wish English had a better word than Kingdom or realm of God.) We tend to ignore Jesus' talk about the Kingdom of God, but even then we	I know Catholic means universal, but It's not in my theological thinking.	This word has been coopted by people who have met Jesus through the Greek philosophical lens. Apostolic does not describe church helpfully for me. I am grounded in the gospels and New Testament



Identity Code	Q3: Define <i>one</i>	Q4: Define <i>holy</i>	Q5: Define <i>catholic</i>	Q6: Define <i>apostolic</i>
		pray for God's will to be done on earth, as it is in heaven, quite frequently.		writings-the apostles teachings, but our traditions reach back much farther. Moses ordained leaders.
SW1.3	I believe we are one with God..	Holy stands for the Holy Spirit which is three is one (Holy Spirit, Jesus and God).	We have placed our faith in Jesus. This does not mean we all should become members of the Catholic faith. It is our faith in Jesus.	Built on the teaching of the Apostles. We should follow the guidelines in the Bible and the teaching of the Apostles.
SW1.4	United, as one with one mission	of God and Jesus	I don't know...	learner/teacher of God's word
SW1.5	One God, one savior, one humanity, one race. one opposing force trying to win our prayers away from God.	God is Holy everything else is corrupt.	A creation of the Roman Empire to confuse and meld regional belief systems in order to maintain their power and build loyalty to the Roman empire.	After Jesus there would not be another, therefore the apostles repeating what Jesus did and said is true to Jesus's teaching, when apostles reinterpret and or make up their own stuff it is false teachings
SW2.1	I do not subscribe to the beliefs in the Nicene Creed, therefore I have not given much thought to the Church in these terms. As a member of the Disciples I understand one to mean that we are all connected and a part of one body, though we may differ in practice and theology.	Connected to the Spirit and a community that lives within the moral teachings of Christ	all inclusive – One	Passed on from a long tradition

Identity Code	Q3: Define <i>one</i>	Q4: Define <i>holy</i>	Q5: Define <i>catholic</i>	Q6: Define <i>apostolic</i>
SW2.2	That all Christians are equal and united under God. There are no divisions of denominations in God's eyes. Because the Nicene Creed then refers to Jesus, I can't extend 'one' to all faiths,. But, if we leave the phrase separate, all faiths are equal and united under God.	All people belong to God and God's love makes all people blessed and holy.	Small c catholic, a common history	Apostles of Christ, followers of Jesus, a priesthood of all believers.
SW2.4	Ideally we are all one. Pragmatically, this is a goal we strive daily to achieve --- by practicing through each interaction throughout each day, to accept each other unconditionally. Jesus modeled this very difficult practice which Love invites us to practice.	Rich in integrity and honesty.	Theoretically it refers to universal; although I doubt how well we as church practice such inclusivity.	We live according to the teachings and practices of Jesus.
SW2.5	To me, this means we worship one God. We come together to worship our God. As many gathering together, we become one with God. And yet, how can that be? I believe this to be true but I don't truly understand it. That's one reason we gather to worship, to be a part of that oneness.	Holy is a way we describe God. It is God's presence that is with us always, where ever we go, what ever is happening, good or bad. It is something we experience when we pray or worship or recognize the beauty in this world that God has created. The words "Holy Ground" helps me see the HOLY.	We are a part of a bigger family than our one congregation that we know and love. We are part of a bigger congregation, across the country and around the world that we love without knowing any of them personally. And yet, in a sense we do know them, for we know our congregation and we know our God	I'm not sure I know the meaning of this word. It seems to be related to "apostles." I have heard this word many times, but to define it makes me realize I don't really know its meaning. Is there a feeling of wholeness in this term, maybe?

APPENDIX M  
SURVEY 3 PARTIAL RESPONSES

**Complete rankings for Survey 3, question 1: what does your congregation need to do to be sustainable in five years?**

Identity code	Grow community outreach/ social justice efforts									
	Increase membership/ reach new people	Down-size property or facility	Expand embrace of diversity	Become a spiritual "hub" for community	Build more community relationships	Clarify purpose and mission	Embrace innovative worship elements	Develop new/ younger leaders		
CENT1.1	8	9	3	4	2	6	7	1	6	1
CENT1.2	5	9	6	4	7	2	8	3	2	3
CENT2.1	8	9	1	2	7	5	3	4	5	4
CENT2.2	6	9	1	4	2	5	8	7	5	4
EAST1.1	4	9	5	2	3	8	7	6	8	6
NW1.2	6	9	5	1	7	8	4	3	8	3
NW2.1	7	9	4	8	6	1	2	5	1	5
NW2.2	1	9	6	5	3	2	7	8	2	8
NW2.3	5	9	7	1	3	4	8	6	2	6
NW2.4	1	9	8	4	7	6	5	2	4	2
NW2.5	5	9	8	4	3	1	6	7	6	7
NW3.1	8	2	3	5	1	6	9	2	1	7
NW3.2	4	3	6	1	9	8	2	5	7	5
NW4.2	1	9	6	3	8	7	4	2	4	2
NW4.3	1	9	8	7	6	4	3	2	4	2
NW5.1	4	9	7	1	8	3	5	6	3	6
NW5.2	1	8	9	5	3	7	6	4	5	4
NW5.3	1	9	4	3	2	8	7	6	6	6
NW5.4	3	9	4	8	2	5	6	1	7	1
NW5.5	3	9	2	1	4	8	7	2	8	6
SW1.1	7	9	3	8	4	1	6	2	1	2
SW1.3	2	5	7	4	6	9	8	1	9	1
SW1.4	5	9	6	4	2	3	7	8	1	8
SW1.5	4	9	6	1	8	1	5	3	7	3
SW2.1	8	9	7	4	3	5	6	1	7	3
SW2.2	2	7	8	1	6	3	9	4	5	1
SW2.4	3	6	4	1	8	7	2	4	3	4
SW2.5	7	9	4	3	5	1	8	9	7	2

### Responses to Survey 3, question 3.

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Identity code	Q3: Briefly describe the challenge from question 2, what you did to address it, and the outcome.
CENT1.1	We currently face the challenge of changing demographics in the community and the realization that our congregation does not reflect those changes. This has been acknowledged from the day I arrived and was stated as an issue the congregation wants help addressing. We are still in process of looking at every aspect of who we are and what we do to determine where changes need to be made. We have held a series of internal discussions on our understanding of our mission as well as engaging community leaders to try to understand the needs of our larger community
CENT1.2	Becoming "good" neighbors with those in our close proximity. Deciding how to best do that while not being disrespectful to their current church commitment. Organized prayer walks to pray for our neighbors at their locations and not try to interact with the residents unless they came to us.
CENT2.1	We are currently in conversation about being officially "Open and Affirming." The conversation started with a younger member of the congregation and the elders are leading it. It is still in process.
CENT2.2	[no response]
EAST1.1	Our greatest challenge is trying to connect with the parents of the grade school children who attend our Wednesday afternoon KidsZone outreach. We average about 25 to 30 kids on a regular basis, but we've had very little success in connecting with their parents. We have tried many different approaches, but have not found a true solution. In most cases, both of the parents are required to work, and one or both parents drive at least 60 miles to work each day. Consequently, when the weekend comes, the parents are focused on rest, relaxation, and time with their children leaving precious little time for building outside relationships.
NW1.2	The actions of a person in a small group ministry were negatively impacting the members to whom they were ministering. Those members brought their concerns to leadership who reached out to the individual in an effort to mediate and bring the relationships back into wholeness. The individual deflected and would not accept feedback. After agreeing to meet with the members, they chose not to hear them out and then left the congregation.
NW2.1	The pastor raised the question for us as to whether we would still be around in a few years if we continued to do everything the same. That led to hard discussions on being honest with ourselves and what we would need to change.
NW2.2	The biggest challenge recently was University Christian Church needing to decide whether or not to "close," to stay open in a reduced space, to combine with another congregation, etc. There was a lot of denial of our situation initially and a reluctance to make any decisions. What helped us the most was receiving an invitation from Lake City Christian to join with them in creating a "new " church, but we minimized how difficult it would be and how long it would take to "merge" the two congregations (big cultural differences. We were helped by an outside consultant from the national Disciples org., but we still have a long way to go- conflicts around by-laws, the interim pastor, etc.

Identity code	Q3: Briefly describe the challenge from question 2, what you did to address it, and the outcome.
NW2.3	I came from a congregation with a 69,000 square foot building, and less than 50 people in the pews each Sunday. Oh, and about 10 million in deferred maintenance. It took years to admit something was wrong with the picture. We are trying to blend with another congregation to form a new church, selling our old building and resettling in a smaller, better maintained building.
NW2.4	Changes in worship service that some people still are not able to accept. Keep trying new options.
NW2.5	Our challenge is in combining two congregations into one. Despite our common heritage in the DoC, our worship styles and organizational needs are quite different, and we're still figuring out how to get all of us singing the same song, as it were. We are working with national and regional leaders, some of whom originally downplayed the difficulty of this process. Outcome is yet to be determined.
NW3.1	We had a very long road to becoming an 'open and affirming' congregation. After a couple of cycles of starting the process and putting it on hold. We were able to make the transition smoothly with very little fanfare or resistance.
NW3.2	Our congregation is extremely socially giving and active. When new needs are brought to them, many members are eager to accept the challenge, while others merely see our limitations and potential burn-out. They are often limited by the roadblocks they, themselves, put in place. I can think of three recent examples wherein the "old regime" nearly deadlocked with people with new ideas. Those are our annual bazaar, our involvement with the Family Promise Program, and our serving of the monthly Community Meal. While it is true that our tiny congregation is stretched thin and the same people do nearly everything, it is many of these folks who were eager to step forward with the new programming and changes to the old. Some of our "traditionalists" were/are unhappy. They continue to tell us it won't work. They find fault. But, sometimes they lend a hand. And, sometimes, they think it was their idea the whole time. (Ah, group dynamics.)
NW4.2	Having a board member who perceives the By Laws and Constitution processes have not been reviewed or updated since forever. There is a push by that board member to simply write out new processes without reviewing the current processes or asking questions as to how, when, where or why the processes that are in place are written as they are. It is indeed pertinent to review and update such items, just do it in an informed manner with a consensus of understanding to reach the desired goals for the church body. The current processes were scrutinized by a critical committee & changed to meet standards less than 6 yr ago. This is a good time for review & update, perhaps not written to 1 person's wishes. Many of the current Board members are new to the church in the last 4 years & their understanding appears to be somewhat limited as they are being swayed by 1 person. The outcome is still in process & is causing some ill will among members & staff.

Identity code	Q3: Briefly describe the challenge from question 2, what you did to address it, and the outcome.
NW4.3	We are trying to increase lay leadership and encourage our Elders to take on more leadership roles in EVERY ministry and own the mission which is to be a movement for healing in a fragmented world. We want the Elders to think of concrete things they can do to further service activities to meet that mission. The problem is that don't think about being ministry leaders. They think of just being spiritual support to other members.
NW5.1	Becoming officially open & affirming after an challenging introduction of the matter by a previous pastor - who was subsequently fired. While we were O&A on paper, and increasingly functioned as such, that original vote 16 years prior had never been fully embraced or celebrated because of the dramatic events that followed. Also, some of those previously opposed to the O&A vote (a very small group) were still in the congregation and highly critical of the effort to claim our O&A identity. They attempted, unsuccessfully, to get our current pastor fired over the matter.
NW5.2	A short fall in income to cover end-of-year expenses. Honesty with the congregation. Asked for short term financial donations. I have not heard if it helped.
NW5.3	We had to decide whether or not to keep our former parsonage, which was then being used as a rental house. We talked discussed with the congregation at meetings and ultimately decided to sell the property.
NW5.4	Declining elderly leadership; Younger members waiting for "SOMEONE" to take charge and conduct the necessary business of the church. I don't know what to do to. Not enough members to keep it operational.
NW5.5	Decreased givings/offerings throughout the years. We are still working through it. We have been working on increasing giving and funds to the church from multiple sources.
NW6.1	Our main challenge has been growth, which we are still in the process of. This has mostly included flexibility on our part, and being able to deal with failure. We have tried multiple different avenues of growth, not all of which have been successful. This has meant creatively thinking about new solutions rather than giving up or admitting defeat.
SW1.1	<p>After two years serving as pastor here, I can see that not only is our congregation on the edge (probably an 8-10 year window) of losing its ability to support a full-time pastor, but our inability to grow our fellowship means we lack the time and talent to fully implement good programming without overworking and exhausting our volunteer base. I sense the following needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Structural change -- particularly in moving away from the (dys)functional committee system toward a governance and empowerment that is more agile, spontaneous, and permission-giving</li> <li>- Missional change -- growing beyond being Ammerman's "Golden Rule Christians" to become socially connected and engaged community of mission, and being able to do so in partnerships that are ecumenical, interfaith, and non-faith</li> <li>- Worship change -- evolving beyond a 1950's reproduction of Greatest/Silent generation worship stylings that have been perpetuated with only cosmetic changes by Boomers, in order to allow Gen-X leaders to create a church more responsive to their needs, and</li> </ul>

Identity code	Q3: Briefly describe the challenge from question 2, what you did to address it, and the outcome.
	<p>hopefully pave the way for engaging Millennial and Gen-Z people looking for spiritual connection and community that can't find it here now</p> <p>I've attempted to address this in an organic fashion by inviting the congregational leaders into study, self-reflection and self-critique, but there is a lack of motivation to address a visible problem (like dwindling membership) by experimenting with other possible ways of being church. Some of this is grounded in a rigid (mis)understanding of church that can't see beyond "we've always done it that way" and what I perceive to be the overvaluing of new programming as embracing adaptive change when we are still engaging in technical change. Whether this is due to a failure in understanding the different types of change, a failure of imagination due to limited experience of the breadth of possibilities for being church, both, none, or something altogether different is difficult to discern, since that answer seems to vary from leader to leader in this congregation.</p> <p>Essentially, the short of that previous paragraph is that I haven't been able to do much more than plant a few seeds here and there with certain leaders. So, I'm looking to shift gears and take a more active role in directing change rather than simply trying to inspire it on the part of some truly dedicated and concerned leaders and volunteers.</p> <p>And I honestly can't blame church folk -- my own or others -- for not seeing or understanding these needs. I didn't have an appreciation for any of this until I took both courses of the IMN interim training, an Alban workshop on "Holy Conversations," and solidified my learning by leading a congregation through its end-of-line decision making as a three-year transitional pastor. (Along with reflecting on a lot of the things I "failed" to accomplish at my first call, and seeing how I needed to grow into my ministry and leadership in order to help the congregation grow into theirs.)</p> <p>[redacted for anonymity]... I find myself in the midst of what I see as a clear need for adaptive change, and I don't expect to know the results of it until I end up leaving in a few years when they can no longer support me full time or we evolve into a way of being church that meets our local needs in our 21st century and I end up staying around for a few years!</p>
SW1.3	<p>Building had leak in roof which property committee did nothing about. It was ignored until leak in upstairs kitchen was so bad that mushrooms were growing on wall. Others not on the property team had to take action and get kitchen cleaned and roof repaired. Once other people were on board property began to react and kitchen was cleaned and repaired and roof was repaired so leak no longer occurred.</p>
SW1.4	<p>The challenge occurred when our basement flooded, and in cleaning the mess, the cleaning crew found asbestos. So...our Fellowship Hall has been off-limits for 4 months and will be for 5-8 more months. We've had to make do with a smaller space and a great deal of patience. And we aren't finished - we have to create a new space which will help us succeed in following our mission...</p>
SW1.5	<p>we are in the midst of rebuilding from a flooded lower level.</p>
SW2.1	<p>We recently opened a Day Spa (Day service center) for our 45 shelter guests. It opens at 7:00a.m when the shelter closes and closes at 5:00 p.m. when the shelter opens. It is a much needed service. We have known for years that it was needed, but we did not have the energy and the people available to manage it. In the last couple of years we have enjoyed an</p>



Identity code	Q3: Briefly describe the challenge from question 2, what you did to address it, and the outcome.
	influx of new congregants who are quite passionate about serving the unhoused and inadequately sheltered. One of those proposed the Day Spa and offered to be the point person. The struggle was in process. No one objected to the proposal they just felt like we needed to take the same amount of time in process as we spent with opening the Shelter. It is a case of the structure getting in the way. We had to have a good long conversation about why it would be okay to simply proceed since there were absolutely no objections. It took 3 weeks to open compared to the 6 months it took for the shelter.
SW2.2	This is a current problem. We decided to hire a bookkeeping service to get a simpler way to keep finances, and to stop being dependent on a single aging member of the congregation. The service is through the YWCA and is supposed to be training a woman. The congregant was extremely reluctant to let go and we allowed it to drag on for far too long. The cost of the service has not dropped as we expected. The trainee made many mistakes and has recently been removed from our account. The books are still not right. Meetings with the lead bookkeeper did not result in the clarity we thought. There will be another, final meeting to go over the errors line by line. If nothing changes, we will fire the bookkeeper and try again.
SW2.4	Our church has hosted a lower level Interfaith Overnight Shelter for four years. A proposal was presented to the Church Board that we open a 'Day Spa', inviting the guests from downstairs to spend their days in our large hall with access to kitchen and meals etc. Within record time, the Board accepted the proposal; communicated with the congregation and the church is now fully supporting our new ministry with the generous support of the greater community. God is alive and well among us all as we greet the sometime daily challenges involved as the life of the church continues and grows richer because we are part of an ever-growing downtown homeless crisis...
SW2.5	Challenge: Providing daytime place for shelter guests. 1. Explained the desire to provide this service to the Elders. 2. Met with shelter and Interfaith Works to determine ability to carry out. 3. Surveyed neighbors and community members to explain and seek support. 4. Requested permission from church board. Opened the day time "Day Spa." (I wasn't a part of this process so I don't know the exact steps.)