Foreword

Rev. Dr. Lonnie Richardson

From the beginning of the church, Jesus has been clear about what matters most. We are called not simply to gather people, but to make disciples. That calling has never changed, but the ways we understand it, live it, and faithfully carry it out must be revisited again and again.

This book, *Growing a Disciple-Making Church*, represents a work of intentional reflection. It grows out of prayer, conversation, study, and lived experience within a real congregation seeking to be faithful to Christ's call. It asks honest questions about who we are as a church, what we are doing well, and where we must be willing to grow.

Too often, churches drift toward measuring success by attendance, programs, or budgets. While these things matter, they are not the heart of the gospel. The true measure of a church's faithfulness is whether lives are being transformed and whether people are growing into the likeness of Christ in their thoughts, their actions, and their love for others. Discipleship is not an optional ministry of the church. It is the church's core purpose.

This resource does not offer quick fixes or simplistic formulas. Instead, it provides a thoughtful framework for understanding disciple-making as both a personal journey and a shared responsibility. It reminds us that spiritual growth happens in community, through intentional practices, honest relationships, service to others, and a deepening relationship with God. It challenges us to move beyond passive faith and toward active, lived discipleship.

I want to offer special recognition and deep gratitude for the extraordinary work of Jon Hanson, whose vision, discipline, and faithful persistence have shaped this book from its earliest stages through its completion. His leadership, careful thinking, and deep commitment to the church's mission are evident on every page. This work stands as a testament to his love for Christ and his passion for seeing the church grow as a disciple-forming community.

I also wish to gratefully acknowledge Barbara and Gary Zaiser, whose generosity made the printing of this volume possible. Their quiet faithfulness and support reflect the very spirit of discipleship this resource seeks to cultivate, and we are thankful for their willingness to invest in the life and future of the church in this tangible way.

This volume is published as a special edition celebrating the 25th anniversary of Fox River Congregational Church. It stands as both a marker of God's faithfulness over the years and a renewed commitment to the work to which Christ continues to call us. In that spirit, this edition has been presented to the Congregational Library and Archives in Boston, Massachusetts, preserving the story of this congregation's journey and witness as part of the wider historical record of the Congregational tradition.

This book is offered not as a final word, but as a faithful guide for discernment. It is meant to be read prayerfully, discussed openly, and engaged seriously. Whether you are a long-time member, a new believer, or a church leader, I trust you will find in these pages both challenge and encouragement.

My prayer is that this work will help congregations reclaim their identity as disciple-forming communities and help individuals grow more deeply as followers of Jesus Christ. May it lead us not simply to know more, but to live more faithfully, love more fully, and follow Christ more closely.

Grace and peace,

Rev. Dr. Lonnie Richardson, Founding Pastor, Fox River Congregational Church

FOX RIVER CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

GROWING
A DISCIPLE-MAKING CHURCH

Volume One

by

Jon S. Hanson

September 2021

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PREFACE

Fox River Congregational Church (FRCC) in Pewaukee, Wisconsin was founded in 2001. Early in our history the congregation spent several months considering well into 2003 an extensive document entitled *Vision: Building for the Future of Our Church* providing focus and contributing to how we are organized today. After several years of activity, effort and growth, we revisited the then current status of our church as to where we were with respect to being a discipleship-making church, and what might be done to improve our efforts to encourage, equip and support our church members (and others) to progress toward becoming more Fully Devoted Followers of Christ. A book entitled *Fox River Congregational Church: Becoming an Effective Disciple-Making Church* (2009) was written for the purpose of providing an informational base for strategic thinking about how best to create and implement a fertile environment to become more effective in our disciple-making efforts. The past ten years witnessed significant progress in our growing church. However, as is true with respect to any organization, a church which lessens its forward visioning efforts will ultimately plateau and then decline. Through the leadership of and discussions with our Senior Pastor Lonnie Richardson, it was clear that here at Fox River we should again undertake an in depth look as to how we can better grow as an effective disciple-making church.

The purpose of this resource book, entitled *Growing as a Disciple-Making Church*, as was the case with its predecessor several years ago, is to provide an informational base to aid in developing a strategic approach for more effective disciple-making. In doing so, this book incorporates much of and builds upon the previous efforts. As was true in our earlier efforts, it should be emphasized that this effort sets forth a vision from both an individual's perspective on growing as a disciple (follower) of Christ and from the church's perspective on growing disciples of Christ. Thus, prayerfully, this resource book will serve as a useful reference for both individuals in their personal Walk with Christ and for the church as a whole in helping people in their Walk.

A Task Force on Growing a Disciple-Making Church, consisting of Reverend Lonnie Richardson, Reverend Ardie Johnson, Jon Hanson, Randy Johnson, Mary Beth Miranda and Barbara Zaiser, has undertaken a several month comprehensive review of this resource book leading to incorporating some changes both as to content in general and recommendations in particular. The Task Force achieved unanimous concurrence as to both.

It is anticipated that book in some form will be made available to every member of our church for at least four reasons. (1) The book serves as an informational base for our members when considering whether to adopt the recommendations ultimately proposed in enhancing our disciple-making efforts. (2) The book offers an opportunity to heighten one's own individual awareness as to the nature of becoming a Fully Devoted Follower of Christ and sets forth ways of doing so. (3) This book may spark interest for people to become involved in the implementation of a disciple-making process and to provide a resource book helping them to do so. And, (4) if we as a church are to embark on a fundamental effort, prayerfully rooted in a sound vision, it is essential (i) that we understand what we are doing and why, (ii) that we are

committed both intellectually and emotionally to doing it, and (iii) that we are on the same wavelength.

This resource book is not being presented to the congregation as a *fait accompli*, but rather as a basis for consideration by and opportunity for input from members of our Congregation. The Task Force wants the Congregation to have the full opportunity to be involved before final recommendations are presented to the Congregation for action.

It is our fervent hope and prayer that the process of considering this material will (1) stimulate broad participation throughout the church in discerning God's vision for the future of our church, (2) will create the space, time, and opportunity for meaningful and honest dialogue among members of the church in a caring and supportive setting, and (3) will enable members of the church to give substantive input to the expression of a faithful, hopeful, and compelling vision to guide the Fox River Congregational Church into the future. It is also our hope and fervent prayer that this effort will not only contribute to our church becoming a more effective disciple-making church, but also that it will contribute to encouraging and assisting individuals in progressing in their own personal Walk with Christ.

Jon S. Hanson
July 2023

PART ONE:
DISCIPLE-MAKING IN A CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Different churches vary in their approaches as to what they are about. Churches today reflect different approaches or mixture of approaches as to their mission, their specific roles, and their ways of seeking to fulfill their mission. The discussion in this study focuses on rethinking the mission of Fox River Congregational Church (often herein simply referred to as FRCC or Fox River) and how to go about achieving it.

I. MEMBERSHIP MODEL OF CHURCH

Widely prevalent among churches today is the reflection of the *membership* model of church. In these churches, at least to a large extent, the focus is on the members of the congregation. When members' perceived needs and desires are adequately met, if they are satisfied with the worship services and other activities provided, and if conflict is avoided or minimized, then the membership can be counted on to do its part to keep the contributions flowing to pay the bills, salaries, and costs of ministry. Maintaining the church for the sake of its members is the primary even if the unstated goal of the congregation.[1]

The common cold of too many churches has been members' limited perception as to what constitutes a Christian life. Regular attendance in worship services, periodically serving on some board, committee or task force, satisfying members' desires, serving some members' needs and regular financial contributions to the church suffice as what constitutes a good Christian life. These churches focus is on serving the desires and the needs of their membership. As a consequence, churches often fail to encourage and help people focus on intentional discipleship leading to spiritual formation which embraces not only deepening one's intimacy with God, but also deepening fellowship with other believers, serving others and reaching out to the doubters, the unbelievers and the otherwise unchurched. The cost of the failure to make disciples is staggering. The vibrancy of the church is lost, the Great Commission does not get well served, and these un-discipled Christians may lead unfulfilled if not wasted lives.[2]

However, this is not to say that focus on the congregation is unimportant. Such attention enables meeting spiritual, physical and fellowship needs of its members. Such a church is often there for its people during times of life when connectedness to God is most needed. Such churches offer a comforting place for many people. Thus, membership model churches possess some strengths. But they also reflect weaknesses.

> Perhaps the greatest weakness of the [membership] model has been the loss, over time, of its vision for the mission of the church

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[1] Michael W. Foss, *Power Surge: Six Marks of Discipleship for a Changing Church* 16 (2000).
[2] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On being and Making Followers of Christ* 200-01 (2006).

> – a mission that can be characterized quite simply as participation in God's love in Jesus Christ for the world.[3]

It has been said that many traditional approaches, followed by churches today, as to what it means to be and to do church, don't work anymore. Too often people of faith have failed to live out their Christian faith. Congregations tend to focus more on maintaining their ministry and budgets than on growing disciples. Churches, commonly, either from the outset or from gradual development overtime, stray from focusing on the mission of God as they seeks to satisfy members' perceptions and desires. Churches should be shaped with a view toward God's purposes rather than simply fashioning churches with a maintenance or inward focus attitude to serve current members needs and personal preferences.[4]

> Churches need "to be less focused on what makes it happy and more focused on what pleases Jesus. … Most churches have worked hard to get to a place where congregational customers are happy — their needs are met. The problem is that we are not called to cater to customers. …[A] church does not exist for the comfort of its people. Actually, the Bible reminds us again and again that we are to "provoke one another to love and good deeds" (Hebrews 10:24), to "bear one another's burdens" (Galatians 6:2), and more. But, if your church loves its comfort more than caring for others, it loves the wrong thing."[5]

Those churches which over-focus on the needs of insiders eventually will only have insiders. When this occurs, a church misses its mission.[6]

New answers need to be discovered and implemented. Such answers can be found through the recovery of local churches traditional identity as disciple-making communities.[7]

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[3] Michael W. Foss, *Power Surge: Six Marks of Discipleship for a Changing Church* 16 (2000).
[4] Stuart Murray, *Church Planting: Laying Foundations* 124 (2001).

> The church is still one of the few organizations that exists for the sake of its non-members. Doubt that? Well, aren't you glad someone didn't decide the church was done before you were introduced to the love of Jesus? For sure you need to care for the people you have, but never to the exclusion of the people you're called to reach. Churches that over-focus on the needs of insiders will eventually only have insiders. And when that happens, you have missed the mission.

Carey Nieuwhof, "Why Charismatic Churches Are Growing (and Attractional Churches Are Past Peak)," OutreachMagazine.com, November 28, 2018.
[5] Ed Stetzer, "3 Things Churches Love that Kill Outreach," OutreachMagazine.com, August 27, 2015.
[6] Carry Nieuwhof, "Why Charismatic Churches Are Growing (and Attraction Churches are Past Peak)," November 18, 2018, outreachmagazine.com.
[7] Jeffrey D. Jones, *Traveling Together: a Guide for Disciple-Forming Congregations* 2 (2006).

II. CALL FOR DISCIPLESHIP

When his disciples saw Jesus following the resurrection, Jesus commanded them in the Great Commission. It has been said that the Great Commission is the greatest command, given by the greatest Commander, to the greatest army, for the greatest task ever. In it, Jesus commands that we, both individually and as a church collectively, be responsible, for carrying out the Great Commission to

> go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19-20)

The Great Commission serves as marching orders for the church and provides the benchmarks by which we measure success.

> Inherent to the Great Commission is the command to make disciples, which implies two types of growth - width and depth. We are to reach people from every nation on earth. That's width. We are to make true disciples of them, teaching them to obey all that he has commanded. That's depth. To be faithful, a church must vigorously pursue both.[8]

Not only does Jesus command that we to go out and evangelize people[9] proclaiming the good news and leading people to Christ, the Great Commission is more. Jesus also commands that we invite and lead people into the embrace of fellowship within the Christian family. And, he goes even further and calls upon us to make disciples. We are called upon not only to be disciples ourselves but also to "make disciples."[10] The Great Commission charges us to lead the lost to Christ, bring them into the body of Christ and then equip and support them to become more Christlike.[11]

> We often use the word discipleship in two different senses. We refer to our personal spiritual growth as discipleship - the process of becoming more like Jesus. But we also use the word to refer to a person or church's ministry of making disciples. So, when we talk about discipleship as a purpose of the church, to which are we referring? Both.[12]

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[8] J. D. Greear, "Deep and Wide: How Your church Can Pursue Growth," OutreachMagazine.com, August 2, 2015.

[9] Although the direct Greek translation uses the word nation, the Greek word is more typically translated as Gentiles. It is people, not nations, who are to be discipled. Of course, this makes sense since discipling a political entity, such as a nation, is impossible. Only people can be discipled and become disciples. Thus, Christ commands us to go and disciple all people wherever they are living their lives.

[10] Ed Stetzer, "Weeping for Willow's Disciples," Outreach Magazine (January-February 2008). .

[11] Larry Gilbert, *How to Influence Your Loved Ones for Christ When You Don't Have the Gift of Evangelism: Team Evangelism* 20 (2003).

[12] Brandon Cox, "Is Discipleship About Growing or Going?" OutreachMagazine.com, September 22, 2015.

Understanding the ministry of Christ and that of the early church clearly reveals that forming disciples of Christ is fundamental to the mission and the identity of the church. The responsibility for carrying out this function, both becoming a disciple and helping others do the same, falls upon all believers, not just upon church leaders. Churches make a fundamental mistake when they categorize discipleship as simply one of the ministries of the church. But rather, making disciples should be viewed as the core of the church's ministry and integral in all that the church does.[13] "[M]aking self-initiating, reproducing, fully devoted followers of Jesus… [is] the central mission of the church."[14]

The membership model of a church, which is a prevalent model for many contemporary churches, focuses on the membership of the congregation. Maintaining the institution for the benefit of the members is either the stated or unstated goal of the church. Chaplaincy is the model of ministry with the pastor functioning as a family or individual caregiver. He/she is expected to provide pastoral care, preach, teach and pray. Neither personal spiritual growth of members nor personal accountability for their personal spiritual journeys are high on the list of expectations. The fundamental weakness of this model has been the loss of the vision of the mission of the church as participating in God's love in Jesus Christ for the world.

The perspective of the discipleship model of church recognizes and elevates Christ as the center of both personal and public life and then living out the implications of that reality. A church which focuses primarily on members rather than on mission inevitably de-centers both Christ and the mission of God to the world.[15]

Although in the discipleship model, the senior pastor may still preach, teach, pray and render pastoral care, his and other leaders in the church primary function is to enable the church to offer spiritual support through emphasis on following of Christ through making disciples. In the discipleship church model, pastors are primarily leaders rather than chaplains.[16]

III. WHAT IS DISCIPLE-MAKING?

Christ calls for the church to make disciples. But what is a disciple? Being a Christian disciple requires more than simply accepting a certain set of beliefs, regularly attending worship services, volunteering some time, contributing financially to the church's ministries, and leading a decent life.

> What I see the Scriptures telling us is that a successful church is *where people's lives are being transformed and becoming more Christ-like*.[17] (Emphasis supplied.)

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[13] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* 36 (2006).
[14] Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* 38 (2003).
[15] Michael W. Foss, *Power Surge: Six Marks of Discipleship for a Changing Church 28* (2000).
[16] *Id.* at 32.
[17] Gearge Barna as quoted in Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism; Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* 18 (1995).

A Christian disciple is a person who seeks to learn from and follow Christ. *The key is personal transformation, i.e., becoming more Christ-like in one's thoughts, feelings and actions.* Being a follower of Christ is an on-going life-long journey of discerning and living out God's call to be the person God created us to be as we participate in his purpose in redeeming his creation in our particular time and place.[18] It involves active participation in God's mission rather than passive inaction.

After a person becomes a believer and accepts Christ as his Lord and Savior (i.e., has converted), he or she must then be taught and mentored. As a church, "we need not only a passion for decisions being made for Jesus, but also an equal passion for making disciples of Jesus."[19] Discipleship embraces mentoring people in the foundations of the Christian faith, encouraging them, and praying for them so that they may follow Christ more fully.[20]

> [Disciple-making] is the process of helping people become more like Christ in their thoughts, feelings and actions. This process begins when a person is converted and continues throughout the rest of his life.[21]

IV. DISCIPLE-MAKING: CORE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

As considered above, too commonly, churches fail to significantly grow their members toward more Christ-like lives. Rather their primary focus is on church maintenance, budgets and personal preferences instead of developing and implementing a strategic approach for disciple-making. Disciple-making is (or should be) at the core of a church's ministry. Failure to do so ignores Christ's command and disserves a church's members as well as others whom the church might influence.

Discipleship occurs within a community of faith which is essential in forming disciples. Only a community of faith offers the setting, the resources, the relationships, the variety of gifts and experiences essential for disciple formation. It takes a community to form a disciple. We do better in a community which helps us than attempting to follow Christ and practice spiritual disciplines alone. For among other reasons, in community, others encourage us and hold us accountable for our intentions. More specifically, it is the community which offers the experiences of deepening, equipping and ministering that form disciples. It creates expectations and motivates commitment. It is essential for a church to offer experiences which encourage, equip and support people in developing and ingraining spiritual disciplines which lead to the

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[18] Jeffrey D. Jones, *Traveling Together: a Guide for Disciple-Forming Congregations* 43 (2006).
[19] Dan Kimball, "Sacred Mission: Beyond Trends," OutreachMagazine.com, February 11, 2013.
[20] *The New Apostolic Churches* 144 (C. Peter Wagner, ed., 1998).
[21] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message & Mission* 106 (1995) (hereafter referred to as Warren (Church). Warren is an author and Senior Pastor, Saddleback Valley Community Church (California).

strengthening and transformation of character as an integral part of their lives and equip people with the habits needed for spiritual growth, i.e., spiritual disciplines.[22]

Unfortunately, a low condition of discipleship is rather widespread though the Christian church. A common cause has been church leaders' reluctance to call their people to discipleship. Perhaps this is viewed as asking too much from people. Such attitude may stem from a fear that people won't come back. People will flee to an "entertainment church" if we ask them to commit rather than simply to be spectators at a performance.

In the post Christendom world, the common wisdom seems to be that churches should lure seekers by focusing the message around faith's relevance to life's daily challenges. Typically, this is done by appealing to self-interest, felt needs, personal fulfillment and personal search for happiness. Thus, not unexpectedly, too often the message as received by the hearer is that Christianity is all about me rather than about becoming a follower of Christ.[23]

This is not to suggest that preaching and teaching relevance of the faith to a person's life is inappropriate or wrong. Studies have shown that young adults are much more likely to attend and remain in church when they consider preaching and services relevant to their daily lives. Relevance matters. But care needs to be exercised in the manner that this is accomplished. The goal of simply trying to lure people in and/or to stay is an insufficient basis for ministry.[24]

Churches commonly avoid putting disciple-making at the center of its ministry. Among other reasons, such failure appears to be a response to people's aversion to concepts such as submission, accountability, vulnerability, confession, study, sacrifice and discipline. Or, perhaps it is simply because people don't want interference in how they live their lives.[25]

However, starting with a no pain gospel leads to disillusionment since it will not deliver on its promise. It is only when we lose our life for Christ's sake that we find life. The irony is that our fear that we will lose people if we call them to commitment has proven unfounded. Growing churches tend to be those appealing to idealism and sacrifice by calling people to participate in the greatest effort of all – God's rescue mission through his church.[26]

Thus, the issue is posed for all churches is whether enough being done to call and expect people to discipleship? Is there sufficient broad-based understanding as to what discipleship is all about? Are we sufficiently challenging people and getting their commitment to grow toward a more Christ-like life? These are issues which need to be addressed.

Even though vital, this is unlikely to happen without a deliberate plan and without people helping people. "It is the church's responsibility to develop people to spiritual maturity."[27] As here at Fox River Congregational Church, our Senior Pastor Lonnie Richardson has emphasized,

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[22] Jeffrey D. Jones, *Traveling Together: a Guide for Disciple-Forming Congregations* 44-45 (2006).
[23] Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Few Disciples at a Time* 50 (2003).
[24] See Stezer at 126.
[25] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* 24 (2006).
[26] Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship Making Disciples A Few At A Time* 50-51(2003).
[27]. Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message* 106 (1995).

"[t]his in not optional. We must do it."[28] (Emphasis supplied.) The challenge for the local church is to respond to and live up to the expectation which God has for his church. "When we cease to form disciples, we cease to be the church...."[29]

As a church, we are called not only to reach people, but also to teach them. After someone has made a decision for Christ, he or she must be discipled. It is the church's responsibility to help develop people to spiritual maturity (i.e., grow toward a Christ-like life). This is God's will for every believer. Paul writes that Christ gifted people in different ways for service

> ...so that the body of Christ [i.e., the church] may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and *become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.* (Eph. 4: 12-13) (Emphasis supplied.)

Churches may perform good deeds in the community, but service organizations do also. Churches may offer fellowship, but so do fraternal organizations. Churches may assist people with their lives, but so do self-help and recovery groups. Churches may worship, hold Sunday school and hold board and committee meetings. However, the only question that really matters is whether a church encourages and offers real opportunities for people to experience the transforming love of Christ in ways that touch their greatest needs and highest hopes and do so in ways which lead them to be people that God wants and created them to be. *The key to leading people to becoming what God intends them to be lies in the recovery of churches' identity as disciple forming communities.*[30]

Thus, as a church, we at FRCC need to accept and embrace the responsibilities of not only reaching out to and leading people to Christ, but also teaching our members (and others) that each person is confronted with a choice of whether or not to follow Christ and what this means. The nature of the church environment either contributes to people remaining stuck in their spiritual growth or the congregational environment encourages spiritual growth. To avoid the former, it is essential that churches return to *transformational discipleship, i.e., to create the expectation for each person to grow toward a more Christ-like life and to encourage, equip and support him or her in doing so.*

This responsibility is not age specific. That is, the church is responsible for discipling persons of all ages whether adults, youth or children.[31] Obviously, the manner in doing so needs to be age appropriate. Nevertheless, children and youth programs, activities, etc. should be designed and implemented in a manner contributing toward their spiritual growth based upon the mission of the church.

Furthermore, disciple-making is not solely a communal activity. It requires that each member individually engage in the process of encouraging, equipping and supporting another in his or her following Christ. That is, disciple-making involves journeying with others to grow in

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[28] Fox River Congregational Church, Minutes of Task Force on Disciple-Making, October 29, 2008, p.2.
[29] Jeffrey K. Jones, *Traveling Together: A Guide for Disciple-Forming Congregations* 66 (2006).
[30] *Id.* at 49-50.
[31] Ed Stetzer, "Strategy Matters in Fast Growing Churches," OutreachMagazine.com , October 28, 2014.

the knowledge, the virtues and the character of Christ. Both becoming disciples and contributing to forming others as disciples is the responsibility for all believers individually, not just the church collectively. Disciple-making is an individual as well as a communal responsibility.

Regardless of whatever else it does, the only question that really matters is whether a church encourages and offers real opportunities for people to experience the transforming love of Christ in ways that touch their greatest needs and highest hopes and do so in ways which lead them to be people that God wants and created them to be? *The key to leading people to becoming what God created them to be lies in the recovery of churches' identity as disciple forming communities.*[32]

C. S. Lewis said the purpose of the church is to "draw people into Christ and make them little Christs."[33] Jesus gave the mission to make disciples. Thus,

> [T]he church urgently needs to … establish the biblical mission of seeing Christ formed in individuals as the foundational mission of biblical community.[34]

Disciple-making must be the core be a church's ministry.

Throughout this document, we focus on becoming a more effective disciple-making church. However, in doing so, we need to be clear as what is and is not meant by the term disciple-making. As individuals and as a church, we cannot make people become disciples. As discussed more fully in PART TWO, Section III.B.2.*b*. (2) below, each person has a choice. It is God, through the Holy Spirit, working in the life of a person and that person positively responding which causes real transformation to takes place. God is ultimately responsible for transformation. However, a church can vitally contribute to bringing people into experiences in which God's transforming power is more likely to occur. Leading and bringing people into such experiences is what we mean by the term disciple-making.[35]

V. CAUTION: CONSUMER MALL CHRISTIANITY

Since the Renaissance, people have moved God out of the center of their lives and replaced him with themselves. The focus on individual rights, thoughts and actions are paramount. This was a fundamental shift from the view that valued community and, in religious terms, the congregation. The congregation/the community had served as the basis for Christian life. It was about God, not about self. The congregation reflected a community where disciples learned to love God by loving one another. However, individualism turns a congregation into a consumer enterprise. The gospel is recast into consumer items, entertainment, adventure and problem solving. Too often, churches have become essentially providers of religious goods and

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[32] Jeffrey D. Jones, *Traveling Together: a Guide for Disciple-Forming Congregations* 50 (2006).

[33] As quoted in *Randy Frazee, The Connecting Church: Beyond Small Groups to Community* 66 (2001).

[34] Randy Freeze, *The Connecting Church: Beyond Small Groups to Community* 66 (2001).

[35] Bobby Gruenewald, "Discipleship: Are We Hosts or Producers?" OutreachMagazine.com, December 15, 2015.

services. Rather than offering a full and integrated approach to discipleship, churches have often become the supplier of an array of religious (or sometimes not necessarily religious) goods, services and activities from which the religious consumer chooses and rejects according his or her tastes as to what best suits his or he needs and/or desires. In effect, too often churches become a religious mall supplier goods and services rather than makers of disciples.[36]

Elizabeth Steele drives home the caveat about drifting into or intentionally pursing a consumer mall or needs approach to doing ministry.

> Defining the church's ministry by responding to people's needs is a common notion; but, because of the blurred line between want and need, no matter how much we speak of needs or perceived needs, it puts the church in the position of being defined not by its faith or history but by people's wants. This trivializes the church, its mission, and its outreach. It eviscerates the heart of the church's message and cuts the church off from its identity as the people of Christ.[37]

The consumer mall approach, be everything to everybody, to doing church fails to form people into the image of Christ. The consumer Christian culture makes us become more while Christ becomes less. We don't live sacrificially and we aren't available to others. This is the antithesis of what Jesus calls us to be. Churches are accomplishing the right thing – gathering people into a congregation – but in the wrong way – cultivating consumer Christians.[38]

FRCC has not succumbed to the consumer mall approach to Christianity. However, being aware that churches have fallen into this trap in efforts to attract people to the church serves as a red flag for us as we develop various programs, activities and services. In all that we do, we need to be cognizant of the ways we bring people in and seek to retain them. We are not here to provide religious goods, services and activities to suit the likes and dislikes of the religious consumer. We need to keep our prime focus on God and growing in our personal relationship with Christ and into a more Christ-like life and bringing in other people to do the same.

VI. ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF A DISCIPLE-MAKING CHURCH

Extensive research of over 400 churches suggests a very strong relationship between a simple church process and church vitality. In general, churches with a simple process for reaching and maturing people are more effective in expanding the Kingdom.[39]

This is not because such churches have moved away from their doctrine and convictions. Sound biblical doctrine is foundational in growing churches. On this, no compromise should be permitted. However, in a complex world, people are responding to simple.

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[36] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* 295-296 (2006).
[37] Elizabeth Steele, "How Responding to People's Needs Hurts the Church," June 9, 2008 (Alban Institute.org.).
[38] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* 296 (2006).
[39] Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples* 14 (2006).

The crucial question is how can we most effectively structure what we do to make disciples? "Spiritual growth is the process of believers becoming transformed into the image of Christ." To be a simple church, *everything a church does must mesh together to engender life transformation.* Simple churches design and create experiences for spiritual growth. A simple church has been defined as

> *a congregation designed around a straight-forward and strategic process that moves people through the stages of spiritual growth.*[40]

The process must clear, easy to grasp. The leaders know it and the people understand it. Complexity is not welcomed. A multitude of new programs are rejected. The process is tied to the purpose of the church. The process *moves people*. Programs are tools to foster this movement. The movement is *through stages of spiritual growth,* also referred to as *stages of discipleship.*

Most churches lack a simple discipleship process. They are not structured around spiritual formation. Consequently, they are making little impact. The research is convincing. Simple church strategy offers a much greater likelihood of creating an effective church.

To be an effective disciple-making church, we need to create disciple-making experiences in three key areas:

1) defining our disciple-making *mission* with clarity (considered in PART TWO below),

2) knowing the *content* of disciple-making experiences (spiritual disciplines) which leads to the accomplishment of the Mission (considered in PART THREE below), and

3) understanding the nature of the process (i.e., stages of disciple-making) to experience the content of disciple-making (considered in PART FOUR below).

PART FIVE considers program content in the context of the various stages of discipleship. Then PART SIX considers recommendations for implementing the vision for disciple-making.

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[40] *Id.* at 60.

PART TWO:
DISCIPLE-MAKING MISSION

The first of the three of the principal elements undergirding an effective disciple-making church is defining and embracing the mission of the church founded on the two Great Commandments and the Great Commission.

I. MISSION: ESSENTIAL FOUNDATION OF A DISCIPLE-MAKING CHURCH

A. NEED FOR AND UNDERSTANDING OF FOUNDATIONAL MISSION

1. Role of Mission

Building lives is what ministry is about. It is what we and our church are called to do. Paul said some people are

> to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, *so that the body of Christ may be built up*.... (Ephesians 4:11-12) (emphasis supplied)

Building up the body of Christ is an on-going process – one person at a time. "Believers are challenged to continue growing in the faith."[41] The role of the church is to partner with God in this great building project.

> [We] are to build the spiritual house by bringing people into a relationship with God. And... [we] are to build the lives of individuals by helping them progress in their faith.[42]

In order to effectively build the body of Christ, we need to know what this involves. What is it that the members of the church individually and collectively as the church need to do? Activity with no purpose is nothing more than activity. The adoption and acceptance of the purpose or purposes of a church encourages church members with a sense of direction which, in turn, generates a driving power and energy. A well defined mission purpose is essential for a church to effectively respond to God's calling.

> The number one task of leadership is to clarify and communicate the purpose and vision of the church.... A statement of purpose is not just a hoped-for target; it is the church's reason for being and the foundation for healthy church programs. When churches stray

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[41] Rainer and Geiger at 110.
[42] *Id.* at 110.

> from being purpose-driven, they slip into becoming centered around the problems of people, program and property.[43]

2. Distractions

To be an effective disciple-making church, a church must discern and deal with distractions from their foundational purposes. Such distractions commonly found in churches leading them astray from the basic mission include problems of people, programs and property.

- *People Centered* – Many churches are people centered. They reflect the nature of the membership model churches considered in PART ONE, I.A. above. Of course,

> [p]eople matter to God, but they're not the first priority of the high-impact church. The most important question for a church is not, *What do people want but, What does Christ want to have happen in people's lives?* Only as Christians claim Christ's purpose for the church will ministry be in accord with His will.[44]

- *Program-Centered* – Too commonly churches become program centered primarily focusing and relying on their activities and traditions. These churches lose their relevance as a Christian church in contemporary society. Being focused on their programs, they are likely to lack flexibility and ability to adapt to changing cultural situations.

> To counter program-centered inertia, the question to be continually asked "*What kinds of programs will best help us accomplish Christ's purpose in the lives of our people?*"[45]

- *Property-Centered* – Since property is a large budget item, not uncommonly churches are dominated by property issues consuming much of leadership efforts for fund raising. Yes, there are seasons in a church's growth when significant attention must be directed at the church facilities, but not at the expense of sidetracking the church away from seeking to accomplish its purpose(s).

> The most important question concerning property is, "*What kind of property do we need to facilitate our programs designed to carry out Christ's purposes in people's lives?...* Buildings are tools, not temples. They are a means to an end, not an end in themselves."[46]

- *Problem Centered* – It is probably a rare church, if any, that does not encounter people problems whether they be conflicts, neediness, leadership failings, etc. People problems are inevitable and must be dealt with. However, the focus and energy of the

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[43] Linus J. Morris, *The High Impact Church: A Fresh Approach to Reaching the Unchurched* 119. (1993).
[44] *Id.* at 120.
[45] *Id.* at 120.
[46] *Id.* at 120-21.

church must not be diverted from carrying out its purpose(s). "A loss of purpose causes a church to lose vitality and often dies."[47]

In short, churches which center on people, programs, property and/or problems eventually lose their direction, hence their vitality. "*The antidote is to remain purpose-centered in Christ.*"[48] (Emphasis supplied.) The number one task of leadership is to [define or redefine,], clarify and communicate the purpose and vision of the church."[49]

B. CLARITY OF PURPOSE AND PROCESS

Unfortunately, church mission statements often are too clichéd, too ambiguous, too broad or too generic to orient a church's efforts.[50] An effective building process is founded on blueprints. They show not only *what* will be built, but also *how* to build it. A good builder does not simply "wing it" Successful builders commence with a clear design. The same is true when building spiritual lives. Effective disciple-making requires a clear disciple-making purpose (or mission) and a clear process leading toward achieving the purpose. Research demonstrates that there is a highly significant relationship between clarity of purpose and the vibrancy of a church.

"Clarity *is the ability of the process to be communicated and understood by the people.* "[51] Clarity offers certainty and eliminates confusion. Both the leadership and the people know how the church is structured to move people toward spiritual growth. The process (*how*) is discussed, taught and illustrated. Without clarity of purpose and process, commitment wanes. Understanding is a condition of commitment. Simple churches articulate a crystal clear process which all can grasp. Clarity needs to be articulated and presented with conviction.

Greg Ogden emphasizes that one of the underlying causes of the malaise in today's churches is their failure to discern and communicate a clear path to spiritual maturity. We need both a clear destination and a clear path for people to walk in order to understand and pursue the implications of discipleship.[52] Rick Warren emphasizes that "[i]nstead of growing a church with programs, focus on growing people with a process."[53] In one survey, 9 out of 10 believers expressed that they would seriously pursue their church's spiritual path if one were presented to them.[54] Process is needed to go along with purpose or mission. Clarity of both the purpose and the path (process) is essential for effective disciple-making.

A church needs to articulate a mission statement. The language needs to be biblically sound, personally compelling, and clear and concise enough to be understood and remembered. The mission statement must be communicated. Print it, preach it, teach it in classes and small groups, and make it known in as many forums as possible. The objective is to reach the point

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[47] *Id.* at 118.
[48] *Id.* at 121.
[49] *Id.* at 119.
[50] "What Difference Do You Want to Make," Alban Weekly, August 7, 2017.
[51] Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples* 11 (2006).
[52] Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship Making Disciples A Few At A Time* 52-53 (2003).
[53] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message* 108 (1995).
[54] Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* 54 (2003).

where every regular worship attendee can answer the question, "what is the church trying to do." The mission statement must be embedded in the culture of the church before it will become the guiding principle in the church's and its members' decisions and actions.[55]

Unfortunately, too many churches are ambiguous about their ministry purpose and/or the process to achieve such purpose either because they don't have them or because they are ambiguously defined. When the purpose and process are not clearly defined, confusion and frustration result. Defining the ministry purpose (the *what*) and process (the *how*) are essential for moving people from salvation to spiritual maturity and significant ministry. People within the church need to understand the purpose and the process since they are integral to the fulfillment of each. The process is for them. The end result is transformation of their lives.[56]

II. DEFINING MISSION PURPOSE FOR FOX RIVER CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

The foundation of creating effective disciple-making experiences is a crystal-clear vision of what we are about. Clarity requires that we answer two fundamental questions. First, what does God want us to become? Second, what do we need to do in order for us to become what God is calling us to be?

A. WHAT DOES GOD WANT US TO BECOME?

What results do we seek from our disciple-making efforts? What does God (hence presumably us) want to happen in the lives of the people (including ourselves) whom we are trying to influence? *What does God want us to become?* Answering this question offers clarity for defining the mission purpose of our church.[57]

Some equate the attainment of spiritual maturity with the completion of a plan or a program of classes and activities. Classes can be helpful. However, they should not be considered the determinants of spiritual growth. They can help people to be better informed about their faith. However, they do not automatically lead to spiritual maturity. Skill focused churches concentrate on training people to become proficient in certain skills for ministry. Bible knowledge focused churches stress biblical literacy. While skills and Bible knowledge are important in a person's spiritual growth, the ultimate purposes are not skills or Bible literacy. But rather, the ultimate focus should be on what the person will become[58] through life transforming understanding of the nature and character of God and our relationship to him.

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[55] Mark Mittelberg, *Building a Contagious Church: Revolutionizing the Way We View and Do Evangelism* 30-31 (2001).
[56] Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples* 111 *et seq.* (2006).
[57] Andy Stanley and Bill Willits, *Creating Community: 5 Keys to Building a Small Group Culture* 54 (2004).
[58] *Id.* at 54-56 (2004).

Spiritual formation is "a process through which individuals who have received new life take on the character of Jesus Christ by a combination of effort and grace."[59] That is, spiritual formation is a process of being conformed to the image of Christ.

> Scripture reveals from the very beginning that human wholeness is associated with the image of God. We are created in the image of God – (Genesis 1:26-27). The New Testament parallel to this is that we are to become the likeness of Christ – (Corinthians 3:18).[60]

A central theme of one of the most heralded Christians, Dallas Willard, is that a faith in Christ must recognize and believe that he knew how to live and that we can become like him (transformation) by living our lives around the practices he followed to remain in fellowship with the Father. Christ's life reflects the practice of spiritual disciplines. Hence, spiritual disciplines must become the center of our lives. The spirit of the disciplines is simply the love of Jesus coupled with the will to become like him.

David Claassen highlighted that Jesus, in his discipleship program, did more than simply educate his disciples.

> [Jesus] sought to transform them! Discipleship was more than so many credit hours of academics. It was a 24-7 process of spiritual transformation in which the Twelve were to become like Jesus. .... "Believers are to be on a journey that takes them ultimately to Jesus Christ and the call to be like Him." This is what "adult education" in the church is to be about: that we might come to know Jesus and become like Him. Our "adult education" ministries should promote *a process of spiritual transformation whereby we grow closer to Christ and become more and more like Him.*[61] (Emphasis supplied.)

Similarly, reflective of Willow Creek Community Church, it is said that

> Disciples are not just people with more answers to Bible questions or who attend more events or listen to more Christian radio. *Disciples are people who act like Christ, who are willing to train to be like Him, who practice the disciplines of prayer, solitude, worship, Bible reading and study, community, and ministry.* They are lifelong learners and lovers of Christ.[62] (Emphasis supplied.)

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[59] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* 19 (2006).
[60] M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *Initiation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* 16 (1993).
[61] David Claassen, "Great Small Groups: A Primer for Small Group Ministry in the Church," *Congregationalist* 3, 4 (Fall 2005).
[62] Bill Donahue, *Leading Life Changing Small Groups* 15 (2002).

It is God's plan for those who call upon his name and perceive themselves as being Christ followers to become like him in attitude and behavior. "Whoever claims to live in him must live like Jesus did." (1 John 2:6)

The church exists not just to collect followers, *but to support them along a growth path leading to transformation.* Transform people how? What do we want people to become? In short, our purpose as a church is for people to become more like Christ in their thoughts, feelings and actions as they live out their faith. Or, as similarly expressed,

> "Discipleship is unique conformity—conforming your life to Jesus and his way through your unique gifts, passions, abilities, and personality."[63]

B. WHAT DO WE WANT PEOPLE TO DO?[64]

The second fundamental question is *what do we want people to do* in order to grow more Christ-like, i.e., grow as disciples of Christ? This focuses upon the *how* people are going to reach the goals of becoming what we want them to be, i.e., growing into a more Christ-like life. Answering this *how* question requires clarifying our understanding of what it takes to grow spiritually.

Christ answered what it is that demonstrates a growing relationship with God. During his ministry, Jesus gathered disciples around him, he talked with them about what it means to be a disciple, they prayed together and there was opportunity for Jesus to correct their mistakes and teach them even more. In all of this, Jesus sought for his disciples to (a) go deeper into their own faith and relationship with God, (b) be a part of a community of faith, (c) grow in their ability to serve others, and (d) reach out to unbelievers and doubters, bring them to Christ and into the body of the church.

Jesus provides the model for discipleship. He teaches what we are to be about and shows us how. In the Great Commandment, we are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. And, we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. (Matthew 22:36-40)[65] Such spiritual maturity is measured by demonstrative growth in our love for God and others. Thus, spiritual growth involves four types of relationships.

(i) Intimacy with God – Jesus said "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

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[63] Trevor Lee, "Ten Seconds: Five Short and Meaningful Discipleship Definitions," unique conformity.com.

[64] This section draws primarily on Stanley and Willits, Andy Stanley and Bill Willits, *Creating Community: 5 Keys to Building a Small Group* at 61-67.

[65] The central point of Christianity is loving God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. This involves committing oneself to being loyal to God above all other loyalties, cultivating one's spiritual life (this needs to be worked at), controlling one's mental diet (we are what we think so control what enters one's mind), and continue loving God to the best of our ability. Lonnie Richardson, "The Mark of a Disciple," August. 24, 2008 (sermon). Lonnie Richardson is the founding and Senior Pastor of Fox River Congregational Church (Pewaukee, Wisconsin).

"God desires a special relationship with every woman, man, and child."[66] He invites us to a personal relationship. He urges us to bring our sin and doubts and follow him. "It's an invitation to a personal relationship with an invisible God who revealed himself through his Son, who was a visible person: the Lord Jesus Christ."[67] A mark of a maturing follower of Christ is the continual pursuit of an intimate relationship with God. This is achieved through, among other things, (a) loving *worship* of God and (b) experiencing a personal relationship with God through the learning and practice of spiritual disciplines.

(ii) Intimacy in Community with Believers – The second mark of a person maturing in his or her faith is regularly and meaningfully connecting with other believers. We need each other for mutual encouragement, support and accountability. This happens when believers spend time together. In short, share life together.

(iii) Serving Others – The third mark of growing in one's faith is serving the needs of others. All are created, loved and valued by God. Jesus calls upon each of us to serve both believers and unbelievers.[68]

(iv) Evangelism – The fourth mark of discipleship is partnering with God in reaching out to the unbelievers sharing the gospel and bringing them to Christ and to be a part of the church body.

In short, the *how* to grow toward becoming more Christ-like in one's thoughts, feelings and actions is pursuing these four relationships with God, with other believers, with those in need, and with those outside the faith.

C. DISCIPLE-MAKING MISSION PURPOSE FOR FOX RIVER CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

Clarity of purpose is the foundation for creating successful disciple-making experiences. Our mission needs to reflect both (a) what we want people to become – *purpose* and (b) what they need to do to get there – *process*.

1. Foundational Purpose

What does God want us to become? We are called to "go and make disciples…." (Matthew 28:19) We are called to be in the disciple-making business. Christ's life is the perfect

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[66] Andy Langford and Mark Ralls, *Beginnings: an Introduction to Christian Faith* 73 (2003) (a participant's companion). This was God's intention from the very beginning when he created man and woman in his image and sought to walk with Adam and Eve in garden. (Genesis 3:8-9)

[67] Andy Stanley, *Follow* 95 (2014) (Participant's Guide).

[68] E.g., "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." Matthew 25:40.

model for all. Christ is not only our Savior, he also is a perfect model for us to follow (i.e., be his disciple).

> The primary purpose of spiritual life is human transformation – real change in the essential nature of the person. God is in the business of transforming ordinary people… so that we express his character and goodness in our whole being. This is real transformation from the inside out – *learning to think as Jesus would think, to feel what he'd feel, to perceive what he'd perceive, and therefore to do what he would do.*[69] (Emphasis supplied.)

The fundamental mark of ministry success is the transformation of peoples' character.[70] We want people to grow toward becoming Fully Devoted Followers of Christ. To do so requires growing in the image of Christ, i.e. *growing toward a more Christ-like life in thoughts, feelings and actions.*

Thus, the foundational overriding objective of FRCC is *to expand the number of people committed to and growing toward living a Christ-like life (discipleship) in thoughts, feelings and behavior.* The product is transformed lives. The role of each individual is to strive toward a more Christ-like life. The role of the church is that "*we are in the disciple-development business. The product is transformed lives - an expanding body of Christ-like people.*"[71]

> What can we become as a congregation? A group of people who are on their way to being more like Jesus. And, if we hold to that aspiration, we will be extraordinary.[72]

2. Describe Purpose as a Process

The gospel uses the word disciple 233 times and the Book of Acts does so 30 times. However, the Epistles never use this term, but rather uses the terms saint, servant brother and witness.

> *Saint* points to the new character of the disciple – that a disciple has a new relationship with God. *Brother* points to the new redeemed communal relationship of discipleship – that a disciple has a new a relationship to other, Christians. *Servant* points to the new motivation of discipleship – that a disciple has a new motivation to serve to Christ [and in doing so, serve others] instead of him or herself. *Witness* points to the missionary responsibility of disciples – that a disciple has a new relationship to the world. The shift from the use of the word *disciple* in the gospel to the

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[69] John Ortberg, *Life You've Always Wanted* (Participant's Guide), 23 (2004).
[70] Dallas Willard, *Living in Christ's Presence: Final Words on Heaven and the Kingdom of God* 124 (2014).
[71] Jon S. Hanson, *Building for the Future of Our Church* 27 (2005) (revision of *Vision for the Future: Building the Foundation of Fox River Community Congregational Church* (2003).
[72] Ronald R. Johnson, "What a Congregation can Become," p.13, The Congregationalist, December 2020.

> terms *saint, brother, servant* and *witness* in the Epistles indicates that the early church saw discipleship as a multi-dimensional church-based corporate activity.[73]

As expressed above, as a church, our foundational purpose of disciple-making, i.e., growing people toward more Christ-likeness, is expressed in quite general terms. However, to effectively move from the fundamental purpose to action needed to achieve that purpose, some additional (albeit simple and clear) specificity reflecting the multi-dimensional aspects of God's call, is called for. Clarity of mission is the foundation for creating successful disciple-making experiences. However, the mission needs to reflect not only what God wants people to become (purpose), it also needs to express what people need to do to get there (process).[74]

3. Recommended Mission Statement for Fox River Congregational Church

Accepting the premise that our mission should encompass both (1) what we want people to become (*foundational purpose*) and (2) what they need to do to get there (*process*), it is here recommended that the following mission statement be adopted by Fox River Congregational Church.

MISSION OF FOX RIVER CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

The Mission of Fox River Congregational Church is to fulfill Christ's Great Commandment and Great Commission to encourage, equip and support all people in growing toward more Christ-like lives in their thoughts, feelings and actions by

- *connecting with God in a loving and intimate relationship as modeled by Christ,*
- *connecting with Christian believers through love, caring and sharing life together,*
- *connecting with people through lovingly serving their physical, emotional and spiritual needs, and*
- *connecting with people outside the faith through lovingly witnessing the good news of Christ and the power of God's love for all people, leading them to accept Christ as Lord and Savior, and bringing them into congregational life.*

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[73] Linus J. Morris, *The High Impact Church: A Fresh Approach to Reaching the Unchurched* 127-28 (1993).
[74] Rainer and Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples* 115 (2006).

This recommended mission statement includes the process of discipleship to move people along the path toward growing toward a more Christ-like life. "It provides clarity to the expectations of members through a... [mission] statement. And, it guides members through an unambiguous process of discipleship."[75]

This expression of our mission essentially reflects an integration of Fox River's current general mission adopted June 22, 2003 as part of our Constitution and the Discipleship Team's Disciple-Making Mission Statement adopted by the Congregation June 14, 2009. These two are parallel in content to the recommended mission statement, albeit not necessarily in the manner of expression. However, it is important that a church have only one mission statement. To be an effective disciple-making church, church leadership, teams and members must focus on one mission. Drawing on and interpreting differing language in multiple statements creates confusion as to what we are to be about. Different mission statements divert people into different directions. Unity, effort and resources become dissipated. Thus, it is critical that Fox River have only one mission statement which clearly expresses the overarching theme applicable to all church-wide efforts

4. Criteria for Effective Mission Statements

Evaluating the recommended mission statement by applying criteria for effective mission statements provides a solid basis for that being recommended.

Criteria 1 – *Clarity of Mission*

The foundation of an effective disciple making church is clarity of mission which requires both (1) what God/we (the church) want people to become (the purpose) and (2) what people need to do to get there (process). To effectively move from the fundamental purpose to action needed to achieve that purpose, some specificity (albeit simple and clear) reflecting the multi-dimensional aspects of God's call is necessary.

Criteria 2 – *Clarity of Purpose*

Clarity of purpose is the foundation for creating successful disciple-making experiences. The primary/fundamental purpose expresses that which overarches all other goals or mandates of the ministry. It is the predominate thrust that should direct all that we do. The language *"to encourage, equip and support people in growing toward more Christ-like lives in their thoughts, feelings and actions"* offers a very simple, concise, straight forward fundamental expression of purpose.

Criteria 3 – *Clarity of Process*: *Provide a Guide as to What Needs to be Done*

While the fundamental purpose very briefly encapsulates what we are to be about, by itself it so general that it fails to communicate sufficient specificity as to what we actually need to do to achieve the fundamental purpose. An effective mission statement needs to be specific enough to focus on the areas that will make the most difference for Jesus' sake in our world. The recommended language, centering on "connecting" in four

[75] Thom S. Rainer, *Who Stole My Pulpit? Leading Change in the Church* 73 (2016).

relationships (with God, with other believers, with people through serving and with those outside the faith) well serves setting forth the process for achieving the fundamental purpose. It provides clear guidance, which is not subject to widely diverse and perhaps contradictory or ineffective interpretations as to what should be done to foster achieving the fundamental purpose. The process of growing in one's discipleship is the pursuit of these four relationships. These are the marks of discipleship which evidence growing toward a more Christ-like life.

By proclaiming our mission as an integration of our foundational purpose and the process to be followed to achieve that purpose, clarity is enhanced. The key in effective disciple-making is defining the church's mission the in terms of process.[76] The mission expressed above does this.

Criteria 4 – *Be Simple and Clear so as to Be Easily Understood and Transferable to Others*

FRCC is in the disciple-making business. We seek to grow and expand the body of people progressing to becoming Fully Devoted Followers of Christ by helping them grow toward a more Christ like in their thoughts feeling and actions. Our product is transformed lives. The recommended disciple-making Mission Statement well encapsulates what we are trying to achieve (purpose) and the process for doing so. The mission for a church needs to be crystal clear as to both what the church collectively and the individual members of the church are to do. The recommended Mission Statement makes clear that the church is to encourage, equip and support people in growing toward more Christ-like lives and individuals are to do so by pursuing connecting in the four crucial relationships.

And, the recommended mission statement is in simple, clear and understandable language free from theological or doctrinal jargon. The words used are simple and straight-forward. It does so with clarity.

Furthermore, while lacking meaningful specificity, in appropriate situations, the mission can be very briefly expressed. That is,

> The mission of our church is to encourage, equip and support people to grow toward more Christ-like lives by lovingly connecting with God, with believers by sharing life together, with others through serving, and people outside the faith.

Here a key theme is *getting connected.* This short hand expression of mission is clear, easy to remember, simply express and communicate to others.

Criteria 5 – *Be Measurable (which requires a certain degree of specificity) so that the degree of achievement of purposes can be evaluated*

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[76] Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples* 115 (2006).

By including in the mission statement some specificity, we not only provide clear direction as to what we are supposed to do, it also enhances our ability to measure and evaluate what we do.

Criteria 6 – *Be Brief Enough to Be Remembered, yet Long Enough to Be Complete*

An oft heard view is that a mission statement should be brief. Although not overly long, it is not suggested here that the recommended mission statement is the epitome of brevity. However, brief generalities are ambiguous and subject to widely varying interpretations. They provide little guidance and offer little basis for evaluation. *The quest for brevity should not trump effectiveness*. In considering how brief should our Mission Statement be, let us remember the often-repeated statement by our Senior Pastor Lonnie Richardson "let's not succumb to ineffectual wandering generalities in lieu of meaningful specifics." The recommended Mission Statement provides the essential meaningful specifics to better enable people to grow toward more Christ-like lives.

Although the above recommended mission statement is not a pithy one sentence statement, it is not overly long. It might be noted that the recommended Mission Statement uses virtually the same number of words as our current Mission Statement. If our sole focus is on brevity, we need to eliminate our current statement and come up with something else.

The recommended Mission Statement is quite susceptible to memory. Virtually all, if not all, members of our church can recite the Lord's Prayer with no trouble. It is length is 60% of that of the recommended Mission Statement and is substantially longer than a pithy mission statement some would advocate. Also, the recommended Mission Statement is substantially shorter than the Christmas carol Silent Night which a lot of people have had little trouble learning.

Furthermore, the recommended mission statement is more susceptible to being memorized than our current statement because it can be readily summarized in a shorthand version: i.e., the mission of our church is to encourage, equip and support people to grow toward more Christ-like lives by *connecting with God, Christian believers, all people through serving, and people outside the faith.* The key theme is clear. i.e., *getting connected* in four relationships This short hand expression of mission is clear, easy to remember, and simple to state. This, in turn, provides an easy bridge to, learning the full statement to incorporate the needed specificity for better understanding and commitment.

Thus, being susceptible to memory is not the problem. To the extent there is a problem, it the un willingness of a person to memorize. Most people in our church probably can't recite our current mission statement nor the covenant. The lack of one sentence brevity in the recommended statement, as is true with the current statement, is not the problem. The solution is for the church is to inculcate the mission statement (and covenant) into the culture of the church through repeated emphasis and usage. There is no need for ultra-brevity to trump effectiveness.

In short, the recommended mission statement matches up well with the criteria for an effective mission statement.

D. COVENANT

FRCC is a Congregational church. A foundational element of the Congregational Way is the concept of covenant. In general, *covenant signifies a relationship based on commitment, which includes both promises and obligations and possesses the quality of reliability and durability*. A covenant is a formal agreement between two parties with each assuming some obligation, e.g., between a husband and wife. Or, a covenant also might be imposed by a greater power upon a lesser one. A covenant is a solemn promise. *The greater power demands loyalty and obligates itself to the protection of the lesser one.*[77] The covenants between God and people are covenants of divine favor or grace. They express God's gracious commitment and faithfulness and thus establish a continuing relationship.[78]

A Congregational church is a "covenanted body of gathered believers." In this church context, the concept of covenant is understood from a biblical perspective. In the Bible, whenever God interacted with humanity, he did so through a covenant, i.e., a sacred promise. He made a sacred promise to Noah, to Abraham, to the nation of Israel at Mt. Sinai and initiated a new covenant with all humanity in the person of Jesus. Our Congregationalist forefathers recognized that God does interact with humanity through covenants and that we should interact with both him and with each other in a like manner. Congregational churches are founded on the concept of covenant. When we covenant, it is a sacred promise with God and each other.[79] Owning our Covenant here at FRCC includes confirming acceptance of Christ as Lord and Savior.

In the tradition of Congregational churches and here at FRCC, owning/committing to the church's covenant is a condition of church membership. It is a solemn/sacred agreement, a binding promise, on our part in establishing a relationship with God and relationship with one another which includes (i) a statement of purpose and (ii) how we are to grow and help others grow toward a more Christ-like life.[80]

It is recommended here that our current church covenant be replaced by the proposed covenant below.

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[77] *Harper's Bible Dictionary* 191 (1985).
[78] *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* 138 (1993).
[79] Bruce Pratt, "Covenants, Covenants, Everywhere Covenants," The Congregationalist, pp.11, 12, February/March 2003.
[80] "Introduction to Scripture & Theology," Congregational Leadership and Wisconsin Congregational Leadership and Lay Program, September 25, 2010 led by Doug Gray (drawn from notes prepared by Jon S. Hanson).

COVENANT OF MEMMBERSHIP
OF FOX RIVER CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

As a follower of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and my Lord and Savior, I covenant with God and other members of our church to personally commit to creating an environment for richer communion with God and to

OWN the Mission of our Church

GROW toward a more Christ-like life by seeking to

connect with God in a loving and intimate relationship as modeled by Christ,

connect with Christian believers through love, caring and sharing life together,

connect with all people through lovingly serving their physical, emotional and spiritual needs, and

connect with people outside the faith through lovingly witnessing the good news of Christ and the power of God's love for all people, leading them to accept Christ as Lord and Savior, and bringing them into congregational life.

DEDICATE time, talent, and treasure to the service of God

ABIDE in the Congregational Way as understood and embraced by our fellowship

Although first impression of the language might suggest that owning the mission of the church and repeating the elements of the mission in growing toward a more Christ-like life are unnecessarily duplicative, but they are not. Owning the mission of the church commits the person to support the church's efforts in making-disciples, but does not commit the person individually do so. It is critical that the individual church member commit personally to growing toward a more Christ-like life.

A covenant is a solemn agreement or binding promise establishing a relationship which includes (i) a statement of purpose and (ii) how the parties to the relationship are to proceed.[81] The recommended covenant, as does the recommended Mission Statement, clearly does both.

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[81] "Introduction To Scripture & Theology," Congregational Leadership and Lay Training Program, September 25, 2010 led by Rev. Doug Gray (Notes from Session #1 prepared by Jon S. Hanson.

Although the recommended revised and current covenants cover much of the same substance, the language and manner of expression of the revised version directly ties into the recommended new mission statement. Not only is it crucial that a church have only one mission statement, it is equally critical that the church membership covenant closely parallels the mission statement. Drawing on and interpreting differing language in multiple statements creates confusion as to what we are to be about. Different language diverts people into different directions. Unity, effort and resources become dissipated. Thus, it is critical that Fox River covenant expression directly and clearly correspond to our church's mission statement.

Furthermore, the recommended Covenant expresses "I" commit in lieu of the more amorphous, "we" commit which is a bit weaker in terms of an individual making a personal commitment. Although the "we" continues to be embraced within the meaning of the covenant statement. when the individual expresses "I covenant," he or she makes the covenant his or her personal mission statement.

III. RESPONSIBILITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIAN TO GROW AS A DISCIPLE

For a person to embark upon and grow as a disciple, he or she one needs to understand God's call upon him or her, be able to express it and be committed in his or her efforts in striving to meet the call in his or her daily living. It is incumbent on the church to offer clarity in vision of what this is all about. The foundation for this clarity is offered in the recommended Mission Statement for FRCC.

If we are to be an effective disciple-making church, we need to move people beyond the too often held limited view and practice of what being a Christian is all about. This is essential from the perspective of our church as a whole as it pursues its mission and it essential from the perspective of each individual in our church progressing in his or her Walk with Christ. If the fundamental role of our church is making and growing disciples, in order to do so, it is imperative to motivate people to commit to discipleship. In turn, this requires a basic understanding of God's call, i.e., what is discipleship and then individual's personal commitment to grow in his or her following Christ. "This commitment to follow Jesus Christ is what it means to describe ourselves as Christians."[82]

A. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A DISCIPLE?

1. Understanding God's Call: "Follow Me" and Transformation

In very clear language, "Jesus said to his disciples, 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Matthew 16:24)

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[82] Andy Langford and Mark Ralls, *Beginnings: An Introduction to Christian Faith* 23 (2003) (a participant's companion). .

> The most urgent call upon God's people is to live as followers of Jesus. The most indicting critique is a simple failure to do so.
>
> It all turns… on our response to Jesus' two words: 'Follow Me.' This is the primary call of God that creates and defines the church.[83]

The word disciple, translated from the Greek word, means a *learner* and a *follower* who is usually committed to a significant master or teacher. He or she wants to know more about the teachings and way of life of a particular person. He or she also wants to follow and become more like that person.

A Christian disciple is one who wants to learn more about Jesus so that he or she can follow and become more like Jesus. Becoming a follower of Christ, i.e., discipleship, is an on-going journey of discerning and living out God's call to be the persons God created us to be.

> The adventure with God is not a destination but a journey. Beginning the journey is like a wedding that takes place at a definable time; but the journey itself is like a marriage – it takes time to know and understand each other.[84]

We never reach the point at which we have learned all that we need to know about following Jesus. That will only occur in eternity.[85]

> To be a disciple involves much more than simply accepting a certain set of beliefs, attending worship services, providing some financial contribution to the church's ministries and leading a decent life. The key to discipleship is *transformation.* We seek to be transformed into a more Christ-like life. This is not only a matter of the mind; it is also a matter of the heart. To become more like Christ, we need to do and to lead. Christ followers are leaders as well as followers. Discipleship is an approach to life from the perspective of God's call and mission. Being a follower of Christ means active participation in God's mission rather than passive inaction. It involves challenge and growth.[86]

Thus, there is more to being a Christian than simply accepting Christ, expressing certain beliefs and perhaps attending church worship services on occasion.

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[83] Mark Labberton, *Called: The Crisis and Promise of Following Jesus Today* (2014) (preface).
[84] Ben Campbell as quoted in Andy Langford and Mark Ralls, *Beginnings: an Introduction to Christian Faith* 10 (2003) (a participant's companion).
[85] Jeffrey D. Jones, *Traveling Together: a Guide for Disciple-Forming Congregations* 40-42 (2006).
[86] Fox River Congregational Church, Minutes of Task Force on Disciple-Making, October, 23, 2008, p.1.

> Christianity is not just about what we *believe*. It is also about how we *behave*.[87]

Christ calls upon us to follow him. When Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." (Luke 9:23), he set the standard for all who name him as savior. There is a gap between identifying oneself as a Christian and being appreciably affected by the gospel.[88] As evidenced by Paul, believers are expected to grow toward spiritual maturity (1 Corinthians 3:1-3). "Christianity is a way of life that results from believing in and following Jesus Christ."[89]

Bill Hybels (founder and former senior pastor of Willow Creek Community Church) emphasizes that acceptance of Christ and conversion doesn't mean that the game is over. Instead, salvation gets people into the game so that the Holy Spirit can work on people and enable them to draw near to Christ. Once one has crossed over the bridge of accepting Christ, what will happen between then and the final day? What is a person saved for? If God has no purpose for a person's life, he could have simply sent him or her by Federal Express straight to heaven. However, God does have purposes for each of us including growing toward the image of Christ, living in biblical community with others, serving others, and reaching out to others so as to build his church.[90]

Similarly, Dallas Willard has issued a clarion call against the belief held in many churches that becoming a disciple of Christ is optional. Although accepting Christ as savior and affirming certain beliefs are essential to being a Christian, they alone are insufficient and only partially fulfill the teachings of scripture and the commands of Christ. There is nothing in scripture that teaches that being forgiven and saved is all that there is to being a Christian. Instead, Christians need to undergo a profound transformation in their character toward becoming more Christ-like. Spiritual formation is the process of transforming a person into Christlikeness. This requires learning and practicing spiritual disciplines. Although one cannot earn salvation, in granting grace, God does anticipate effort.[91]

In short, a disciple is one who follows Christ. This embraces a committed life long journey of learning, experiencing and acting. "Discipleship is not a destination but a journey. The process is lifelong…."[92] Being a disciple *depends upon our response to God.* How we choose to live our lives determines whether or not we are disciples. If we choose to approach life's decisions from the perspective of God's call and involvement in God's mission, we are disciples even if we fall short in living out our discipleship. Our faith perspective shapes our decision making and performance. Our response to God's call comes both in thoughts, feelings and actions. It is the response that makes us disciples.[93] The response is to *follow Christ by*

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[87] John Stott, Basic Christianity 15 (1958).
[88] Linus J. Morris, *The High Impact Church: A Fresh Approach to Reaching the Unchurched* 36 (1993).
[89] Timothy Larsen, "What Is Christianity?" *Theology Questions Everyone Asks: Christian Faith in Plain in Language* 17 (2014) (edited by Gary M. Burge and David Lauber).
[90] Bill Hybels, "Defining Moments," Willow Creek Association Audio Journal for Church Leaders (2008). Bill.
[91] Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus' Essential Teaching on Discipleship* (2006) (book reviews by Paul M. Dubuc appearing in amazon.com).
[92] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* 310 (2006).
[93] Jeffrey D. Jones, *Traveling Together: a Guide for Disciple-Forming Congregations* 44 (2006).

becoming more like him in words, thoughts, feelings and actions. This is the essence of discipleship.

The process and product of Christian discipleship is transformation. For Paul, the fully devoted disciple is a person who has matured to reflect the character of Christ in his or her life.[94] Spiritual formation is the movement we experience from the persons that we are, changing by degree, to becoming persons more in the image of Christ.[95] Transformation is the process through which individuals take on the character of Jesus by a combination of personal effort and God's grace. Personal effort involves commitment to learning, understanding and practicing spiritual disciplines such as worship, prayer, scripture, Christian fellowship, etc. Spiritual disciplines are the intentional practices, relationships; and experiences which give people space from other demands of life so as to be better able to keep company with God. The exercise of spiritual disciplines places people where God is most likely to exercise his transforming power. Transformation comes from intentional effort to cultivate the kind of life in which God can bring change through the Holy Spirit to generate a Christ-like character in each of us.[96]

Growing toward becoming more Christ-like in our thoughts, feelings and actions and following Christ is the responsibility of all who profess to be Christians. This is the core of discipleship. Following Christ is the responsibility of all of those persons who profess to be Christians.

2. Being a Christian without Being a Disciple?

The question has been posed can one be a Christian without being a disciple. What does it mean to be a Christian? What does it mean to be a disciple?

Some people consider themselves Christians either because they were born into a family that termed itself Christian or because they attend church once in a while. However, this does not make one a Christian. One could be born in a garage, but that does not make him or her a car. One does not inherit Christianity.[97] A distinguishing characteristic of these people is that God makes little or no difference in their lives.[98] "[However,] Christianity is more than doctrine or theology, and even more than prayer.... [But rather,] it is the daily effort to live one's faith in every time and place."[99] Christianity has been defined as

> a way of life that results from believing in and following Jesus Christ. ...Christians are those who believe in Jesus Christ and follow him at whatever the cost.[100]

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[94] Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* 105 (2003).
[95] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* 188 (2006).
[96] "Discipleship and Formation," Leadership and Lay Minister Training Program, March, 2012 (from notes prepared by Jon S. Hanson).
[97] Lonnie Richardson, "The Christian," Nov. 2, 2008 (sermon).
[98] Dinesh D'Souza, *What's So Great about Christianity* 2 (2007).
[99] William R. Cook, "The Lives of Great Christians," The Great Courses.
[100] Timothy Larsen, "What Is Christianity?" *Theology Questions Everyone Asks: Christian Faith in Plain Language*, 17,18 (2014) (edited by Gary M. Burge and David Lauber).

Thus, there is a body of authority which holds that one is not a Christian if one does not seek to follow Christ, i.e., grow more Christ-like.

This perspective derives from the fact that Jesus set in motion the vision of finding and training people to become like the original 11 disciples. This is a lifelong experience during which imperfect people are shaped into Christ's likeness – people who progress though not achieving perfection. At the point of salvation, when a person decides to accept Christ as Lord and Savior, his or her journey should not cease. Instead, he or she should strive to progress through spiritual childhood, adolescence and adulthood in his or her spiritual growth. By attempting to do so, a person evidences his or her desire to please God.[101] As noted previously, the product and process of Christian discipleship is transformation. Spiritual formation or spiritual transformation is the movement we experience from the persons that we are, changing by degree, to becoming persons more in the image of Christ.[102]

We should not succumb to the erroneous teachings of the gospel that equates faith to simply agreeing with of a set of religious facts or beliefs. Belief in Christ has little meaning if we don't follow him. Believing without discipleship is simply to agree to a set of facts about a religious figure.[103] When Jesus commanded "make disciples" (Matthew 28:19), he wasn't focusing only on converting people to believing in Christ. He wants his followers to submit to his teachings and his way. The earliest Christian believers were referred to as belonging to "the Way." (Acts 9:2) They understood that the Christian faith was a way of life as well as a set of beliefs.[104] When a person chooses to follow Christ, the goal is spiritual formation leading to transformation to a more Christ-like life. This is for all Christians, not just religious or church leaders.[105] This is not earning salvation, it reflects salvation.[106]

The Bible does not sanction the belief that it is fine to simply be a causal Christian who professes faith in Christ and accepts the gift of salvation without continuing to become a follower or disciple of Christ. Some people believe that one cannot be a Christian without being a disciple. Faith modeled and taught by Jesus requires more than mere agreement with religious truth. It requires commitment to follow Christ daily. Following Christ is the centerpiece of the Christian experience.[107] Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ."[108] You can't have one without the other. It is said, that the distinction between being a Christian and being a disciple lacks biblical basis.[109]

However, the belief that one cannot be a Christian without being a disciple is not accepted by all. Many churches hold the view that one can be a Christian without being a disciple – sometimes referred to as non-discipleship Christianity. That is, one can be a Christian without a

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[101] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ 33* (2006).
[102] *Id.* at 188.
[103] *Id.* at 43
[104] Keith L. Johnson, "What Is Salvation?" *Theology Questions Everyone Asks: Christian Faith in Plain Language* 113 (2014) (edited by Gary M. Burge and David Lauber).
[105] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ 39* (2006).
[106] *Id.* at 43-44.
[107] *Id.* at 47.
[108] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship (1937)* as quoted in Hull at 47.
[109] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* 33 (2006).

sincere effort to obey and follow Christ. Here, the emphasize is on grace in the context of conversion, rather than upon the whole journey of life.[110] A Christian is any person who by faith accepts Christ as savior, receives eternal life, and is secure in the family of God. (Being a Christian only in this sense has been referred to as "cheap grace."[111]) From this perspective, a disciple is perceived as a more serious Christian who actively practices spiritual disciplines, engages in evangelism and trains others to be disciples.[112]

Christ calls upon us to follow him. As previously noted, when Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." (Luke 9:23) He set the standard for all who name him as savior. Paul scolded believers for not growing to maturity. (1 Corinthians 3:1-3) In short, all too many Christians fail to live up to the biblical expectations of being a disciple.

Timothy Larsen, in addressing the question of what is Christianity, defines Christianity "as a way of life that results from believing in and following Jesus Christ."[113] The question should not be what is minimum one has to believe and do to be a Christian. But rather, at whatever stage one is at in his or her spiritual life, a Christian is one asking what is God commanding him or her to believe and do and then responding by believing and doing it as well as calling others to do the same.[114]

Reverend Lonnie Richardson of our church maintains that we are not Christians because of what we do, but because of what Christ did. When we accept what Christ did, we become Christian. We don't earn our Christianity by what we do. Reverend Timothy Keller expresses it this way.

> We hold to the classic teaching about the nature of the gospel: to be a Christian is to be united with Christ by faith so that the merits of his saving work become ours and his Spirit enters us and begins to change us into Christ's likeness. You either are a Christian or you are not—you either are united to him by faith or you are not—because being a Christian is, first of all, a "standing" with God.[115]

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[110] *Id.* at 41-42.

[111] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* 54 (rev. ed. 1988). Foster is a Christian theologian, author in the Quaker tradition, a professor of theology at Friends University and pastor of Evangelical Friends churches.

[112] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* 33 (2006).

[113] Timothy Larsen, "What Is Christianity?" *Theology Questions Everyone Asks: Christian Faith in Plain Language* 17 (2014) (edited by Gary M. Burge and David Lauber).

[114] *Id,* at 18-19.

[115]Tim Keller, "Turning Laypeople into Lay Ministers, OutreachMagazine.com, October 8, 2012.

Once we accept Christ, we are Christian which, in turn, opens the door to growing into becoming a disciple.[116] "A Christian is a person in whom Christ dwells."[117] In fact, most Christians entertain thoughts and engage in actions reflecting discipleship even though they don't think in those terms.

It is not the purpose of this discussion to resolve the issue whether one can be a Christian without being a disciple (i.e., without attempting to follow Christ). But rather, the purpose here is to highlight that there is more to being a Christian than simply accepting Christ, expressing certain beliefs and perhaps attending church worship services on occasion. This is strongly suggested by the mere fact that the "word "Christian" is listed only three times in the New Testament, while the word "disciple" is mentioned over 300 times. Clearly, discipleship is a big deal."[118]

Regardless of whether or not one concludes that a person can be appropriately termed a Christian without also seeking to be a disciple, we need to recapture the biblical expectation defined by Jesus when he called upon us to follow him.[119] It has been said that the difference between a Christian and a follower of Christ (disciple) is commitment. The Bible does not distinguish between ordinary and extraordinary followers. Instead, there are Christians who do and those who do not sincerely try to live up to expectations. A church seeking to enhance its effectiveness as a disciple-making church cannot accept non-discipleship Christians as the norm. Effort to grow as a disciple needs to be the expectation and goal for each and every individual.

B. SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES: UNDERSTANDING WHAT GROWING AS A DISCIPLE INVOLVES

To grow toward becoming more Christ-like in thoughts, feelings and actions, both individually and collectively as a church, we need to understand what growing as a disciple involves. What are the marks of discipleship?

1. Vision of Growing

When asked what is the greatest commandment, Jesus responded "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. – (Matthew 22:37-39). And, as expressed in 1John 4:11, "Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one

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[116] Fox River Congregational Church, Minutes of Task Force on Disciple-Making, October. 23, 2008, p.2.

> "Some Christians today still suggest things like this. They believe that church attendance, regular Bible study, the right kind of worship, or even believing the right doctrines are requirements for being one of God's own children. But this is simply not the case, While each of those things is certainly important and also beneficial for a growing faith, they are not re requirements. Rather they are the results of a growing faith – the fruit produced by faith."

Comments on Galatians 1:6-9, *The Study Bible: Arranged in 365 Daily Readings* (NLT) 968 (2nd ed. 2011).

[117] Lonnie Richardson, "The Christian," November 2, 2008 (sermon).

[118] Christy Heitger-Ewing, "Disciples Making Disciples: First Baptist Raytown," OutreachMagazine.com, October 13, 2015.

[119] Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* 49 (2003).

another." All people "have value because they are made in the image of God. Therefore, they are to be loved even at great cost."[120]

Life is about learning to love. The primary purpose in life is not acquiring possessions, achieving success or status, or even experiencing happiness. These are secondary issues. The essence of life centers on love and developing relationships with God and other people. Learning about and practicing love is life's most important lesson. As Jesus said this is the greatest commandment. Nothing else comes close in importance.[121]

Such spiritual maturity is measured by demonstrated growth in our love for God and others. However, such love does not come easily. Human nature tends to focus on one's own self-interest first. Real love places the needs of others before one's own. It involves giving to another without any requiring or expectation of getting something in return. It involves giving others what they need not conditioned by what they deserve.

In his classic definition of love, Paul said

> Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres, (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

While love may create intense feelings, love is not a feeling. Love is a choice, an action, a way of behaving, a commitment. Love sacrifices for others.[122] To grow as followers of Christ to be more Christ like in our thoughts, feelings and actions,

> we must *learn* to love. It isn't easy. Real love takes knowledge, God's grace, and lots of practice. We must retrain ourselves to think and act in loving ways.[123]

In doing so, as Paul says, "Let love be your highest goal" (1 Corinthians 14:1)

In addition to repeatedly clarifying the fundamental understanding of discipleship as God's call for us to grow toward more Christ-like in our thoughts, feelings and actions, a church needs offer a clearer awareness of the parameters and expectations for growing as a follower of Christ. What is it that Christ (and we as a church) want people (including ourselves) to do in order to grow in becoming disciples of Christ? What does it take to grow spiritually?

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[120] Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Mark of a Christian* 16 (1970).
[121] Rick Warren, *40 Days of Community: 40 Days of Community Devotional: What on Earth Are We Here For?* 12 (2012).
[122] Rick Warren, *40 Days of Community: 40 Days of Community Devotional: What on Earth Are We Here For?* 13 (2012).
[123] Rick Warren, *40 Days of Community: 40 Days of Community Devotional: What on Earth Are We Here For?* 13 (2012).

Spiritual growth involves four types of relationships. FRCC took a fundamentally important step forward when the congregation adopted our Disciple-Making Mission Statement explicitly setting forth the foundational basis for FRCC's efforts to grow disciples. Building on this and the current general mission statement, the recommended mission of the Fox River clearly and explicitly embraces the pursuit of the four critical loving relationships, (1) intimacy with God, (2) intimacy in community with fellow believers, (3) impacting persons both inside and outside our fellowship through caring for their needs, and (4) witnessing to those outside the faith (unbelievers, doubters and the unchurched) to bring them to Christ.

Connecting in these relationships evidences growth toward a more Christ-like life. It is through the pursuit of these relationships that we open ourselves up to God and place ourselves in situations where God is most likely to transform us into the image of Christ thereby becoming people that God intends us to be. In short, this vision can be briefly expressed *as getting connected with God, with believers, with both believers and others through serving, and with the people outside the faith.* This affords a simple, clear vision as to what being a disciple and disciple-making is about. This discipleship making mission can create a deep sense of shared purpose and direction in growing toward a Christ-like life founded on God's Great Commandment to love God and others.

2. Spiritual Disciplines: Overview

a. Growing Towards Spiritual Maturity

Throughout its history the Christian faith has regarded a specific collection of spiritual practices, or disciplines, as essential for growth toward Christlikeness. These ancient practices emerge from the pages of scripture. They do not equal spiritual growth any more than the core beliefs do. However, they do assist us getting into the workroom of the Holy Spirit, where God may transform us.[124]

There are people who have attended church for years but have not yet experienced a significant life-change. However, "we can't follow Jesus and stay the same."[125]

> Authentic transformation is possible if we are willing…to arrange our lives around the kind of practices and life Jesus led to be constantly receiving power and love from the father.[126]

Transformation comes from intentional effort to cultivate the kind of life in which God can bring change. This involves getting space away from everyday demands of life and purposefully keeping company with God. Spiritual disciplines are practices and activities of spiritual devotion that turn attention away from one's own purposes and desires to a desire for the purposes of

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[124] Randy Frazee, *The Connecting Church: Beyond Small Groups to Community* 58 (2001).
[125] Perry Noble, "Take Your Next Step with God," OutreachMagazine.com, September 9, 2012.
[126] Dallas Willard, *Living in Christ's Presence: Final Words on Heaven and the Kingdom of God* 42 (2014).

God.[127] One needs to train himself or herself in the practices for growing in the likeness of Christ. These practices have historically been referred to as spiritual disciplines.[128]

At the outset it is important to disabuse people of some negative notions which deter them from engaging in spiritual disciplines. Perhaps most important and common is the sense that spiritual disciplines are beyond the realm of ordinary people. Furthermore, don't they kill joy in one's life. However, in his classic work *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, Richard Foster emphasized that

> [w]e must not be led to believe that the Disciplines are only for spiritual giants and hence beyond our reach, or only for contemplatives who devote all their time to prayer and meditation. Far from it. God intends the disciplines of the spiritual life to be for ordinary human beings; people who have jobs, who care for children, who wash dishes and mow lawns. In fact, the Disciplines are best exercised in the midst of our relationships with our husband or wife, our brothers and sisters, our friends and neighbors.[129]

Another negative notion of stemming from the term discipline is that it will involve drudgery and boredom.

> Neither should we think of the spiritual Disciplines as some dull drudgery aimed at exterminating laughter from the face of the earth. Joy is the keynote of all the disciplines. The purpose of the Disciplines is liberation from the stifling slavery to self-interest and fear. When the inner spirit is liberated from all that weighs it down, it can hardly be described as dull drudgery. Singing, dancing, even shouting characterize the Disciplines of the spiritual life.[130]

The term discipline also may connote something that one just does not want to do. However, one's attitude toward discipline depends upon what one is training for. "Significant transformation involves training for something. …Spiritual disciplines are training exercises to give us power to live in the kingdom." When one understands that he or she is training for a life of love and joy in the kingdom, a spiritual discipline moves to a much more positive frame of reference.[131]

Spiritual formation stems from constant practice and use of spiritual disciplines. This involves commitment to learning, understanding and practicing spiritual disciplines such as,

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[127] "Spiritual Formation: The Great Adventure," Wisconsin Congregational Leadership and Lay Ministry Training Program, March 26, 2011 (led by Stu Merkel).

[128] Lonnie Richardson, "Beyond Life as Usual – Enough: The Life-as-Usual Revolt," February 10, 2008 (sermon).

[129] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* 1 (rev. ed. 1988).

[130] *Id.* at 2.

[131] Dallas Willard, *Living in Christ's Presence: Final Words on Heaven and the Kingdom of God* 140,141 (2014).

prayer, scripture, worship. Christian fellowship, serving, witnessing, etc. *Spiritual disciplines are the intentional practices, relationships and experiences which give people space from other demands of life to be better able to keep company with God.* The exercise of spiritual disciplines places people where God is most likely to exercise his transforming power. Transformation comes from intentional effort to cultivate the kind of life in which God can bring change through the Holy Spirit to generate a Christ-like character in each of us.

Spiritual discipline involves repetition which requires discipline. Actual transformation requires time as new and good habits slowly replace the bad habits of old. Perseverance is required. We practice so that the skill and knowledge developed become second nature. We practice spiritual disciplines that form the pathways to the heart of God and transform us into godly people. Do our training and leave it up to God to make transformation happen.[132] Then, the Holy Spirit "teaches the mind of God… [and serves as] the agent of new birth, giving us an understanding so that we know God and a new heart to obey him."[133] "[We are] being transformed into his likeness…." (2 Cor. 3:18).

Spiritual disciplines are the practices modeled by Christ during his time on earth. As John Calvin wrote "By imitating Christ we are drawn into union with him…."[134] Christian spirituality embraces the practical aspects of how we live the life of Christian people; It is how we come into a relationship with God. *God Pursues - We Respond.* The role of spiritual life is to respond to God; to connect with God through living as God calls us to live, i.e., living in a manner which transforms us into a more Christ-like life in our thoughts, feeling and actions.

Although God is our creator, Lord and master, judge, father, savior and more, amazingly God also wants to be our best friend. In order to establish a personal relationship with each of us, God gave us his Son, his Word and his Holy Spirit.[135] With Christ paying for our sins on the cross, we are no longer separated from God. We now can approach God and have access to him at any time. God invites us to enjoy friendship and fellowship with all three persons of the Trinity: our Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Here, friend means not just an acquaintance, but rather a close trusted relationship. God desires that we know him deeply.[136] The core values of our church include

> *God seeks and invites all of us to live in loving fellowship with Him and with each other. God is a personal God with whom we can enter into a caring, loving, and personal relationship.*[137]

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[132] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* 197-206 (2006).
[133] J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* 219 (1973).
[134] John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* 3.1.3 (as quoted in Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On being and Making Followers of Christ* 97 (2006).
[135] Don Cousins and Judson Poling, *Friendship with God: Developing Intimacy with God* 15 (1992) (Willow Creek Resources, Walking with God Series).
[136] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* 85-86 (2002).
[137] Fox River Congregational Church Statement of Core Values.

Among the benefits of our relationship with him are renewed relationships with others, peace, purpose, fulfillment, direction, confidence and self-esteem.[138]

How is it possible to develop an intimate friendship between an omnipotent, invisible and perfect God and a finite, sinful human being? We do so by seeking to become like Christ in our thoughts, feelings and actions. Like any friendship, we must work at developing it. It won't happen by accident. Spiritual growth is like a seed growing to fruition. It must be planted and cultivated. While our effort has nothing to do with our salvation, it has much to do with growing in our personal relationship with God. One must make the effort to grow.

The development of one's spirituality (that is, growth toward a more Christ-like life) to achieve the union of God and the person is a deliberate, conscious and to some extent methodical effort to expand ones understanding and achievement of that which God calls upon us to be – a person of faith, hope, charity and love. Being conformed to Christ's image embraces several elements of transformation: a transformed mind, a transformed character, transformed relationships, transformed habits, transformed serving and transformed influence.[139] Spiritual growth doesn't just happen. It requires intentionality, discipline, and work.

We have been invited by God to come into an intimate personal relationship with him. Just going through motions and rituals is not enough. Such a relationship arises from choice, it isn't simply an accident. One must be intentional about developing a relationship with God.

> *You are my friends* if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, *I have called you friends*.... (John 15:14-15) (Emphasis supplied.)

And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness, and *he was called God's friend.*" (James 2:23) (Emphasis supplied.) Being in relationship with God can last forever. What could be more important than its development? Desire a friendship with God more than anything else.[140]

The foundations for spiritual growth are commonly referred to as spiritual disciplines or spiritual habits If our church is to reach its goal of encouraging, equipping and supporting our members (and possibly others) to grow in their spiritual formation, we need to assist them (including ourselves) in establishing that which promotes spiritual growth. We need to offer experiences emphasizing the foundational spiritual disciplines needed to grow spiritually. Developing and practicing spiritual habits is crucial in the life of every Christian,

The practice of spiritual disciplines is the foundational base of disciple-making. However, the church's disciple-making role is more than fostering spiritual disciplines. In the Great Commission Christ instructed his disciples to teach other what I have taught you. Thus,

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[138] *Friendship with God* at 17-18.

[139] For discussion of this six-fold definition of growing towards a more Christ-like life, see Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* 130 *et seq.* (2006).

[140] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* 98 (2002).

we as a church need to teach what Jesus taught, as well as fostering the understanding and practice of spiritual disciplines, as an essential basis of disciple-making.

b. Responsibility for Transformative Spiritual Disciplines

(1) The Individual's Role

One analogy used to illustrate the purpose of spiritual disciplines is that of a farmer. On his own, a farmer is helpless to grow grain. All he can do is provide the right conditions for growing of grain by cultivating ground, planting seeds and watering the plants. Then natural forces take over and up comes the grain. Similarly, spiritual disciplines are a way of sowing to the Spirit. Our task is cultivating our daily lives into fertile ground in which God can bring growth and change. This is what the spiritual disciplines are all about.

We all are shaped by something.

> *Messed-up Priorities*. Too often, we are not wise in the use of our time and energies and the tyranny of the urgent far outweighs what's truly important. …[R]ealign priorities and realign your schedule so you can spend time developing your heart for God and his Word.[141]

The fundamental question confronting us is whether we choose to be shaped by God or will we permit ourselves to be shaped by other influences.

So, why should we practice spiritual disciplines? *Practicing spiritual disciplines paves the road toward transformation.* We are called to engage in spiritual exercise to work out in God's gymnasium so that we may mature as Christians by growing into the likeness of Christ.[142]

> The Christian life is the process of growing up, mark by mark. God wants – and helps – us to 'be conformed to the likeness of his Son…. (Romans 8:29)[143]

The practice of spiritual disciplines emerges from the desire of people to connect with God. Spiritual disciplines are the intentional practices, relationships and experiences which give people space from other demands of life so as to be better able to keep company with God. It is the desire to know God that fuels these disciplines[144] Spiritual disciplines develop habits of the heart better enabling a disciple to respond to God's invitation into a personal relationship with him and to discern and respond to what God calls upon that person to do.

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[141] Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church; 10 Traits of a Vital Ministry* 67 (1999).

[142] Lonnie, Richardson, "Beyond Life-as-Usual – Study: Perfecting The Brains God Gave Us," February 24, 2008 (sermon).

[143] Bruce Bickel 7 Stan Jantz, *Knowing God 101: A Guide to Theology in Plain Language* 235(1984).

[144] Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* 17 (2005).

> [Growing] as fully devoted followers of Christ is in fact a venture into spiritual disciplines that leads to a deeper understanding and experience of God and carries with it a vision for accomplishing the purposes of God.[145]

Spiritual disciplines are crucial to transformation toward a more Christ-like life in thoughts, feelings and actions.

However, one needs to understand that the practice of spiritual disciplines takes intentional effort. Believers must take steps in order to grow. Although this does not earn a relationship with God, it puts places one in a right place where God can grow him or her as a believer, saved by grace.[146]

Spiritual growth, with the help of the Holy Spirit, involves (i) learning and practicing spiritual disciplines (such as prayer, spending time with God's Word, worship, and fellowship and (ii) performing acts of serving, evangelism, and stewardship. To carry out these practices and actions in an on-going and meaningful way leading to spiritual growth requires commitment, discipline and perseverance (keep at it),

> [The practice of spiritual disciplines] is a means by which God may graciously deepen our faith in him, our knowledge of him and our obedience to him. It means taking God seriously enough to ensure we get to spend time with him, despite all the pressures on us. It means acknowledging that we cannot hope to keep growing as Christians without the continual support – structuring our lives to allow that support to get through. This is no legalism, a routine for a routine's sake; rather, it is a sign of deepening obedience and commitment which are the hallmarks of a maturing faith. … By developing a spiritual discipline, [one] …can build time into … [his or her] routine to be set aside for God – and nothing or nobody else![147]

Discipline requires accountability. Meaningful accountability starts with oneself. Although efforts at *self-discipline* are indispensable, alone they are rarely enough. We all tend to slough off in various areas when conflicted with other activities, events, responsibilities and desires. We need someone we trust to hold our feet to the fire. We do this by voluntarily asking them to do so. One approach is a one-on-one relationship with another believer getting together on a regular basis, sharing lives together, and asking where we are in our Walk with Christ. Another approach is participating in a relational small group relationship. Both approaches offer *voluntary mutual* accountability as to how one is engaging in his or her Walk. And, of course, each person is ultimately accountable to God.

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[145] Stuart R. Merkel, *A Strategy for Employing Individual and Communal Spiritual Disciplines for Spiritual Growth at Gurnee Community Church*, November 2008.
[146] Ed Stetzer, "4 Strategies for Better Discipleship," OutreachMagazine.com, March 13, 2013.
[147] Alister McGrath, *Doubting: Growing Through the Uncertainties of Faith* 134-135 (2006).

But, beware!

> Spiritual disciplines can open a door for God to work and can nourish a relationship with him. … *[However, they] are only helpful if they are motivated by love for God.*[148] (Emphasis supplied.)

Spiritual disciplines are simply tools. They possess no value in of themselves. It is self-indulgent simply to do them for the purpose of parading that fact before others. There is no virtue in doing spiritual exercises without a reason. However, there is a reason and it is found in the Great Commission, i.e., become a disciple. Spiritual practices exist to open us up to God and draw closer to him. Spiritual practices are tools which help us know God, develop intimacy with him and grow our fitness for serving. Akin to doing calisthenics to condition the body, spiritual disciplines condition our spiritual lives to that we can better use our God-given spiritual gifts. Repeated acts create habits which, in turn, create character.[149]

(2) God's Role

Spiritual disciplines lead to the strengthening and transformation of our character. But, are we sufficiently good in the practice of such disciplines to achieve transformation? Are only some people able to do so? Fortunately, the ultimate result is in God's hands not ours.[150] We cannot replicate the character of Christ on our own. Only the Holy Spirit has the power to do that. The role of the Holy Spirit is to generate a Christ-like character in each of us.

> [W]e must always realize that it is God, not ourselves, who is the source of the transformation of our being into wholeness in the image of Christ. Our part is to offer ourselves to God in ways that enables God to do that transforming work of grace.[151]

God transforms us, we do not transform ourselves.

> This transformation occurs as we recognize that God created us to live in an interactive relationship with the Trinity. Our task is not to transform ourselves, but to stay connected with God in as much of life as possible. As we pay attention to the nudges of the Holy Spirit, we become disciples of Christ. Our task is to do the connecting, while God does the perfecting. Our task is to stay connected with God in as much of life as possible.[152]

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[148] *The One Year Study Bible: Arranged in 365 Daily Readings* (NLT) 1272 (2011) (study note) (2nd Edition, Tyndale House Publishers).

[149] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* 195-96 (2006).

[150] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* 6 (rev. ed. 1988).

[151] M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *Initiation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* 30 (1993).

[152] Jan Johnson, *Spiritual Disciplines Companion: Bible Studies and Practices to Transform Your Soul* 7 (2009).

As we pay attention to the nudges of the Holy Spirit we are transformed by God in growing more like Christ (discipleship).

We connect with God through the practice of spiritual disciplines which can be anything that helps us to become discerning of and responsive to the small voice of the Holy Spirit. "The Christian journey toward wholeness in the image of Christ… progresses by means of spiritual disciplines."[153]

Spiritual exercises must be done for the purpose of connecting with God, not for their own sake or a desire to mark a check off on a to-do list. They must be practiced in a disciplined way in order to train us to better connect with God. They may be practiced individually, in groups or both.

However, for the Holy Spirit to work, we need to make room for this to happen. God gives us spiritual disciplines as a means of receiving his grace. They enable us to place ourselves before God in a manner for him to transform us. Choose to embark upon and continue the path of spiritual disciplines and trust God to give us the power, love, faith and wisdom to do it. God wants to have an intimate relationship with us. Although scripture reflects people's desire to be with God, scripture is more about the desire of God to be with people. "The most frequent promise [in the Bible] is 'I will be with you."[154]

God uses our desire to grow spiritually, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the habits we develop through practicing spiritual disciplines to form in us the characteristics and qualities of Christ.[155] Spiritual growth comes from the collaborative effort between the individual and the Holy Spirit.[156] Learning and practicing spiritual disciplines is vital in our on-going pursuit of an intimate relationship with God.

> Spiritual disciplines give the Holy Spirit space to brood over our souls…. Spiritual transformation… comes from partnering with the Trinity for change. That doesn't mean we give the Holy Spirit an agenda or a demand. We simply *desire*. We bring our ache for change…. Then we keep company with Jesus by making space for him through a spiritual discipline. Our part is to offer ourselves lovingly and obediently to God. God then works within us doing what he alone can do…. God is free to come to us in spiritual disciplines as he wills, not as we demand. *But unless we open ourselves to him through spiritual practices, we will miss his coming altogether.*[157] (Emphasis supplied.)

We cannot create spiritual formation on our own. Spiritual vitality cannot be manufactured. There is no checklist guaranteeing results. We don't know how, when or by how

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[153] M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *Initiation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* 75 (1993).
[154] John Ortberg, *God Is Closer than You Think* 15 (2005).
[155] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* 197 (2006).
[156] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* 174, 180 (2002).
[157] Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* 19 (2005).

much God intends to transform us. Instead, we are invited to take the risk and trust God.[158] Jesus called for such trust when he said "Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly." (Matthew 11:30) (The Message)[159]

> God will come upon us and reconstruct us into the image of Christ. .... [Although] the path does not produce the change, it ... places us where the change can occur.[160]

In short, spiritual formation is the shared work between the individual and God. On the journey, assistance may arise from various sources such as the church as an affirming community of Christ followers, family, spiritual guides in many forms such as books mentors, etc. While it is ultimately God who causes the transformation, it is the responsibility of the individual to engage in those experiences (spiritual disciplines) setting aside time and space for God leading to connecting in a manner for him to exercise his transformative power.[161]

C. COMMITMENT

A disciple is one who follows Christ. He or she embraces a committed life long journey of learning, experiencing and acting. Being a disciple *depends upon our response to God.* How we choose to live our lives determines whether or not we are disciples.

God's plan and desire is that we will reciprocate his love and live out our days in intimacy with him our Creator and extend this harmony to other people and to the world around us. God offers us the freedom to choose, i.e., freedom to commit to him or freedom to walk away.[162] If we choose to approach life's decisions from the perspective of God's call and involvement in God's mission, we are disciples even if we fall short in living out our discipleship. It is our response to God's call that makes us disciples and enables us to become intimate with our Creator.[163] The response to God is to follow Christ by becoming more like him in words, thoughts, feelings and actions.

The process of becoming more Christ-like starts with a decision – a commitment. The operative word is *follow.* When Jesus said "Follow me," he defined faith. Faith is not simply believing that Jesus is the Christ. The proof of faith is reflected by following him and, more

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[158] *Id.*

[159] Christ says in

> "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." – Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV)

[160] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* 8 (rev. ed. 1988).

[161] Stuart R. Merkel, *A Strategy for Employing Individual and Communal Spiritual Disciplines for Spiritual Growth at Gurnee Community Church.* 57, November 2008).

[162] Andy Langford and Mark Ralls, *Beginnings: an Introduction to Christian Faith* 74 (2003) (a participant's companion).

[163] Jeffrey D. Jones, *Traveling Together: a Guide for Disciple-Forming Congregations* 44 (2006).

fundamentally, obeying him.[164] Either we are or we are not followers of Christ. Each person has to make a choice one way or another by commission or omission. There is no in between. Not only is this choice made at the point of repentance and conversion, we also make the choice every day in our daily lives. We don't simply amble into discipleship. We have to make a conscious decision to follow Christ.[165] Regardless of a church's efforts in offering disciple-making experiences, in the absence of individual commitment, little will be achieved. Spiritual growth does not occur automatically. It requires a decision, a decision to commit to grow in Christ. It is the responsibility of the church to confront people with this choice. To rephrase the mission purpose of Willow Creek Community Church, here at FRCC we should be about turning *religious* as well as "irreligious people into Fully Devoted Followers of Christ."[166]

In short, God transforms us, we do not transform ourselves. Our task is to stay connected with God in as much of life as possible. As we pay attention to the nudges of the Holy Spirit, we are transformed by God to growing more like Christ. This is discipleship. We connect with God through the practice of spiritual disciplines which can be anything that helps us to become discerning of and responsive to the small voice of the Holy Spirit. Spiritual exercises must be done for the purpose of connecting with God, not for their own sake or a desire to mark a check off on a to-do list. They must be practiced in a disciplined way in order to train us to better connect with God. They may be practiced individually, in groups or both. A person should try various types of disciplines to discern those which work best for him or her.

D. COSTS OF NON-DISCIPLESHIP: LOSS OF THE ABUNDANT LIFE

The previous discussion has reviewed what following Christ involves. This is reflected in the recommended mission for Fox River which calls each of us to grow toward a more Christ-like life in our thoughts, feelings and actions by connecting with God, connecting with other believers, connecting with believers and non-believers through serving them, and connecting with those outside the faith through evangelism. Spiritual growth is not automatic. It requires choosing and being committed to following Christ.

However, too often people refrain from a serious commitment to growing as disciples of Christ. For some, this is due to a lack understanding as to what discipleship calls for. For others, an understanding of the nature of the commitment to discipleship gives rise to concern as to what are the costs of discipleship.

There is a belief among many who profess that being a Christian disciple is very difficult. The costs of discipleship are perceived as being quite high. Couple this with the belief that we are saved by grace, not by anything that we do. Obedience to Christ in our day-to-day living is not really necessary. But, reaching this conclusion this ignores Christ saying "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." – (Luke 9:23)

Growing as a disciple toward a more Christ-like life requires serious commitment and effort. This involves learning, practicing and engaging in various spiritual disciplines aimed at

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[164] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* 118 (2006).
[165] *Id.* at 119-20.
[166] *An Inside Look at Willow Creek Community Church* 55 (Paul Braoudakis, editor., 5th ed., 2000).

connecting with God, connecting with other believers, connecting with both believers and unbelievers through serving and connecting with the those outside the faith. A review of several spiritual disciplines is considered in PART THREE below.

Unfortunately, too often a person refrains from a serious commitment to becoming a Fully Devoted Follower of Christ because of the perceived costs of active discipleship such as time, effort, other desires and priorities. All have responsibilities. Peoples' lives are busy. Work, career, family, recreation consume much time. Self-interest and desires come into play. Distractions are many. These are not irrational considerations when making a decision as to whether not to commit to growing discipleship.

Of course, it is necessary to take care of day-to-day responsibilities. Nevertheless, our greatest responsibility is to pursue God-ordained passions. Permitting less important responsibilities to displace more important ones is *irresponsible responsibility*. One should not allow a responsibility to become an excuse. Instead, engage in *responsible irresponsibility* which means refusing to permit your human responsibility to deter you from your primary calling – the pursuit of the passions which God has put into your heart.[167]

In addition, for many engaging in spiritual disciplines connotes work and drudgery. Such would be the case when one engages in a discipline which lacks direction or a worthwhile goal commensurate with the effort involved. However, the only road to Christian maturity passes through the practice of spiritual disciplines. Yes, to do so requires intentional effort. However, when the effort is motivated by a clear direction and the ultimate rewarding goal of growing toward living a Christ-like life and entering into a personal relationship with God, spiritual disciplines become a delight rather than drudgery.[168]

Furthermore, one should consider comparative costs associated with different courses of action. This is not an irrational consideration. We all are confronted with the temptation to refrain from a serious commitment to following and growing in Christ because of the perceived costs of active discipleship – such as time, effort, other desires and priorities. However, in considering costs of engaging in committed discipleship, too often people fail to recognize the overriding benefits of discipleship such as living in intimacy with a loving God and with each other, acceptance of oneself, a sense of well-being, and a life of meaning and purpose. In contrast, the costs of non-discipleship are overwhelming both individually and collectively. The costs of non-discipleship include the following

- the loss of a life penetrated throughout by love and joy,
- the loss of abiding peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
- the loss of a faith that views life in the light of God's governance for our own good,
- the loss of security in God's promises,
- the loss of hope in discouraging circumstances,
- the loss of ability to do make the right choices, and

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[167] *See* Mark Batterson, *Wild Goose Chase* 17-18 (2008).
[168] Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* 17 (1991).

- the loss of the opportunity to enter into a personal relationship with our God – the perfect friend.[169]

The costs of non-discipleship are great. Furthermore, in weighing the benefits and costs of discipleship, consideration of the fruits of a spiritual life is crucial.

The benefits of a spiritual life in growing toward a more Christ-like life also include the following additional fruits. A fruit of spiritual life is developing a life *living in intimacy with God.* God is not only our Father; he wants to be our friend. He knows what is best for us, can help us attain it, and loves us unconditionally. He is trustworthy. He is the perfect friend. What could be better than having an intimate personal relationship with such a perfect friend? Yes, intimacy can be risky and costly. It is not easy to open up oneself to someone else, especially to God, who may call upon us to do what we would prefer not to do. But the benefits are overwhelming. And, remember, that God only asks of us what is best for us.[170]

A spiritual life gives rise to *intimate relationship with others.* Since God is already intimate with us and inside of us, we should find God in each other. Thus, we can find God not only in contemplation and prayer, in the ordinary things of God's creation, but also in the lives of those around us.[171]

A third fruit is *intimacy with others in the church body.* Church is not simply a filling station where one comes to fill up - get pumped upon with one hour of grace - and then go off elsewhere for the rest of the week functioning solely on one hour of grace. Instead, the church is where we find community and meaningful relationships with others.[172]

Another fruit of a spiritual life is acceptance of *one self's worth.* Our worth in the eyes of God does not depend upon what we have or what we do. But rather, it depends upon who we are. We are children of God who loves us very much. Our worth, hence our self-esteem, is not dependent on how others perceive us.[173]

Christ said, I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (John 10:10) In short, *non-discipleship costs you the abundance of life which Christ said he came to bring.*[174] Failure to grow as followers of Christ imposes heavy costs indeed!

This bears reemphasis. Failure to follow Christ costs nothing less than the loss of the full abundant life that Christ promises that we can have. Thus, the costs of not seeking to become a disciple of Christ are heavy indeed! Furthermore, in comparison to the costs of non-discipleship, we should keep in the forefront consideration emphasis on the easy yoke in growing toward Christ's image. Christ said,

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[169] Dallas Willard and Bill Hybels, "The Great Omission (Defining Moments, Willow Creek Program, 2008).
[170] Jon S. Hanson, "A Spiritual Life Through Spiritual Disciplines," p.4, April 4, 2007 (notes drawing upon numerous resources over a 10 year period).
[171] *Id.* at 4.
[172] *Id.* at 5.
[173] *Id.* at 5.
[174] Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus' Essential Teaching on Discipleship* (2006) (book review by Paul M. Dubuc appearing on amazon.com).

> Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me… you will find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Matthew 11:29-30)

Yes, there is a burden, but it is light since Jesus assumes most of it.

Nevertheless, there are still too many who are unwilling to commit. They continue to drift. Others make halfhearted commitments, but then often succumb to competing values or temptations. To counter this all too human tendency, it is the responsibility of a disciple-making church to be proactive in effectively communicating understanding of God's call, what growing as a disciple involves, creating expectations for the abundant life, and fostering commitment to follow Christ.

The goal is for each person to understand, embrace and commit to following Christ by becoming more like him in thoughts, feelings and actions. This is not beyond ability of a normal person. But rather "[t]he secret of the easy yoke is simple, actually. It is the intelligent, informed, unyielding resolve to live as Jesus lived in all aspects of his life…."[175] This is achieved through understanding and learning the practice of spiritual disciplines taught and reflected in Christ's life.

> God stands amazed at the folly of any human being, no matter how smart, who painstakingly prepares every contingency, covers every base for every eventuality, no matter how unlikely, and then forgets the one inevitable certainty that stares all of us in the face, which is, I'm going to die one day. This…[neglects] to plan for the most obvious and inescapable fact of human existence.
>
> Fool. What other word do you use to describe such folly? A human being so busy building up his little kingdom as if it were to endure forever. He doesn't have any time for the Kingdom of God, [which is here an available now] which will endure forever. He's so busy making a living that he doesn't make a life. This is a rich fool's syndrome….[176]

The benefits of God's love, promises, guidance, support, comfort and the costs of *non*-discipleship offer powerful motivation for people to positively to respond to God's call for discipleship. And, there is nothing more exciting than passionately pursuing God. When we recognize and accept this, the more we will enjoy the adventure of the journey. In contrast, self-absorbed spirituality leaves us empty and bored. Too many Christians are bored with their faith. There is more than simply trying not to do anything wrong. But, when we chase the matchless God of heaven, life becomes a grand adventure.[177] Jesus prescribed a life in which happiness is not the objective, but rather happiness is a by-product of living in a way that is pleasing to God.

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[175] Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* 10 (1991).
[176] Lonnie Richardson, "When the Game is Over, It All Goes Back in the Box," (sermon), Oct. 11, 2015.
[177] *See* Mark Batterson, *Wild Goose Chase* (2008) Chapter 1.

E. DISCIPLE-MAKING IS FOR EACH OF US

When we approach life's decisions from the perspective of God's call and involvement in God's mission, we are disciples even if we fall short in living out our discipleship. In addition, however, becoming a disciple also involves discipling others to do the same. The desire of discipling is to be involved in a relationship or in relationships in which one is encouraged and/or where one is encouraging another to become a follower of Christ. It is the process of encouraging, equipping and supporting another in his or her apprenticeship to Jesus. This requires journeying with and helping another to grow in the knowledge, the virtues and the character of Christ.[178] Disciples seek to help others grow in loving God with all their heart, soul, strength and mind. Discipling someone includes introducing them to a number of spiritual practices, relationships and experiences that can help them mature in their faith.[179]

> Disciples encourage one another in the spiritual disciplines – practices through which we open ourselves to being shaped by God.[180]

Both becoming disciples and contributing to forming others as disciples is for all people. As products of the Reformation, the concept of the priesthood of all believers is central to our understanding of discipleship (as well as being a fundamental principle of our Congregational Way.[181]) "Disciple-making is an individual as well as a communal responsibility."[182]

The Book of Acts records how the Holy Spirit "turned the world upside down" through the lives of Jesus' early disciples. Jesus is still looking for disciples. And, the Holy Spirit is still able to turn the world around through the lives of people committed to keeping company with Jesus.[183] Helping to make disciples of others is a responsibility of each of us.

F. SUMMARY

The ministry of Christ and that of the early church make clear that bringing people to Christ and then growing them as followers (disciples) of Christ is the core the mission of the church, i.e., disciple-making. Christianity is more than simply accepting a set of beliefs. It is also about how we behave. The essence of a disciple is to be a follower of Christ by seeking to grow

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[178] Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* 134 (2005).
[179] *Id.* at 136.
[180] Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), "Discover Disciples," (brochure).
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> "The Congregational Way accepts and fosters the principle that we are all ministers where we live and work as well as in church. Our Christian ministry is our understanding and expression of the mind and mission of Christ that demonstrates a common life of gratitude, devotion, witness, service, celebration and discipleship. All Christians are called to this ministry of servanthood in the world to the glory of God."

Fox River Congregational Church, "The Congregational Way: Essential Principles of Congregationalism" (adopted June 22, 2003).
[182] Fox River Congregational Church, Minutes of Task Force on Disciple-Making, October 23, 2008, p.3.
[183] Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* 136 (2005).

more Christ-like in one's thoughts, feelings and actions. Thus, the responsibility of the individual Christian is to follow Christ by embarking upon and continuing those practices, commonly referred to as spiritual disciplines which offer experiences in which we are more likely to connect with God and be subject to God's transforming power. It is through these transformative experiences that we spiritually grow and progress in our Walk with Christ.

For a person to embark upon and grow as a disciple, one needs to understand God's call upon him or her, be able to express it and be committed in his or her efforts in striving to meet the call in his or her daily living. Doing so is founded first on the clarity of the call which is expressed in the recommended Mission Statement for FRCC. Next is awareness of the spiritual disciplines offering the opportunities of connecting with God (considered in PART III below) and finally personal commitment and follow through with on-going engagement in those spiritual disciplines which best work for each individual. Following Christ is a life time journey leading toward an on-going personal transformation to a more Christ-like life in thoughts, feelings and actions. Being a follower of Christ depends upon our response to God. How we choose to live our lives determines whether we are disciples. The response to God's call is to follow Christ by becoming more like him by engaging in those disciplines modeled by Christ. In doing so, one responds to the invitation to come into a more intimate relationship with God which can pave the way to personal life transformation of mind, character, relationships and habits, thereby growing in the image of Christ.

PART THREE:
CONTENT OF DISCIPLE-MAKING EXPERIENCES:
SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

The first the three principle elements undergirding an effective disciple-making church is *defining with clarity and embracing the disciple-making mission of our church* considered in PART TWO above. The second principle element undergirding an effective disciple-making church is *knowing and fostering the content of the experiences, i.e., spiritual disciplines, which lead to the accomplishment of the Mission.* This is the focus here in PART THREE.

Spiritual formation is the movement we experience from the persons we are, changing by degree, to becoming persons more in the image of Christ. Transformation is the process through which individuals take on the character of Jesus by a combination of personal effort and God's grace and transforming power. Personal effort involves commitment to learning, understanding and practicing spiritual disciplines such as prayer, spending time with God's Word, worship, *et al.* The exercise of spiritual disciplines places a person where God is most likely to exercise his transforming power.

> [I]t is spiritual disciplines of various sorts that best help followers of Christ position themselves to make the journey towards spiritual maturity and the greater experience of God.[184]

Transformation comes from intentional effort to cultivate the kind of life in which God can bring change through the Holy Spirit. By paying attention to the nudges of the Holy Spirit, we are transformed by God.

Spiritual growth toward a more Christ-like life (spirituality[185]) is a deliberate conscious decision. It requires both commitment and effort. It is within the reach of every believer to grow toward a Christ-like life (spiritual maturity) if he or she develops the habits necessary for spiritual growth. This is accomplished by learning spiritual exercises and then being disciplined to practice them. Spiritual disciplines provide the content of disciple-making experiences. Growing in spiritual disciplines reflects marks of discipleship as one progresses on his or her path to becoming more Christ-like in one's thoughts, feelings and action by pursuing the relationships of connecting with God, believers, believers and non-believers by serving, those outside the faith by outreaching. .

What are the spiritual disciplines to be fostered? Various writers have identified numerous disciplines. For example, Reverend Lonnie Richardson has focused on solitude, study,

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[184] Stuart R. Merkel, *A Strategy for Employing Individual and Communal Spiritual Disciplines for Spiritual Growth at Gurnee Community Church* .63, November 2008).

[185] The word spirituality does not refer to a body of theological ideas. But rather, in the Christian context, spirituality is a manner of living. Spirituality is the union of God and the person. It is how we connect with God. Growing spiritually is growing into a more Christ-like life. Notes prepared by Jon S. Hanson, "A Spiritual Life Through Spiritual Disciplines," p.7 (as April 4, 2007) (drawing upon numerous resources over a 10 year period).

prayer, service, sacrifice and worship.[186] In her book, Adele Ahlberg Calhoun considers numerous disciplines under the more general categories of worship, open myself to God, relinquish the false self, share my life with others, hear God's word, incarnate the love of Christ and pray.[187] Richard J. Foster sets forth 12 disciplines allocated to three categories (inward disciplines, outward disciplines and corporate disciplines).[188] Evangelical Christians are said to focus on the 7 disciplines of Bible reading, scripture and memorization, prayer, worship, evangelism, service and stewardship. Jan Johnson considers 16 categories of spiritual disciplines: solitude, silence, prayer, listening, reflection, secrecy, study, meditation, community, submission, worship, celebration, confession, service, simplicity, and fasting. Some groups of disciplines tend to appeal more and work better for those who are introverts, some for extroverts and some for either or both.[189] Reverend Stuart Merkel notes several classical spiritual disciplines which are not only important in their own right, they are also foundational to other spiritual disciplines. The classical disciplines include Bible reading, prayer, worship/liturgy and meditation. There are several additional spiritual disciplines which build on the classical practices. These seek to dig deeper into the ways of God and the character of Christ. They include fasting, study, solitude and silence, service, frugality and simplicity, and community.[190]

There will be no attempt in this resource book to discuss all of the spiritual disciplines. Although the following discussion focuses on a limited number of spiritual disciplines, in doing so, there is no intent to derogate the value of others. This list is not intended to be either exclusive (i.e., no other practices are appropriate) nor comprehensive (i.e., there are other practices not on the lists which may prove to be effective for an individual).

Because of the availability of a wide range of spiritual disciplines and the fact that an individual can realistically engage in only a limited number of such practices, one needs to explore and determine those which work best for him or her. Make an effort to select those spiritual disciplines which will best help oneself stay on the road to spiritual growth.[191] In making such a determination, questions to ask might include (i) what disciplines attract you, (ii) what disciplines repulse you, and (iii) what are you capable of sustaining given your life circumstances, experience and support.

Of course, it is not expected that a person will attempt to effectuate all of those discussed herein. Each individual is at a different stage in his or her Walk with Christ. What works best for one may not work well for another. Progress is made in steps. Small steps at a time probably offer better results than leaping into over commitment which can lead to discouragement. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, a person should seek to discern develop and practice those disciplines which open up space for him or her to come into the company of God. Spiritual

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[186] Lonnie Richardson, "Beyond Life as Usual: Cultivating the Life in which God Can Bring Change"(sermon series (February-March 2008).

[187] Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* (2005) (see table of contents).

[188] Richard J. Foster. *Celebration of Discipline: the Path to Spiritual Growth* (1988) (see table of contents). .

[189] Jan Johnson, *Spiritual Disciplines Companion: Bible Studies and Practices to Transform Your Soul* 11 (2009).

[190] "Spiritual Formation: The Great Adventure," Congregational Leadership and Lay Ministry Program, March 26, 2011 (led by Stu Merkel).

[191] Stuart R. Merkel, *A Strategy for Employing Individual and Communal Spiritual Disciplines for Spiritual Growth at Gurnee Community Church* 75, November 2008.

disciplines "simply put us in a place where we can begin to notice God and respond to his word to us." [192]

Spiritual disciplines are the content of disciple-making experiences. Understanding and practicing spiritual disciplines in the pursuit of the four critical relationships grow a person toward more Christ-like life through (1) connecting with God, (2) connecting with other believers through sharing life together, (3) connecting with others whether believers or not by serving their needs and (4) connecting with those outside the faith through outreach or evangelism.

To grow in one's Walk with Christ, an individual needs to progressively engage in various spiritual disciplines.

> The spiritual life is a lifelong process of opening ourselves to God. The spiritual journey begins even before we are aware of it. That journey brings us to the point of opening our hearts to God.
>
> As we grow in our practice of personal spiritual disciplines, we grow in our responsiveness and obedience to God's call. Personal prayer, Bible study, spiritual reading, fasting, journaling, acts of justice and compassion - these and other personal spiritual practices, all are means of opening our lives to God.[193]

In doing so it should be recognized that the pursuit of these four relationships (involving the practice of spiritual disciplines to do so) interrelate, interact and reinforce one another. Pursuit of one contributes to the pursuit of the others. One discipline need not nor should not be done in isolation from another.

Understanding and practicing spiritual disciplines evidence spiritual growth thereby serving as "marks of discipleship." When one understands what these marks of discipleship are and how they might be practiced, he or she is more likely to positively respond to God's call to follow Christ.

I. CONNECTING WITH GOD: PURSUING A LOVING AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM

From the beginning, God has taken the initiative. He has and continues to seek us. In turn, we must respond. Jesus promised "Seek and you will find" (Matthew 7:7) If we don't seek, we won't find.[194]

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[192] Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* 19 (2005).
[193] Upperroom.org, Ministry Areas/Personal Spirituality.
[194] John Stott, *Basic Christianity* 24 (2008).

Christianity central focus is not trying to do what Jesus says. But rather, Jesus simply asked, "follow me." He offers an invitation, an initiation to a relationship. We need not be perfect to enter into this relationship. Jesus doesn't expect people to be perfect, but rather he wants them to follow him. Being a sinner and/or an unbeliever doesn't disqualify anyone, Following Jesus most often begins with a sinner and unbeliever taking one small step which begins to build a relationship.[195]

A maturing follower of Christ, seeking to connect with God, continually pursues a loving and intimate personal relationship with him. "At its core, Christianity is an invitation to reenter into a loving relationship of trust with the Father."[196]

"Spiritual growth, in a sense, is simply increasing our capacity to experience the presence of God."[197] God wants to be our friend.

> There is nothing – absolutely nothing – more important than developing a friendship with God. It's a relationship that will last forever.[198]

But, to have an intimate relationship with God, one must strongly desire such a relationship. One is as close to God as he or she chooses to be.

> Intimate friendship with God is a choice, not an accident. You must intentionally seek it.[199]

Through practicing spiritual disciplines, the followers of Christ incur a deeper understanding and experience of God creating openness for knowing God's purposes for one's life.[200] In turn, this opens the way to an intimate friendship relationship with God.

Several spiritual disciplines for pursuing an intimate relationship and friendship with God are explored in the following sections.

A. PURSING INTIMACY WITH GOD THROUGH THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE OF PRAYER

1. What Is Prayer?

Public prayer is that which we do when we are together, such as being assembled in worship. Private prayer is that which we do by ourselves individually. However, whether prayer is public or private, the basic element is the same, i.e., that is, we are in the presence of God. Prayer is more than simply an obligation and effort to meet such obligation. Prayer involves a loving (rather than obligatory) worship of a loving God. Prayer is experiencing being in the

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[195] Andy Stanley, *Follow* (description of DVD program).
[196] Andy Stanley, *Deep and Wide* 105 (2012).
[197] John Ortberg, *God Is Closer than You Think* 23 (2005).
[198] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* 99 (2002).
[199] *Id.* at 98.
[200] Stuart R. Merkel, *A Strategy for Employing Individual and Communal Spiritual Disciplines for Spiritual Growth at Gurnee Community Church* .84, November 2008.

presence of a loving friend.[201] "Prayer is a matter of cultivating a relationship of love with God."[202]

People communicate with friends and others to cultivate good relationships. As they regularly communicate with one another, sharing thoughts and feelings, friendship grow. When they do things for one another, their bond of friendship strengthens. The same occurs in developing a close relationship with God.[203] God invites us to converse with him opening the way to cultivate a warm relationship with him. "The Lord is near those who call upon him...." (Psalm 145:18) "Come near to God and he will come near to you." (James 4:8)

Prayer is a reverent, intimate, private personal conversation with God through which we grow in our relationship with him and from which we receive guidance on our spiritual journey.

> Prayer is about our relationship with God. Perhaps more than any other activity, prayer expresses the fact that God has invited us into a personal relationship with him. Through prayer our human hearts are knit together with the heart of God.[204]

In prayer, we have the opportunity to speak and to listen to God speaking to us. Prayer to our God is experiencing being in the presence of a loving friend. Through prayer we can come into a relationship with him. God wants us in his presence and to be in our lives on an on-going basis. It has been said that

> Prayer is the most important activity in our lives. It is the main way in which we develop a relationship with our Father. ...It is a relationship rather than a ritual. ...It is a conversation with our Father in heaven.[205]

God cares for us (1 Peter 5:7) and, when we pray, he listens to us. (Jeremiah 29:12) In prayer we develop intimacy with our heavenly Father.

Paul stresses that we can bring everything to God in prayer.

> We can bring our prayers, our supplications and our requests to God; we can pray for *ourselves; We* can pray for forgiveness for the *past,* for the things we need in the *present,* and for help and guidance for the *future.* We can take our own past and present and future into the presence of God. We can *pray for others.* We can commend to God's care those near and far who are within our memories and our hearts.[206]

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[201] Jon S. Hanson, "A Spiritual Life Through Spiritual Disciplines," p.24, April 4, 2007) (notes drawing upon numerous resources over a 10 year period).
[202] Lonnie Richardson, "Shut Up and Pray: Understanding Unanswered Prayer, April 30, 2017 (sermon).
[203] "You Can Be Close to God," Watchtower, p.3, December 1, 2014.
[204] John Ortberg, *Life You've Always Wanted* (2004) (Participant's Guide).
[205] Nicky Gumbel, *Alpha Questions of Life: An Opportunity to Explore the Meaning of Life* 66 (2003)..
[206] William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* 77 (1975).

God has given us a wonderful promise when we pray to him.

> Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:6-7)

We have a direct line to God. He is never too busy. One never gets a busy signal. All we need to do is to dial in.[207]

The fundamental importance of prayer is highlighted by the fact that Christ spent a significant amount of time in prayer and teaching the importance of prayer. Here is a person who, although lacking the imperfections of the rest of us, nevertheless felt compelled to pray. Since he serves as the model for all Christians, there can be no doubt that prayer is an essential element of Christian living. It is a foundational spiritual discipline. We need to learn how to pray effectively and to practice doing so on a regular basis. Prayer is an indispensable element in connecting with God through growing toward a more Christ-like life in our thoughts, feelings and actions

God is always with us and we are always in his presence. He is with us in church, in our solitude, in our family and friends, at work and in everything that we do. When we pray, we consciously become aware that we are in God's presence. Prayer is experiencing being in the presence of a loving friend.

> A classic definition of prayer is the placing of ourselves in the presence of God, raising our heart and mind to God and resting there.[208]

Christians live a life of prayer which means practicing God's presence. By doing so, we situate ourselves where God is more likely to transform us. "Prayer is a central avenue God uses to transform us."[209] Consequently, prayer is an essential spiritual discipline which we need to learn how to do effectively and practice doing so on a regular basis.[210]

Think of it, we can talk to God at any time. We don't need to schedule an appointment. And, God not only listens, he answers prayer.[211]

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[207] Bill Hybels, "Prayer: Opening Your Heart to God," (Interactions Small Group Series, Willow Creek Resources).

[208] Steve A. Peay, "Introduction to The Spiritual Life," 1998 First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa, Lenten Series) (drawn from notes prepared by Jon S. Hanson.

[209] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* 33 (rev. ed. 1988).

[210] Contributing towards an understanding prayer is recognition of what prayer is not. It is important to avoid practices which offer only the illusion of rather than authentic prayer. For discussion of what prayer is not, *see* Section 5 below.

[211] Lonnie Richardson, "Managing Faith: Spiritual Life Priorities," January 4, 2004 (sermon).

2. God Answering Prayer

God answers prayers. Jesus said,

> Ask and it will be given to you: seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. (Matthew 7:7)

Unfortunately, too often we reduce prayer to petition and expect God to be a celestial gumball machine spitting out what we want, whenever we want it and however we want it in answering our prayers. Such prayers fail to reflect a real effort to connect with God on an intimate level. Instead, they're more like a daily to-do list – "God, take care of this and God do that." Too often prevalent in our prayers is "I talk and God you listen" attitude."

But our experience tells us that God does not automatically and/or immediately respond to our prayers in the way we would like. For some, this evidences the lack of efficacy of prayer and undermines one's faith in God. Such view suggests a lack of understanding as to how God answers prayer.

God answers prayer using one of several options.[212]

(i) "No" – your request is wrong. Here the prayer is answered, but the answer is no. We often make requests that are self-serving or simply materialistic. Fortunately, God says no to those requests which are not best for us. This is done with both wisdom and love. We can expect God to say no to prayers which are detrimental to others, detrimental to ourselves and/or are contrary to Christ's teachings. "If the prayer request is wrong, God will say no way, at which point… [one] should review the request or modify it or lay it to rest…."[213]

(ii) "Slow Down" – your timing is wrong. There are times when we need to be patient. In some situations, God is saying grow up. When you put that sin away and grow up, the prayer will be answered.

(iii) "Grow" – your spiritual condition is wrong. Determine how you should grow before God says yes.

(iv) "Yes" – your request, timing and spiritual condition are okay.

However, there are times when despite efforts to listen, God may remain silent. Don't be discouraged and dissuaded from continuing efforts to listen. God does listen. But he isn't simply

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[212] Lonnie Richardson, "Mystery of Unanswered Prayer," November 10, 2002 (sermon); Lonnie Richardson, "Understanding Unanswered Prayers," February 28, 2016 (sermon); Don Cousins Judson, *Friendship with God*: Developing Intimacy with God 47 (1992) (Walking with God Series, Willow Creek Resources).

[213] Lonnie Richardson, "Understanding Unanswered Prayers," February 28, 2016 (sermon).

an answering machine. He speaks when he has something to say. Furthermore, there are a couple of reasons we don't hear his voice more often. First, we don't seriously listen. We don't schedule times for stillness and solitude enabling communication to be possible. We haven't built the discipline of regular times for solitude and silence into our schedule.[214] Second, we may not hear God's voice because we don't plan on doing anything about what he says. We fail to follow up on the Holy Spirit's leadings. So, God may feel no reason to continue speaking.[215] There is an old Russian proverb reminding us "Pray to God, but continue to row to shore."[216]

God answers prayer in a manner best for us. Whatever the answer,

> [t]he message will be suited to the person's individual need, but the central truth is certain: we serve a God who has spoken in history, who still speaks today and who wants to speak to us.[217]

Prayer does not change God, but rather prayer changes the one who prays. "The true test of prayer is not whether a person gets what he or she asks for but the effect on one's life from a habit of talking with God."[218] The greatest value of prayer is the gift of God's presence and knowing that we are not alone wherever we are.[219]

3. Types of Prayer

Prayer opens us up to a divine dialogue through an intentional encounter with God.[220] Frequent and regular prayer is sustained not by the sense of duty, but rather by the desire to connect and grow in intimacy with God.

The spiritual disciplines of various types of prayer afford different patterns for attending to God throughout the day. There are seemingly bewildering types of prayer, both in terms of content and manner of praying. The most effective approaches to prayer can vary from person to person and from time to time. Pray as you can, not as you can't. The method of prayer needs to fit us rather than us to fit a particular method of prayer. However, to maximize the potential of prayer, each person needs to explore various alternative prayer disciplines that are available. Then, do what works best so long as the effort is to live towards God.[221]

Some of the types of prayer are summarized as follows.

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[214] Bill Hybels, *Too Busy Not to Pray* 151 (revised and expanded 1998).
[215] *Id.* at 152.
[216] Andy Langford and Mark Ralls, *Beginnings: an Introduction to Christian Faith* 154 (2003) (a participant's companion).
[217] Bill Hybels, *Too Busy Not to Pray* 150 (revised and expanded 1998).
[218] Lonnie Richardson, "The Power of Prayer: the Prayer of Jesus," February 21, 2016 (sermon).
[219] Andy Langford and Mark Ralls, *Beginnings: an Introduction to Christian Faith* 155 (2003) (a participant's companion).
[220] Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* 203 (2005).
[221] Stephen A. Peay, "Spirituality 101: What Does It Mean To Be a Spiritual Person?," August 17, 1997 (First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa) (from notes prepared by Jon S. Hanson).

a. Prayers of Adoration and Praise

In our prayers of adoration for God, we acknowledge who we are and who God is. Praise and adoration is a proper response to one who is far greater than we are and who loves us and offers us so much. (Remember, the Lord's Prayer commences with praise – "hallowed be thy name.") Opening a prayer with adoration and praise puts us in the right frame of mind.

b. Prayers of Gratitude: Thanksgiving

An expression of gratitude is a major reason to pray. God is moved whenever we express our appreciation. Say thank you for his many blessings. Praising, honoring and thanking God in prayer is important for the same reasons they are important in the context of worship as discussed later below. Never forget the cost of salvation paid by Christ on the Cross. Also, when praying, remember God continually invites us to share our lives with him in a personal relationship. We have so much for which to be thankful. This calls for us to respond to God's invitation with thanksgiving as well as praise as a primary purpose of prayer.

Since our talents have been granted to us by God, it is only natural and appropriate to thank God for the results achieved through the use of those talents. However, God has granted each person free will to make use of his or her abilities. Thus, everything in life is not predestined. Individual choices and actions can make a difference. Consequently, when things go well there is a tendency to think in terms that "I did it." Because "I did it," the thought of thanking God for the abilities which made the result possible occurs too infrequently. While some results achieved are a reflection of a person's own effort, remember the basic talents employed are the gifts for which we need to be grateful.[222]

An additional dimension for *gratitude* prayers, too often taken for granted, is God's grant of free will to us which gives our lives scope and purpose. In its absence, everything done would be beyond a person's control. Only a God of utmost love and compassion would relinquish control and grant free will. Thus, while some results achieved are in part a reflection of a person's own effort (remembering that the basic talents employed are the gifts of God), gratitude prayers should be often forthcoming not only for God's support in our achievements but, even more importantly, for God's willingness to afford us free will to both decide and act and for such decisions and actions to have an impact.[223]

c. Prayers of Confession

A third type of prayer is confessional prayer (i.e., acknowledgment of sinfulness, repentance and asking for forgiveness and transformation.)

Outside the context of a church worship service, people tend not to focus on confessional prayer. Why? The term sin is a very ominous word. In a worldly context it connotes evil, cruelty,

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[222] Jon S. Hanson, "Prayer: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow,". February 22. 1988 (prepared for class on Basic Christian Living, First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa .
[223] *Id.*

malice and the like. Although certainly not without faults, people tend to view themselves as relatively decent persons rather than as sinners. However, the concept of sin is not simply limited to the more malevolent aspects of human behavior. Sin is any commission or omission of an act or thought which is contrary to the will of God. It involves falling short of what God calls us to be. Pride, self-centeredness, and desire for control are among those at the top of the list.

However,

> [a]s believers in Christ, all our sins are forgiven. His death cleansed us from all sin. So why should we still confess our sins?
>
> Confession is more than obtaining Christ's forgiveness for sin. Confession… [recognizes] that our thoughts, works and actions are… contrary to… [God'] will. Sin… cause[s] us to lose sight of what is right and wrong. In confession, we reorient ourselves to what is right. Confession is about seeing ourselves, our sin and our God clearly.
>
> Repentance is incomplete though, if it ends with confession. Repentance must include changed attitudes and behavior. When you sin and are truly sorry, confess this to God, ask for his forgiveness, and accept his grace and mercy. Then, with clearer vision, turn and run from sin.[224]

This might well be addressed by a general daily examination of conscience followed by confession and resolve to better.

> The Bible clearly states that God freely forgives our sins, but many of us struggle to live in the reality of that forgiveness. [Thus,] …the practice of confession is necessary to our spiritual growth. Confession is not something God has us do because *he* needs it. Rather, confession is a practice that, done wisely, will help us become …transformed….[225]

With the Bible urging repentance of sin, coupled with the fact that we are more sinful than we normally recognize or acknowledge, confessional prayer should play a very important role in the lives of Christians.[226]

d. Prayers of Supplication (Petition)

A fourth type of prayer are prayers of supplication or petition (also termed request prayers) in which the person praying asks for something for oneself and/or for others.

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[224] *One Year Study Bible: Arranged in 365 Daily Readings* (NLT) 826 (2011) (Tyndale House Publishing (2nd Edition).

[225] John Ortberg, *Life You've Always Wanted* 55 (2004) (Participant's Guide).

[226] Jon s. Hanson, "Prayer: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," February 22. 1988 (prepared for class on Basic Christian Living, First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa (Wisconsin).

Prayers of petition express our awareness of our relationship with God. We are creatures not creators. We are not masters of our own situation. Thus, it is natural and appropriate for us to call out for help to meet our needs and the needs of others.[227] The Bible establishes that God wants us to ask for the things we need. Jesus urged people to pray.

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. (Matthew 7:7) God longs to hear us express the yearnings of our heart. We ask and then leave the problems with God. This frees us from carrying the burden ourselves. God wants us to ask and God will answer.[228] Our prayers bring us in tune with God. He responds in a manner that is best for us rather than simply granting that for which we ask. God conforms us to his will rather than him conforming to ours.[229]

When praying for ourselves, do so within biblical parameters and guidelines which include the following.[230] First, *ask with a clean heart,* i.e., ask with good intentions. Second, *ask in faith,* i.e., believe that God will answer. Third, *be prepared to respond appropriately to God's answer.* For example, when praying for God's mercy, be prepared to show mercy to others. Fourth, *ask according to God's will.* Ultimately pray that it is "not my will, Lord, but yours be done" and be willing to be obedient to his will. God answers prayers, including petition prayers, but he does so in his own way rather according to our desires.

Prayers of petition for others (often referred to as intercessory prayers) lift up their needs to God and commend them to God for his care. Christ prayed for the sick and for those hurting. Paul repeatedly prayed for others in his letters. So too are we called to pray on behalf of others.

When we pray for ourselves and for others, focus not on asking for release from any task God calls for us to do, but rather for strength to complete the task. "Prayer should always be for power and seldom for release; for not release but conquest must be the keynote of the Christian life."[231]

e. Chain Group Prayer

A powerful form of intercessory prayer involves chain group prayers. These are prayers performed by a group of persons in response to requests by others. The requests might be from a person asking for prayer on his or her behalf or a request by someone else who is aware of another person in need. The requests are funneled though some coordinating point(s) in the church. Then the requests are distributed to those participating in the chain group. Multiple prayers are offered either by group members separately and/or by group members collectively. FRCC quilt ministry offers a variant of a chain prayer group. Prayer is powerful. There are

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[227] Steve A. Peay, "Introduction to The Spiritual Life," 1998 (First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa, Lenten Series) (drawn from notes prepared by Jon S. Hanson)..

[228] Lonnie Richardson, "The Asking Factor for Answered Prayer," Oct. 14, 2007 (sermon).

[229] Stephen Peay, Seminar on Prayer, February 28 through Mar. 24, 1996 (First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa) (from notes prepared by Jon S. Hanson).

[230] Lonnie Richardson, "The Asking Factor for Answered Prayer," October 14, 2007 (sermon).

[231] William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians 167* (Revised Edition, 1975).

reports of many who have benefited.[232] And, those who actively participate in chain group prayer take a further step in their own Walk with Christ.

f. Other Types of Prayers

Although not elaborated upon here, there are numerous other types of prayer. For example, a *contemplative prayer* involves discerning some idea and walking around with it. Why am I thinking about it?. How does it affect my family, friends and church? What is God trying to tell me? In short, walk around a thought in the presence of God and seek to discern how he will lead you. A *meditative prayer* is form of prayer whose purpose is to establish quietness before God and receive thoughts that might come. A *centering prayer* (e.g., Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me") is sitting in God's presence, focusing on him and giving him undivided attention). *Praying scripture (lectio divina[233])* and *conversational prayer*s, offer further meaningful possibilities.

A *conversational prayer* is simply conversing with God. We can talk to God and unburden ourselves to God as a best friend. This can simply be a conversation talking about what you are doing at the present moment. It can take occur anytime at anyplace. God wants to be a part of our lives. He wants to hear about our joys and successes as well as our burdens, fears, concerns and needs. Through Christ we have a direct line at any time. Unfortunately, too often, we fail to dial in.[234]

There is also a prayer known as an *action prayer*. One should be alert that too often we continually ask God to do what he has already called us to do. For example, one might pray that his friend has lost his job and lacks sufficient money for food. God's answer might be "go to the grocery store and buy him some." Often God responds to our prayers by empowering us to be the answer. Don't ask for something and then act inconsistently with that being asked. Act consistently with one's prayer request. However, for the prayer to be answered, we must be moved to action. "The ultimate action prayer is 'Lord, what would you have me do?"[235]

One might also try praying the psalms. There are psalms for nearly every type of occasion. David, the author of many of the psalms, wrote psalms in which he complained, when he was mad, when he wanted his enemies silenced or destroyed when he was in despair as well as when he was thankful to God or wanted to praise God. For our purpose, read a psalm expressing one's own mood. Read it thoughtfully and emotionally until one understands it well enough to put into one's own words. Then pray one's own paraphrase. Pray different psalms for different circumstances. If they worked for David, they could very well work for us.[236]

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[232] *E.g.*, First Congregational Church of Mukwonago, Wisconsin, "Ministry Teams," February 28, 2016, p.5 (pamphlet).
[233] *See* Jon S. Hanson, "A Spiritual Life Through Spiritual Disciplines," pp.33-37, April 4, 2007) (notes drawing upon numerous resources over a 10 year period).
[234] *Id.* at 37.
[235] Lonnie Richardson, "Action Prayers," March. 6, 2016 (sermon);. Lonnie Richardson, "How to Get Your Prayers Answered," July 19, 2015 (sermon),
[236] Lonnie Richardson, Shut Up and Pray: Praying When It Is Hard to Pray," May 7, 2017 (sermon).

The host prayers mentioned here are offered to alert people to the availability of many prayer forms which may be used to supplement one another or as alternatives to other prayer forms which might better fit a person's individual needs. Regardless of the prayer forms an individual chooses, their effectiveness depends upon a willingness to listen and be transformed.

4. Elements of Prayer

Without attempting to be exhaustive, there are several elements which underlie effective prayers.

a. Communication with God: Listen

The primary function of prayer is not simply for us to talk to God. Instead, the primary function of prayer is to open the lines of communication so God can talk to us. Too often in prayer we do the all the talking while God listens. Our prayers tend to be monologues rather than dialogues. God know what we are going to say and what our needs are. Instead, we should try to come into relationship with God rather than simply attempting to manipulate him into doing what we want. He invites us to listen to him.

But, to hear God one must be willing to discipline his or herself to be still before God. "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). Jesus modeled the discipline of stillness before God in the context of a very busy life.[237]

> God's power is available to us when we come to him in solitude, when we learn how to focus and center our hearts and be quiet before him. When we learn the discipline stillness before God, we find that his leadings come through to us clearly, with little interference.[238]

Bill Hybels suggest that sometime during the course of prayer simply ask "Now Lord, I invite you to speak to me by your Holy Spirit." Or, one might simply ask "Speak to me Lord, for your servant is listening."[239] However, it is not important to follow some particular method, i.e., such as one modeled by someone else whom one respects. But rather each person should custom design an approach that works for him or her, an approach that enables hearing God's still, small voice.[240]

Listening to God in prayer is a fundamental means to avoid shutting God out of our lives. It is a prime means which God uses to transform us into a more Christ-like life. Prayer is not just talking to God. Prayer is being in God's presence. Peter preached that God is where we live,

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[237] Bill Hybels, *Too Busy Not to Pray* 145 (revised and expanded 1998).
[238] *Id.* at 146.
[239] *Id.* at 147, 149. Questions that Bill Hybels regularly asks God include (i) what is the next step in developing my character, (ii) what is the next step with respect to my family, and (iii) what is the next step in my ministry. *Id.* at 148.
[240] *Id.* at 148.

move and have our being. Prayer is practicing the presence of God in our lives, not just a one way conversation.[241]

When we listen, how do we discern whether it is actually the voice of God which we think we hear? Or, is it our own voice saying what we want to hear? In making such a determination, test the answer. Is it consistent with scripture? Is the response is consistent with the way a Christian person would respond. With the aid of the Holy Spirit, meditate on scripture. Start with scripture and find the answer there. Look at the model of Jesus.[242]

b. Trust God

When we pray, remember three things: (i) remember *the love of God* who desires only what is best for us, (ii) remember *the wisdom of God* who alone knows what is best for us, and (iii) remember *the power of God* who alone can bring to pass that which is best for us. "He who prays with a perfect trust in the love, wisdom and power of God will find God's peace."[243]

c. Thy Will Be Done

When we start to complain or doubt about God answering our prayer the way we would like, remember God did not always give Jesus what he prayed for. Before Jesus went to the cross he prayed that such burden be lifted. Jesus "fell with his face to the ground. He prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." (Matthew 26:39) God did not respond affirmatively to Jesus' request. But, what is important here is Jesus modeling prayer assenting to God's will.[244]

Effective prayer includes expressing that *"'Thy will be done."* Realize that we never know better than God. The essence of prayer is not that we say to God: "Thy will be changed," but that we say to him: "Thy will be done." Real prayer does not demand things we wish, but rather accepts that which he wills.[245] Prayer that seeks to align our lives with God's will is prayer that God answers.[246]

d. Thanksgiving in All Prayers

Paul laid down that *thanksgiving* must be the universal accompaniment of prayer.[247] Paul insists that we must give thanks *in everything,* in sorrows and in joys alike. This implies both (i) *gratitude* and (ii) *perfect submission* to the will of God. It is only when we are fully convinced that God is working all things together for good that we can really feel the gratitude which believing prayer demands.

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[241] "Introduction to The Spiritual Life," (Lent 1998), First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa, (led by Stephen) (from notes prepared by Jon S. Hanson).
[242] For consideration of discerning God's will, see Section I. below.
[243] William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* 78 (1975 Revised Edition)).
[244] Lonnie Richardson, "Shut Up and Pray: Does Prayer Really Work," May 21, 2017 (sermon).
[245] William Barclay, *The Gospel of John* 180 (Vol. 2, 1975, Revised Edition).
[246] Lonnie Richardson, "Shut Up and Pray: Does Prayer Really Work," May 21, 2017 (sermon).
[247] "··· in situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." (Philippians 4:6).

e. Pray Persistently

Too often, when we feel that our prayers are not answered, we stop praying with the sense that it must not have been God's will or maybe this "prayer thing" doesn't work after all. There come times when prayer seems to be unavailing. The remedy is to keep on praying.

> Paul calls for people to persevere in prayer. Even for the best of us, there come times when prayer seems to be unavailing and to penetrate no farther than the walls of the room in which we pray. At such a time the remedy is not to stop but to go on praying; for in the man who prays spiritual dryness cannot last.[248]

Jesus instructed his disciples "that they should always pray and not give up." (Luke 18:1). Through persistent prayer, we (i) remain in the presence of God, (ii) we define and refine our requests according to God's will, and (iii) we demonstrate our faith in what Jesus promised.[249]

5. What Meaningful Prayer Is Not[250]

Sometimes something can be defined, at least in part, by what it is not. However, in noting below things that prayer is not, what is meant is that prayer is not just this. While these facets may be a part of genuine prayer, each facet in of itself isn't the whole of prayer.

*a. Ritual, Rote or Babbling Pray*er

Prayer does not occur just because someone mouths what is thought to be a prayer. Prayer is not empty words or phrases.

In praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this: ... [the Lord's Prayer]. (Matthew 6:7-15) Whether a prayer is heard depends on the fervor of the soul, not the number of words or the number of times repeated. Simply saying a prayer only as a matter of ritual or rote or heaping on fancy phrases or babbling on[251] does not replace heartfelt and sincere communication with God. When prayer is conducted simply as a formality, it serves little real purpose other than perhaps providing a person a false sense that he or she is dutifully praying. Prayers, which are merely part of a routine and conventional repetition of a form of words, have little prospect of being well received.

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[248] William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians* 166 (revised edition, 1975).
[249] Lonnie Richardson, "Prayer Power," September 30, 2008 (sermon).
[250] This section draws primarily on Steve A. Peay, "Introduction to The Spiritual Life," 1998 (First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa, Lenten Series) (drawn from notes prepared by Jon S. Hanson).
[251]

> And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. (Matthew 6:7-8)

Yes, liturgy (ritual) can inspire prayer and can express prayer. But, just performing liturgy as simply a rote exercise will not serve as meaningful prayer. To think otherwise is an illusion.

b. Seeking Recognition, Respect, Approval Prayer

Prayer in public to make one feel good and gain the approbation and praise of others is not meaningful prayer. As Jesus forcefully teaches,

> Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 6:1)

> And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. (Matthew 6:5-7)

Beware of just going through the motions, of simply praying by rote or praying for public exposure. Don't be a hypocrite who prays in public so he can be seen praying in public so as to be viewed as a good man. Genuine prayer seeks not to make oneself look good, but rather genuine and meaningful prayer is God centered rather than self-centered. Pray in private and don't simply pray by rote. Instead, pray from the heart.

c. Selfish Prayer

As we pray in the name of Christ, avoid praying for something that we know Jesus would disapprove. Prayer should not be selfish. When one prays he or she should not focus entirely on his or her-own needs. The greatest temptation is to pray as if only ourselves mattered. For example, don't pray for some personal ambition which would hurt others. Don't pray in the name of him who is love for vengeance on others. Whenever we try to utilize prayer to only realize our ambitions and desires, such will be ineffective as not a real prayer at all. Selfish prayer will not find favor with God.

d. Prayer Simply to Get a Sign

Don't test God by praying for a sign as the answer to a prayer. Jesus said, in response to some scribes and Pharisees looking for a sign, that "[a]n evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; but no sign shall be given to it…." (Matthew 12:39-40)

e. Prayer Isolated from the Setting in Which It Is Made

Prayer cannot be divorced from its setting. For example, John Newton (the author of the hymn Amazing Grace) was a slave trader who knelt on the deck of his slave ship every day to pray. Yet, he found prayer to be unfulfilling. The prayer itself could not be divorced from the setting in which it was professed. Praying in a manner inconsistent with what one does (unless seeking to change) lacks genuineness or meaning. We cannot take prayer out of the setting of our lives. One can say a prayer, but saying a prayer does not constitute all of what prayer is. Saying a prayer comes out of the total experience of the one who prays. Coming into the life of God does not mean running away from human life.

f. Prayer Apart from the Culture

Prayer is not simply a question of the relationship between God and me. It is not simply a private experience. God calls us as a people. Our Puritan ancestors held that one person does not constitute a church. A church is more than one person gathered together around together Christ. When Jesus prays the Lord's Prayer he said "Our Father" not my Father. Thus, prayer is not solely a withdrawal into a private thing. Furthermore, Jesus went to church (synagogue) and prayed in a corporate or public manner with others. Here is an answer for those who say they don't need to go to church in order to pray. If Jesus, the Son of God and our role model, found it important to pray in a church setting, who are we to say that not doing so is O.K.

This is not to say that we don't need times alone and periods of quiet in order to recharge. Jesus went apart from time to time to be by himself to pray to God. But, he did so to prepare for his work in transforming the culture. He did not to withdraw from the culture. Prayer involves struggle within our culture and a means to transform our culture. Even monks who drew away into the dessert to be alone, did so to become transformers of the world rather than centering on their own individual selves and God. Thus, one's individual devotion needs to be done in the context of life and culture rather than in solely private in the context of an isolated individual.

g. Prayer for God to Do Our Bidding

Often a prayer is solely and consistently focused on trying to cause God to do our bidding, in effect, seeking to reduce God to being the celestial gumball machine who will spit out what we want in answer to our prayers. However, the foundation of prayer is not request and answer. Instead, the foundation of prayer is thanksgiving, not petition. Instead, we should emphasize our acknowledgment of and adoration for our loving Father and friend. Prayer does not change God, but rather prayer changes the one who prays. By prayer, we make ourselves ready to receive what God has for us. Adoration, not petition, is the foundation of prayer. All prayer should be praise, all life should be prayer.

h. Prayer for an Exceptional Experience

If the sole focus of our prayer life is the quest for an exhilarating experience, we are not going to find it. (New Age movement types look for an experience, a way to get a new high). Baseball provides an interesting analogy. If we go to a baseball game

solely to see a grand-slam home run, the other enjoyable aspects of what makes up most of the game will be missed and the grand-slam may never happen. While a grand-slam home run is exciting, it is far from being the whole game. A grand-slam by itself is not the whole of baseball which has so much more from beginning to end. When one lives only for the grand-slam, one misses most if not all of the game. The same is true with respect to prayer. One won't find God and all that he has to offer if the goal of prayer is simply an extraordinary ecstatic experience.

6. The Prayer Life Style[252]

Paul said *"pray continually."* Prayer is a lifestyle. So how do we pray continually?

Learn to pray by praying. Although hearing messages from the pulpit and reading sources on prayer can be helpful, we best learn the most about prayer in the privacy of our own prayer life. Learn to pray by praying.

Begin where we are. Don't feel the need to wait until we clean up our life style before praying. God does the cleaning.

Be honest with God and ourselves in our prayers. Too often we say things in prayer that we know are not true and we know God knows they are not true. One can and should be honest in his or her prayer since God already knows what's going in one's mind anyway. Honesty will not surprise God. Be honest and let God help dealing with the problem.

C*ry out to God in prayer.* Even if prayers are full of misconceptions, self-pity and bad theology, as long as a person cries out to God, God can reach him or her. However, when a person stops crying out to God, when he or she turns his or her back to God and gives up on God, the doors of possibility close in a person's life.

Continue the prayer conversation with God all day long. Develop the habit of talking to God throughout the day. God is with us. Why ignore him? The more we become aware of God's presence in our lives throughout the day, the more we come to experience and grow in our personal relationships with him.

7. Balanced Method for Prayer: – ACTS

As considered more fully in Subsection 3. above, there are four basic types of prayer (adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication) which (by using the first letters of each of these types) can be succinctly referred to by the word ACTS. A simple method for a balanced prayer life is following the ACTS structure which incorporates these four types of prayer. This structure helps avoid falling into meaningless repetition. ACTS calls for incorporating, in some way, each of the following elements in prayer.

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[252] Lonnie Richardson, "The Prayer Life Style," October 7, 2007 (sermon).

- **A**doration – (Praise)

  Begin with praising God for who he is and all the wonders he has performed. Focus on his attributes. Praise his nature, his goodness, his faithfulness, his creative power, his love, his grace, his wisdom, etc. This time is reserved for praise. Confession, gratitude and requests come later.

- **C**onfession

  Confession acknowledges our sinfulness. Tell God about specific sins which we have committed, admit we have missed the mark. Resolve to turn away from committing those sins again (repentance) and ask for forgiveness and cleansing.

- **T**hanksgiving – Gratitude)

  Thank God for his forgiveness and a new start, for all that he has given, for answered prayers, and for demonstrations of his love.

- **S**upplication – (Petition)

  In this form of prayer, we present our requests to God, not only for ourselves, but also for others.

One can incorporate all these elements in a single prayer or separate the elements into different prayers. That is, one can vary the ACTS pattern by focusing on one element one day and another element on another day.

One suggested approach is practice each of the four aspects of prayer. To get started, on Day One praise God using Psalm 23. On Day Two, identify the main areas of temptation with which you struggle, confess any sin in these areas and pray for strength to resist such temptations. On Day Three, with intentionality, recall physical, spiritual and relational blessings you have received and express gratitude to God for each one. And, on Day Four, pray for concerns in your life as well as those in the lives of others who are close to you.[253]

Whether one incorporates all elements of ACTS in one prayer or different elements in separate prayers, it is important to incorporate each element in prayer with regularity.

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[253] Don Cousins and Judson Poling, "Friendship with God: Developing Intimacy with God," Walking with God Series for groups), p.52 (Willow Creek Resources 1992).

8. Physical Aspects of Prayer and Meditation[254]

We need periods of quiet and calm from frantic schedules to relax, think about the day and build relationships with friends and family. Similarly, we need quiet and prayerful reflection with our Lord and his Word so as to build an intimate and personal relationship with him. There are a variety of ways for one to mediate and pray. The following description provides an approach to silent prayer.

- Schedule regular quiet times for personal devotions.
- Create sacred space by finding a quiet and comfortable place.
- Anticipate, so as to avoid, to the extent possible, distractions or interruptions.
- Select a chair in which to relax, but not so comfortable that dozing is induced.
- Consciously feel the tension flowing out of the body through a progressive relaxation sequence moving from one part of the body to the next.
- Focus Mind on God

  Pray that God will give insight through the reading of the scripture passage. Start with a simple prayer such as "Lord, I come at this moment in quiet to pray. Be with me and help me in doing so."

  One simple technique to sharpen the focus is to repeat several times the word "God" or "Jesus" or the short Jesus Prayer - "Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

- Pray in Silence for a Period of Time

  A common occurrence is the wandering of the mind and the popping up of various distractions. If a distraction keeps occurring, it is important. Use it as an opportunity. That is, pray about it. Otherwise, slow down and refocus on your prayer. The worst thing to do is to stop praying when a distraction occurs.

- Conclude with a slow rendition of the Lord's Prayer

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[254] Jon S. Hanson, "A Spiritual Life Through Spiritual Disciplines," April 4, 2007, pp.40-41 (drawn upon numerous resources over a 10-year period).

- Reflect and record in a journal what you discovered, for example, about yourself, about God and about your relationship with God.

9. Getting Started on Developing the Spiritual Discipline of Prayer

The spiritual discipline of prayer involves a learning process which develops with practice Occasional joggers do not suddenly qualify for a marathon. They train over a period of time before doing so. The same is true with prayer. When we follow a progression, we can expect to pray with greater confidence and spiritual success a year from now than we do currently. "God always meets us where we are and slowly moves us along into deeper things."[255]

If we sense that we are not praying effectively, search for the "block." Perhaps something within us needs to change. Perhaps persistence and patience are required. Listen, make adjustments and try again.[256] However, in doing so, understand that "[t]he true test of prayer is not whether a person gets what he or she asks for, but [rather] the effect on the life from a habit of talking to God."[257]

As a person embarks and seeks to grow a meaningful practice of the spiritual discipline of prayer, several facets of a prayer warrant consideration and understanding including

- what is prayer,
- how God answers prayer,
- types of prayer,
- elements of prayer,
- what meaningful prayer is not
- prayer life style,
- balanced prayer (ACTS),
- physical aspects of prayer, and
- getting started in developing the spiritual discipline of prayer.

B. Pursuing Intimacy with God through the Spiritual Discipline of Spending Time with God's Word

1. Foundational Importance of Spending Time with God's Word

From the outset of the creation of Christ's church, the importance of learning and understanding God's Word has been manifest. The people "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching…." (Acts 2:42) People acknowledged that Jesus had authorized and empowered the apostles as teachers of the church and submitted to their authority.

> All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God

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[255] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* 35 (rev. ed. 1988).
[256] *Id.* at 38.
[257] Lonnie Richardson, "The Prayer of Jesus," February 21, 2016 (sermon).

> may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Today, we are also called to devote ourselves to the apostles' teaching through the pages of scripture. To grow as a follower of Christ, one needs to seriously know and submit to the authority of scripture through the expounding of the Bible from the pulpit, reading, studying, discussions in small groups and reflection upon the scripture.[258] Purposeful Bible reading and studying is a foundational spiritual discipline.

a. God Reveals Himself

For there to be a personal relationship between God and his people, there needs to be two-way communication. The Bible is a collection of books regarded as authoritative by Christians which, although written by men and women, is the inspired word of God through which he reveals himself.

> *Sola Scriptura.* This famous slogan states the formal principle of the Protestant Reformation. 'Scripture alone" is the supreme authority of the Christian faith, life and thought.[259]

Herein, God delivers his message of love and redemption to us in the form of words that constitute a living and transforming force in our lives.

When we pray, we speak to God. When we read the Bible, God speaks to us.[260] Our spiritual ancestors, the Pilgrims and Puritans, focused on the Bible as the *revealed word of God.* We get to know God and his plan for us in scripture. God actually speaks to us "through the biblical message."[261] "[I]t is through the Bible that we come to know God."[262] It is in scripture we discern the ultimate authority governing all of life.[263]

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[258] Lonnie Richardson, "The Marks of a Live Church," June 1, 2014 (sermon).

[259] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "What Is the Bible?," *Theology Questions Everyone Asks: Christian Faith in Plain Language* 40 (2014) (edited by Gary M. Burge and David Lauber).

[260] William Barclay, *Introducing the Bible* 103 (25th ed., 1992).

[261] J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* 36 (1973).

[262] Julie Johnson Staples, "Dreaming, Talking, Acting," Congregationalist, September 2017, p.12.

[263] Underlying religious belief is the question what constitutes authority for the belief. Historically, there have been three views as to what constitutes the ultimate authority: the Bible, church tradition and human reason either alone or in combination. Following the lead of the continental reformers, the Puritans claimed that scripture alone, being the revealed word of God, is the final authority for religious belief. More recent debate as to limited inerrancy of the Bible raises the question as to what areas does the Bible apply (e.g., limited to questions of salvation). Does the Bible speak infallibly to all of life or only to certain areas? The Puritans were clear in their convictions. First, scripture is the authoritative standard in testing religions truth. It is the touchstone to test all doctrines. Second, Puritans extended biblical authority to matters of morality (ethics). Third, the Bible is also the ultimate authority governing ecclesiastical issues (church practices). In short, the authority of the Bible extends to all of life.

However, in applying scripture to all of life, the Puritans were not simplistically expecting to find specific rules which they could literally or directly follow. Instead, they found general principles which could be translated into contemporary situations or applied in general ways. In short, Puritans theory and practice made scripture the rule for all of life. Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* 140-45 (1986)

b. Developing Relationship with God

As considered earlier, God invites us to be his friend. However, it is impossible to be one's friend without knowing him. Through God inspired scripture God reveals who he is, what he is about and what he calls upon us to do. Revealing himself through the Bible is the process by which God makes himself known.

> THE BIBLE IS DIVINE REVELATION. God's own word to us. It reveals who God is, who we are and why we are here. Through Bible study we gain insights into God, human nature and creation. Studying Scripture can equip, guide and reveal *how to live in life-giving ways that deepen our friendship with God and others.*[264] (Emphasis supplied.)

If we want to come to know God, to enter into a personal relationship with him and to be a friend with him, i.e., pursue an intimate relationship with God, we need to spend time in his Word.

Through the process of spending time with God's Word, people grow spiritually, learn to be honest with themselves, become better equipped for good works, renew their minds, live more successful lives and grow in their relationship with God. God's Word provides access to the truth, protects one from adverse external influences and equips us to better influences others.[265] "Our own development as Christian disciples is linked to careful study and obedient response to the Scriptures."[266] As the psalmist wrote, "your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path." (Psalms 119:105)

God wants to be known. He reveals himself in various ways in addition to our spending time with his Word. These include experiencing the natural world (his creation), humankind (made in his image), using our God given gifts, and prayer. However, spending time with God's Word is a crucial and foundational spiritual discipline to connect with God in a loving personal relationship. "Christians are truly people of the Bible.... In his Word, ...God makes himself accessible to me."[267]

c. Transformation

We come to scripture not to amass information, but to be changed. The purpose of spending time in the Bible study is to uncover truths that can transform our lives.[268] Thus, read and study the Bible from a devotional, life changing viewpoint rather than simply from an intellectual perspective. The emphasis needs to be reflection on scripture for life application rather than simply accumulating more Biblical knowledge.

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[264] Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* 165 (2005).

[265] Don Cousins and Judson Poling, *Friendship with God: Developing Intimacy with God 30-32* (1992) (Walking with God Series, Willow Creek Resources)..

[266] Donald N. Bastian, *Belonging (Free Methodist Church): Adventures in Church Membership* 119 (2002).

[267] Andy Langford and Mark Ralls, *Beginnings: an Introduction to Christian Faith* 90 (2003) (a participant's companion).

[268] Ed Stetzer, "4 Strategies for Better Discipleship," OutreachMagazine.com, March 13, 2013.

> The purpose of Spiritual Disciplines is the total transformation of the person. They aim at replacing old destructive habits of thought with new life-giving habits. Nowhere is this purpose more clearly seen than in the discipline of study. [269]

The purpose of spending time with God's word is to uncover truths that can transform our lives. It is God revealing himself to us. The Bible is a love letter from our most trusted and dearest friend. Studying and immersing oneself in God's Word is a foundational spiritual discipline. It is crucial to our spiritual growth toward a more Christ-like life.

The most important aspect of the discipline of study is not in what we do, but in what God does with our minds. [270] Our thinking and study must begin, continue and end with a request for God to guide our thoughts in his truth.[271] To become Christ-like in our character, filling our lives with his Word. God's Word is essential. It is an integral part of our living. It provides the spiritual nourishment needed to enable us to live out our purposes. "The Bible is about real life, moral truths, and our relationship with God."[272] A healthy follower of Christ feeds on God's Word. This is often referred to as abiding in God's Word which involves three activities

- accept and trust the Bible as the ultimate authority for our lives,
- assimilate the truth of God's Word by filing one's mind with the Word so that the Holy Spirit can transform us, and
- apply the principles of God's Word (i.e., obedience).

A simple prayer opening time with God's word, such as "Lord, open our hearts and our minds to the power of your word, that as we read, we may know, understand, and obey your word for us to today,"[273] focuses on connecting with God in a personal relationship. Abiding in God's Word is achieved by (i) receiving with an open mind, (ii) reading the Bible regularly, (iii) asking the right questions of the text and writing down one's insights, (iv) remembering, and (v) reflecting upon God's Word.

Attending to scripture and engaging in prayer are essential for healthy growth as a follower of Christ.

> [T]he Word of God and prayer are fundamental. …In them we find comfort, direction and hope. In them we discover God through his

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[269] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* 62 (rev. ed. 1988).
[270] The following discussion draws primarily on Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* 185-92 (2002).
[271] Lonnie, Richardson, "Beyond Life-as-Usual – Study: Perfecting the Brains God Gave Us," February 24, 2008 (sermon).
[272] Andy Langford and Mark Ralls, *Beginnings: an Introduction to Christian Faith* 95 (2003) (a participant's companion).
[273] Upper Room (Daily Devotional), May 9, 2016.

> Spirit. In them we grow in our relationship with our Savior. In them we learn about where we have come from and who we are to become today.[274]

Scripture and prayer are foundational to the other spiritual disciplines to connect with God, other Christians, those needing serving, and people outside the faith. Thus, it is essential to invigorate congregations toward greater spending time with God's Word as well as to introduce prayer into every context of the church's ministry.[275]

2. Various Contexts of Spending Time with God's Word[276]

Studying the Bible is one of the most frequently praised, although unfortunately one of the most consistently neglected, activities in the Christian community today. In learning and practicing the spiritual discipline of spending time with God's word, various approaches of doing so need to be understood.

Bible study is not simply reading the Bible. Of course, one cannot study the Bible without reading. However, one can read the Bible without studying it.

Bible study is not the same as meditation on the Bible. Meditation is focusing on one verse or phrase of scripture. Think about it, chew it over in one's mind, consider its possible implications and ramifications, see how it applies to one's own life, allow it to make an impression on one's heart and produce a response towards God. Meditation is vital to healthy Christian living. However, it not the same as Bible study.

Bible study is not the same as reading books about the Bible. While Bible study may involve referring to various books, reading such books should be regarded as aids to rather than equated with Bible study. Although biblical commentaries, introductions, expositions, or explanatory notes can greatly enhance an understanding biblical understanding, reading such material is not Bible study per se. Such writings should not become a substitute for personal Bible study.

> *What then is Bible study?* Briefly, it is the personal investigation of the meaning of the Bible. It is an individual grappling with the biblical text in order to understand it better and to make it one's own.[277]

In short, the spiritual discipline of spending time in God's Word involves both meditation on his word (see also discussion in E.3. below) and Bible study supplemented with reading material about the Bible.

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[274] Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church: 10 Traits of a Vital Ministry* 17 (2006).
[275] *Id.* at 18.
[276] This section draws primarily on Lonnie Richardson, "How to Study the Bible Workshop."
[277] *Id.*

3. Attitudes in Studying the Bible

When approaching the study of scripture, one should embrace several attitudes which reflect purpose and commitment.

- The Bible is not only God's Word to us; it is his love letter to us. We should learn all we can about God's Word for us in the Bible because the Bible is God's primary means of speaking to us. The Bible is a love letter from our most trusted and dearest friend. Although the ability to read comes from the brain, one needs to read the Bible as a love letter with your heart. Cherish it as something intensely personal from someone in love with you.[278]

> The Bible is a great love story. Yes, it contains instruction on how to live. Models for us to follow. And, examples of those who both rejected God's love and received it. Sure, some of it is hard to understand. But at its core, it is a love letter… Psalms are love songs. From cover to cover it is the ongoing story of an unconditional, patient and gentle lover seeking to win the hearts reluctant, wandering, unfaithful people like you and me. … Read it as… a faithful lover calling us to intimacy…. God gave us the Bible that we might be transformed by the faithful lover calling us to intimacy.[279]

- Recognizing that our need for illumination of the Word is intended to form us in the mind of Christ. Read the Bible in the spirit of prayer and humility.[280]

- Engage in *systematic and regular studying* of the Bible. Set aside a time and place each day for Bible study, meditation and prayer. Spend some time alone with God. This is a time to focus on and listen to him. Remember, the ultimate purpose is to respond to God's invitation to engage in an intimate loving relationship with him. God has offered us a banquet. We need to respond.[281]

- *Read the Bible with reverence*. Commence reading with an opening prayer seeking a true understanding of God's words. The same Holy Spirit who moved the original writers of the books of the Bible, today brings God's truth to us. The Holy Spirit enables us to study and interpret these books as we seek

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[278] Jon S. Hanson, "A Spiritual Life Through Spiritual Disciplines," p.13, April 4, 2007) (notes drawing upon numerous resources over a 10 year period).
[279] Lonnie Richardson, "Adventures in Grace: How to Move Beyond Information and Experience a Love Letter for the Hard of Hearing," February 26, 2017 (sermon).
[280] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "What Is the Bible?," *Theology Questions Everyone Asks: Christian Faith in Plain Language* 41 (2014) (edited by Gary M. Burge and David Lauber).
[281] Jon S. Hanson, "A Spiritual Life Through Spiritual Disciplines," p.14, April 4, 2007) (notes drawing upon numerous resources over a 10-year period).

not only what does this mean, but also what does it mean for me. Christian study of scripture approaches the Bible with reverence seeking more than information, but also seeking and finding the grace of God.[282]

- *Study the Bible both individually and within the fellowship of the Church.* It is not necessary to always reinvent the wheel. Learning scripture includes learning within the fellowship and the teachings of the church.[283]

- *Read the Bible honestly.* Seek the truth rather than trying to substantiate a point about which one has already made up his mind. When studying the Bible we should be listening for God's voice, not for the echo of our own voice.[284]

- *Look to the whole of scripture*, not selective passages. A single passage may lead us in the wrong direction. An honest approach is to apply the whole of scripture to our problem, not simply a text selected to suit us.[285]

- *Study the Bible whole heartedly.* Jesus said we must love God with all of our heart, soul and strength. This is the way to study the Bible. Pray for guidance and illumination. God grants understanding to those who persevere and mediate on the meaning. The Holy Spirit helps those who toil to help themselves. The more one brings to the Bible, the more one will get from it.[286]

- *Studying the Bible should lead to action.* Don't study the Bible simply for the sake of argument or discussion. Seek to discern the will of God and, then do it, obey.[287]

- It is important to avoid the mistake of downgrading the importance of the Old Testament and focusing solely on the New Testament. The Bible is a like a two storied library with the books on both floors ultimately telling the same story. God makes himself known through both the prophets and the apostles. The Old Testament teaches creation and our need for salvation through Jesus. It is difficult to understand the New Testament apart from the Old Testament since 10% if the former consists of quotations, paraphrases and allusions from the Old Testament. And, it is important to remember that Jesus repeatedly cites books in the Old Testament as having authority. The Bible as a whole answers big questions: why we are here, what should we be doing and where are we going. God reveals himself through all of scripture and establishes relationships with those who respond to his word in faith. Studying and interacting with the Bible as a whole is more than simply a means of

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[282] *Id.* at 14.
[283] *Id.* at 14.
[284] *Id.* at 14.
[285] *Id.* at 15.
[286] *Id.* at 15.
[287] *Id.* at 15.

> communication for the amassing of information It is a means of mediating a personal relationship with God.[288]

Effective spending time with God's word should not be approached casually. It results from (i) understanding the purpose(s) of such study, (ii) learning and practicing the requisite skills, and (iii) adopting a committed attitude. These are essential elements for meaningful experiences when spending time with the Word.

It is incumbent upon FRCC, as a disciple-making church, to offer meaningful and deepening experiences which better enable people to become devotionally immersed in God's Word and to grow in one's personal relationship with God.

C. PURSUING INTIMACY WITH GOD THROUGH THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE OF VITAL TRANSFORMING WORSHIP

Worship, in the broad sense, embraces not only corporate worship services, but also worshipping through prayer, spending time with God's Word, through giving (time, talent and treasure), and through all of life in response to God's love and grace. Thus, it might be said that all of the spiritual disciplines are simply elements of worship. However, as we consider spiritual disciplines, here, reference to worship is to collaborative worship with others (especially worship services).

At the outset, it should be emphasized that simply repetitiously mouthing the words of a certain creed, performing particular religious acts, or as simply attending worship services on a regular basis may indicate nothing more than church membership.

1. Understanding and Practicing the Spiritual Discipline of Worship

Most, if not all, of our members have at least the sense that worship is one of the core elements of living life as a Christian. Yet, how many of us can articulate why communal worship is essential. What is the purpose of worship? How are to we respond to God in worship? What are we to get out of worship? Do we view worship as a spiritual discipline? Do we approach worship with the expectancy that it will be a transforming experience? The degree and the manner in which we are able to answer questions such as these impacts our commitment to regular participation in worship services, our attitude toward worship and, ultimately, our growing in our personal relationship with God.

Worship accepts, welcomes and glorifies God as the Creator and Sustainer, Jesus as the Lord of lords and the Holy Spirit as the Comforter, Teacher and Guide.

> Worship [then] allows us to *experience the intimacy* with God as our loving Father, with Jesus as our Brother and Friend and with

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[288] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "What Is the Bible?" *Theology Questions Everyone Asks: Christian Faith in Plain Language* 30-34 (2014) (edited by Gary M. Burge and David Lauber).

> the Spirit as the One who empowers us and guides us into all truth[289] – (Emphasis supplied.).

Glorifying God and *drawing people into a more intimate personal relationship with God*, whether in a collective or solitary setting, are fundamental purposes of worship.

Underlying a meaningful worship experience is engaging the congregation in a manner which reminds people that they come together out of love for God and one another. In practicing the spiritual discipline of worship, often the sense of closeness with God is accompanied with praise, joy, thankfulness, and physical and/or emotional reactions during worship service. A variety of actions are commonly associated with genuine worship. Explicitly expressed in scripture are kneeling, bowing down, standing before the Lord in awe, clapping hands, playing instruments and shaking tambourines, playing percussion instruments, dancing before the Lord, lifting hands and eyes towards God, and praising, singing and shouting for joy. Worshipers should avoid being judgmental of others in the congregation who exhibit the variety of expressions in responding to the Lord.[290]

These are all biblical expressions of worship. Quite commonly, Western Christians attribute such expressions as nothing more than emotionalism. Such view has led to an overemphasis on the cerebral dimension of the Christian faith. However,

> personal encounters with God are one of the most powerful means God uses to transform and heal us. When we experience His presence… we no longer perceive Him as some Distant God or abstract idea; He is real, living powerful and near.
>
> …Worship in the high-impact church engages the cognitive, emotional, volition and spiritual.[291]

Genuine responsiveness to the presence of God in a worship service reflects connecting with him. So, rejoice for rather than begrudge those who display physical or emotional genuine reactions to experiencing the presence of 'God.

Worship is not a spectator sport. It is not something for us to simply observe and/or critique the performers. Instead, we need to be actively engaged participants. We need to understand what is going on. We need to internalize the worship service. Being engaged in worship, rather than simply spectate, is paramount. When we enter into the presence of God in worship, we come into the presence of an unimaginable supreme power. Thus, as we approach worship, it behooves us not to do so in a shallow, cavalier or complacent manner. Worship is a spiritual discipline of utmost importance which needs to be learned and joyfully practiced as we pursue a loving personal relationship with God.

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[289] Linus J. Morris, *The High Impact Church: A Fresh Approach to Reaching the Unchurched* 125 (1993).
[290] Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church; 10 Traits of a Vital Ministry* 52-54 (1999).
[291] Linus J. Morris, *The High Impact Church: A Fresh Approach to Reaching the Unchurched* 126 (1993).

2. What Is Worship: An Encounter, Invitation and Response

What is worship? Through worship we collectively pursue an intimate personal relationship with God. Meaningful worship is a critical component of disciple-making. Thus, the church needs to offer worship services from a disciple-making perspective. At the same time, individuals gathering for the worship service need to look beyond viewing worship services simply as a duty to attend, as simply as an observer of persons performing on stage, and/or as a basis for a social gathering. Worship should be a *time of transformation* through an encounter with the holy.[292] Worship services need to be viewed as an essential part in our spiritual growth toward a more Christ-like life.

> Scripture is replete with examples of God's efforts to initiate, restore, and maintain fellowship with his children. God is like the father of the prodigal who upon seeing his son a long way off, rushed to welcome him home.[293]

This is astounding; our Creator wants to fellowship with us. He invites us into a personal relationship with him. God made us to love us and he wants us to love him back. He longs for us to get to know him and spend time with him. Thus, learning to love God and be loved by him should be the greatest objective in our lives. This is manifest by what Jesus called the Greatest Commandment, i.e., Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind.[294] (Matt. 22:37)

At its most fundamental level, a worship service (whether it be in a worship service involving a large gathering of a church body or in the context of a small group) affords a time and place where we can encounter our living God. Christ promised that where "two or three come together in my name, there I am with them." (Matthew 18:20) In worship we are so gathered. "To worship … is to know, to feel, to experience the resurrected Christ in the midst of the gathered community."[295] In worship, we encounter he who invites us to enter into an active personal relationship with him. As said in James 4:8, "Come near to God and he will come near to you." God has taken the initiative. Through worship we come into the presence of the living God. We are offered the opportunity to respond to God's invitation to Walk with him. As previously noted,

> [w]orship allows us to experience the intimacy with God as our loving Father, with Jesus as our Brother and Friend and the Spirit as the One who empowers us and guides us into all truth.[296]

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[292] Although a single worship service may not be a "wow" transforming experience, more commonly, one progresses in his or her Walk with Christ one small step at a time. Transformation is an evolutionary process over time to becoming more Christ-like in one's life. Fox River Congregational Church, Minutes of Task Force on Disciple-Making. p.3, October. 29, 2008.

[293] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* 158 (rev. ed. 1988).

[294] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* 70 (2002).

[295] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* 158 (rev. ed. 1988).

[296] Linus J. Morris, *The High Impact Church: A Fresh Approach to Reaching the Unchurched* 124 (1993).

From the perspective of a disciple-making church, the primary purpose of worship is to draw people into a more intimate relationship with God. *From the perspective of the individual, the core purpose of worship is for each of us to respond to God's invitation to enter a personal relationship with him.*[297]

3. Responding to God

In pursuing an intimate relationship with God, how are we to respond to him?

> [Worship has been defined] as a corporate gathering of believers who thank and praise God and also expect to hear from him. ...In worship... [we] remove...[ourselves] from the center of things. Perhaps no greater challenge exists for most of us than to make a worship experience about God rather than about us. We seem to have a propensity to think of worship as meeting our needs. But that's not worship – it's idolatry.
>
> .... Worship becomes a key part of discipleship because, in worship, we break ourselves of the habit of interpreting events in God's story as centered on ourselves. We learn to think of ourselves as participants, as supporting cast, as servants who focus on the drama's main character; the triune God we serve. [298]

In keeping focus on God rather on ourselves, the questions become how do we encounter God and respond to his invitation, i.e. how do we worship meaningfully in seeking personal fellowship with God? We encounter God through regular participation in worship services. But, just being there is not enough. God's invitation to a personal relationship with him demands a response. Such requires learning the purposes of worship and responding in a manner reflecting these purposes. The prime purposes of worship are (a) reverence, awe and submission and (b) praise and thanksgiving.

a. Reverence, Awe and Submission

Worship, which is acceptable and pleasing to God, embraces the *attitude and acts of reverence* for him.[299] Dallas Willard defines worship in the following manner.

> In worship we engage ourselves with, dwell upon, and express the greatness, beauty, and goodness of God through thought and the use of words, rituals and symbols. We do this alone as well as

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[297] Jon S. Hanson, "Why Are We Here?," January. 11, 2004 (sermon),
[298] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* 218, 219 (2006).
[299] *Harper's Bible Dictionary* 1143 (1985).

> in union with God's people. To worship is to see God as *worthy*, to ascribe great worth to him.[300]
>
> Let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.... (Hebrews 12:28)

As Dallas Willard, importantly emphasizes, worship is not and should not be limited to large or small group gatherings. As individuals, we can and should alone worship our God.

The term "worship" in both the Old and New Testaments translates the Hebrew word meaning to bow down or to prostrate oneself, indicating reverence and homage. Reverence can be defined as the

> attitude that we wear that says that God is God and we are not, that God is the source of all that is, that God is worth worshipping, worth bowing down before, worth our very lives.[301]

Linked with reverence is submission. Worship includes offering and submitting ourselves to God. Worship is seeing what God is worth and giving God his due. Grasp the truth about God, trust him and let him govern. Submission is the natural response to God's amazing love, mercy and invitation into a personal relationship with him. We give ourselves to God not because of duty or fear, but because of love. "You are free to choose what you surrender to, but you are not free from the consequences of that choice."[302] You cannot fulfill God's purposes for your life if your focus is on your own plans. Put Jesus in the driver's seat.

In short, a fundamental purpose of worship is to come before God in loving awe, reverence and submission. Worship is a time to humble ourselves before God, trust him, and submit ourselves to him.

b. Praise and Thanksgiving

We are also called upon to *offer God praise, honor and thanksgiving*. As exemplified by Psalm 34:3, "Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together." Throughout scripture we're commanded to celebrate together God's presence by glorifying the Lord and exalting his name. "Worship is a natural expression of appreciation to God for who He is and His great gift of salvation." [303]

Why is praising, honoring and thanking God so important? Since God has granted us free will, God does not receive our praise and thanksgiving unless we choose to give it. God either cannot or will not force us to do so.

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[300] Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of Disciplines*: *Understanding How God Changes Lives* 177 (1998).
[301] John Miller, "God the Subject and Object of Worship," (review of Congregational Lecture), Congregationalist, p.18 at p.19 (September 2015).
[302] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* 82 (2002).
[303] Bruce Bickel & Stan Jantz, *Knowing God 101: A Guide to Theology in Plain Language* 242 (1984).

Few things make one feel better than the receipt of heartfelt praise and appreciation. This is true for us and it is also true for God. He smiles when we express both our adoration for and gratitude to him.[304] In contrast, no one likes to be taken for granted. This is especially true of God who has done so much for us. God is our creator, he fashioned us and he sustains us. We live, think, feel, act and believe because of his creative power. He invites us to share our lives with him in a personal relationship. We have so much for which to be thankful. This calls for us to respond to God's invitation with praise and thanksgiving.[305] Lonnie Richardson has preached that praise and gratitude should be the chief end of worship. [306] This is evidenced by the fact that Jesus taught us to begin our prayer to the Father saying "hallowed be your name." (Matthew 6:9) This is an expression of praise.

In short, in worship we are to respond to God's invitation to enter into and maintain a personal relationship with him through our expression of reverence, awe and submission. Such expression also embraces exalting God with lofty praise, honor, thanksgiving and joy.[307]

4. Communal and/or Individual Worship: Why Is It Necessary to Go to Church?[308]

Private worship is that which we do as individuals. Corporate or communal worship is that which we do together as part of God's family. Although most Christians consider participation in the church worship services a significant element of Christian living, there are people who believe that doing so is unnecessary. Instead, they might better spend their time out in nature, in God's creation. "I can worship God just as well by myself on the golf course or outside communing with nature." Isn't individual/private worship enough?

This raises the question; can a person worship alone rather than regularly participate in a congregation or small group worship gathering? There is nothing wrong with seeking quiet time out in nature or elsewhere. In private a person can express his praise and thanksgiving with reverence, awe and submission in a private context. However, for several reasons, by itself private worship is not enough.

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[304] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* 73 (2002).

[305] Lonnie Richardson, "Giving Thanks to the God Who Gives," November 27, 1997 (sermon).

[306] Lonnie Richardson, "Living in the Garden: Why We Worship," August 2, 1998 (sermon).

[307] Fox River Congregational Church envisions this sense of worship.

> "We envision a Christian fellowship in which all members gather together as a worshipping community to express our love, reverence, praise and gratitude to God in joyful, inspiring, energetic, prayerful and creative worship...."

Fox River Congregational Church, *Vision for the Future of Our Church* (adopted June 22, 2003).

[308] Drawn from "Basics of Christian Living," First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa, January-February 1988 (led by Mark Dunn) (drawn from summary notes prepared by Jon S. Hanson); Lonnie Richardson, "A Single Coal Cannot Survive," National Association of Congregational Christian Churches Devotional Booklet, March 16, 2003; Stephen Peay, "Why Is It Necessary to Go to Church," August, 17, 1997; Jon S. Hanson, "A Spiritual Life Through Spiritual Disciplines," pp. 8-9 (as of April 4, 2007) (drawing upon numerous resources over a 10 year period).

a. A Single Coal Does Not Survive: We Need Each Other

When one becomes set in his or her ways, he or she is not exposed to new truths, loses the sense of sharing, loses the multi-dimensional benefits of corporate worship (e.g., uplifting music, corporate prayer, sermons, sense of sharing communion, etc.). In the absence of regular participation in a congregational worship service or a small group worship activity, a person may avoid regular thinking about God, the gospel, prayer, etc. even to the extent of no worship at all. When a single glowing ember is removed from a fire, it quickly ceases burning and turns an ashen gray. Like an ember drawn out of an on-going fire and set apart, when a person withdraws from a worshiping fellowship, the connectedness with God is likely to burn out.

In contrast, coals together burn brightly. Fellowship in worship with others empowers and supports us as we show love of God and each other. In regular communal worship a person is nurtured and encouraged while united with the family of God. Relationships with God and others can be strengthened and we can have our eyes opened to new perspectives on life. We need the Christian community.

> One way to set yourself up for a discouraging journey in the faith is to cease the discipline of regular worship attendance. An individual is not a choir. The talents and presence of others are needed for harmony.[309]

Furthermore, by not worshipping as part of a Christian community, we deprive that community of our love and support just as we separate ourselves from the community's support of us.

b. Don't Limit the Experience of God

While seeking private quiet time, whether out in nature or otherwise, an important element in one's spiritual life in seeking to connect with God. Trying to do so doing by itself is not enough. Where is God most? God is in his people. When we wander about by ourselves, our experience with God is limited. It is in relationships with others that we gain support and discernment as we seek to follow Christ.

Furthermore, when persons fail to regularly attend worship, they tend to become set in their ways. They are not exposed to new truths. The sense of sharing and the experience of fellowship is lost as are the multi-dimensional benefits of corporate worship (e.g., music, corporate prayer, sermon, communion, etc.). And, in the absence the regular attendance at church worship, a person may avoid regular thinking about God, prayer, etc. even to the extent of no worship at all.

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309. Lonnie Richardson, "A Single Coal Cannot Survive," National Association of Congregational Christian Churches Devotional Booklet, March 16, 2003.

c. Building the Body of Christ[310]

During worship services, often there are pew sitters who wonder why they are there and, finding no satisfactory answer, drop out. Mainline Protestant churches report significant drop in worship attendance. Various reasons have been expressed as to why including boring sermons, dislike of the music style, irrelevance to their daily lives, etc.

Paul writes "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. „„ you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." (1 Corinthians 12:12, 27). In Ephesians he remarks "… Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior." (Ephesians 5:23).

To have any kind of authentic relationship with God through worship, one needs to let go of focusing what he or she will get out of it. If nothing else, *simply show up.* If church members don't show up, who will create the body of Christ. With this purpose in mind, approach God with the assurance that there is a reason to be there, perhaps simply to hear a grieving person or to help a mom with her children. The spiritual discipline of worship includes building up the body of Christ.

d. Christ Is Our Model

Christ is our model for Christian living. He regularly went to church. If our Lord went to church, clearly so should we. The spiritual discipline of worshipping collectively with other people is an essential ingredient to one's growing toward a more Christ-like life.

5. Preparing for Worship[311]

Few of us give much thought to entering into actually worshipping. On most Sundays, we consider ourselves fortunate to get out of bed, locate suitable attire, consume a quick cup of coffee and glance at the newspaper before scrambling out the door, driving to church and sliding into the pew in time for the beginning of the service. When children, a spouse and/or out-of-town guests are added to the mix, the minimal goal of arriving in time for the first hymn may be all that we can do. At this hectic pace, we may not feel centered enough to "enter" worship until well into the service.

By engaging in this frantic weekly routine, we at least demonstrate that worship matters to us. We want the worship of God to be part of our lives. However, it is nigh on impossible for worship to be a fulfilling part of our lives, let alone its life-giving core, when we fail to allot adequate preparation time. The spiritual discipline of preparation for worship entails *slowing down, making a transition,* and *warming up.*

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[310] Drawn from Betsey Mauro, "The Discipline of Showing Up for Worship; Confessions of a Bad Pew Sitter," Congregationalist, p.13, March 3, 2013.

[311] This Section draws primarily from Marlea Gilbert, Christopher Grundy, Eric T. Myers, Stephanie Perdew, "Preparing Ourselves for Worship," 2007-01-15 (Alban Institute, alban.org).

If we play an instrument, we set aside time for various preparatory exercises. If we play a sport, dance or practice yoga, we allot time to warm up. These preparations help shift our focus from other parts of life to the activity at hand. Similarly, fully participating in worship also calls for preparation.

a. Slowing Down

Slowing down starts with the pace of our morning routine before leaving for church. Rushing around on Sunday mornings and arriving barely in time or even late prevents preparation for worship. We benefit by starting slowly and calmly as we turn our focus toward the one whom we worship.

b. Making a Transition

Preparation for worship calls for a transition. Worship is not separate from our on-going lives, but rather it is a special event within the patterns of life. We move from self-directed, outward-focused activity to a time of structured and active listening and openness to God's presence and guidance. For the potential of worship to affect us positively, deeply and powerfully, we need to open ourselves to God's word for us.

How might we prepare to be touched deeply? Simply acknowledging that worship entails a transition from our daily routine to focusing on God begins the transition. For most, however, more may be required. Perhaps on Saturday evening or Sunday morning prior to worship, we can spend some time to reflect on our week. Reflecting on our weekly experiences renders us more aware of what we need to bring to God. We can become more attuned to how God might be calling us to something new, whether a relationship, a job, or a role. We become aware of that which we need to celebrate, for what we should be thankful, and why we are offering God our praise.

c. Warming Up

Our warm-up begins when we approach and enter our common worship location. We greet people and reconnect. Some might participate in a class or rehearsal before the service begins. We then make our way to the sanctuary, settle in and perhaps spend a bit of time in quiet thought. The prelude or other opening of the service provides time to complete our warm-up and ready ourselves to participate fully in worship.

> We need time to collect ourselves, to settle down inwardly, to be reminded of who God is, who we are, and why we have gathered. In other words, the mood for worship must be established.[312]

Worship is a fundamental spiritual discipline. To fully participate in worship requires preparation. Hence, preparation for worship should be incorporated into the spiritual discipline

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[312] Robert E. Webber, *Worship is a Verb: Eight Principles for Transforming Worship* 142 (3rd printing 1999).

of worship. Furthermore, the church should create conditions conducive to preparing for worship.

In summary, the spiritual discipline of worship involves learning about what participating in a worship service worship is (or should be), i.e., an encounter with, invitation from, and response to our God. This spiritual discipline also involves learning that the central purpose of worship is to respond to God's invitation to enter into and maintain a personal relationship with him through expression of reverence, awe and submission which embraces exalting God with lofty praise, honor, thanksgiving and joy. Although not negating the benefit of private worship, regularly engaging in vital communal worship experience offers the opportunity of a *time of transformation* through an encounter with the holy.[313] And finally, the spiritual discipline of worship includes learning and practicing preparation before the service by slowing down, making a transition, and warming up.

D. PURSING INTIMACY WITH GOD THROUGH THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE OF SOLITUDE, SILENCE AND LISTENING

To experience the power of God in our lives, we must experience the presence of God. To experience the presence of God, we need to make a habit of spending time alone with him in silence and solitude. God calls upon us to do so. In Psalm 46 God says "Be still and know that I am God...." (Psalm 46:10)

1. Solitude

Jesus calls us to "[c]ome away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." (Mark 6:31) Solitude was a practice often entered into by Christ. Since Christ needed periods of solitude, think how much more we need it?

The purpose of the spiritual discipline of solitude is to free oneself from both the addiction to and the distraction of noise in order that one can be totally present with and open up oneself to God. This involves allowing uninterrupted time in a distraction free environment so that one experiences the sense of being at rest alone with God. In solitude we place ourselves where God can reveal things to us which we might not otherwise notice in the normal pursuit of our lives.

> Solitude is a formative place because it gives God's Spirit time and space to do deep work. When no one is there to watch, judge and interpret what we say, the Spirit often brings us face to face with hidden motives and compulsions... The world of recognition, achievement and applause disappears and we stand squarely before God without props. ... [W]e need solitude if we intend to unmask the false self. ...Alone, without distractions, we put ourselves in a place where God can reveal things to us that we might not notice in the normal preoccupations of life. ...[God]

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[313] Fox River Congregational Church, Minutes of Task Force on Disciple-Making. October 29, 2008,

> wants us to be who we are meant to be. In solitude we see how little we embrace our true identity in Christ. ... In solitude we learn what it is to distinguish between the voice of God and the voices of the world. … Don't be afraid of the darkness of solitude. Stay with God. The light will eventually dawn.[314]

In essence,

> In order to experience the power of God in life, we must experience the presence of God. In order to experience the presence of God, we need to make a habit of spending time in silence and solitude. … It's about being alone with God, and being quiet so that we can hear him speak.[315]

Solitude is not only a spiritual discipline to be practiced in its own right, it is also used in conjunction with other spiritual disciplines such as silence and prayer.

2. Silence and Listening

Silence is not only the absence of speaking; it is also listening.[316] Silence is a regenerative practice of listening to God in quiet without interruption. Silence enables us to leave behind the competing demands of our world for time alone with God. The spiritual discipline of silence "can serve to focus on being increasingly attentive to God by shutting out the noise and chatter of the world."[317]

Silence may settle in with nothing apparently happening. We wonder if it is a waste of time. But, "like a can opener the silence opens up the contents of our heart, allowing us deeper access to God…."[318] As we remain in silence, our capacity to open up more and more to God increases. "Together the disciplines of solitude and silence offer time for God to guide and be in control of one's life and offer time to hear God's purposes."[319]

3. Practicing Solitude, Silence and Listening

Scripture reveals the quest for solitude. Great leaders were familiar with solitude including Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, prophets of the Old Testament, John the Baptist as well as New Testament figures, most importantly Jesus. These individuals knew the power of solitude because they experienced the power of solitude.[320] Scripture is replete with Jesus often

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[314] Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* 112-13 (2005).
[315] Lonnie Richardson, "Beyond Life as Usual – Solitude: Being Present with God," February 17, 2008 (sermon).
[316] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* 98 (rev. ed. 1988).
[317] Stuart R. Merkel, *A Strategy for Employing Individual and Communal Spiritual Disciplines for Spiritual Growth at Gurnee Community Church* 76, November 2008.
[318] Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* 109 (2005).
[319] Stuart R. Merkel, *A Strategy for Employing Individual and Communal Spiritual Disciplines for Spiritual Growth at Gurnee Community Church* 100, November 2008.
[320] Lonnie Richardson, "Beyond Life as Usual – Solitude: Being Present with God," Feb. 17, 2008 (sermon).

withdrawing into solitude to pray (e.g., Luke 5:16). Since Jesus regularly sought solitary places, so should we.[321]

The more hectic our lives, the more essential it is that we develop the habit of seizing those opportunities throughout the day to be alone with God. Solitude opens the possibility for a radical relationship with God.

John Ortberg offers some guidelines for the daily practice of the spiritual discipline of solitude a few minutes at a time.

- Be still for a moment and quiet your mind.
- Acknowledge that Jesus is present. Invite him to teach you.
- Go back in your mind to when you first woke up and watch that scene, as if on video. This may lead you to pray for patience, greater love, courage, forgiveness, or other virtues.
- Continue to reflect on the day, going from scene to scene. Some scenes may fill you with gratitude, others with regret. Speak to God about this. You might pray for people with whom you interacted.
- End win a prayer of thanksgiving for God's mercy and love. Ask him to refresh you as you sleep.[322]

Regardless of the time that we have, whether it be five minutes here or fifteen minutes there, stop and be still. Get alone with God. Forget about everything but him. Be silent and listen. If we are serious about wanting an awareness of and interaction with God, we need to spend time listening to him. Regular Bible reading offers the opportunity to hear God. Practice the art of listening to what God says. The spiritual discipline of solitude, silence and listening is about being alone, quiet and in the presence of with God in a manner that we can hear him speak. This enhances the likelihood of God renewing, invigorating and energizing us and, most importantly, shaping and transforming us into more Christ-like in our thoughts, feelings and actions. The most powerful part of our prayer life is the time we spend alone with God in silence and listening. In our silence, God is able to break through to us and transform us.

E. PURSUING INTIMACY WITH GOD THROUGH THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE OF MEDITATION

1. Meditation in General

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[321] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* 97 (rev. ed. 1988).
[322] John Ortberg, *The Life You Have Always Wanted* (Participant's Guide) 45 (2004).

The biblical use of the two Hebrew words for meditation convey various meanings such as listening to God's word, reflecting on his words, rehashing his deeds and ruminating on his law. In each situation the emphasis is on changed behavior as a result of encountering the living God.[323] "Christian meditation, very simply, is the ability to hear God's voice and obey his word."[324]

The ability to hear God is not a rare or special ability possessed only by a few. We do not need special gifts or psychic powers. God speaks to people not because they have special abilities. But rather, he speaks to them "because they … are willing to listen."[325]

The purpose of meditation is to grow into a familiar relationship with God. The expression "he walks with me, he talks with me," rather than being pious jargon, becomes a description of daily life.[326] The fact of spiritual life is that such life is available to all who search for it. All who acknowledge Jesus as Lord and desire to hear his voice can enter into the presence of and converse with the living God.[327]

2. Getting Started

The desire to hear God's voice is a gift of God's grace. Thus, the starting point for meditation is to desire and pray for this gift of grace. This moves us forward on the journey to be in the presence and to hear the voice of God.[328] "Meditation is a long, ardent gaze at God, his work and his Word. Slowing down and giving one's undivided attention to God lies at the core of Christian meditation."[329] Contrary to our busy culture, meditation calls for us to stop and pay attention. Meditation allows God to reveal his truth in our hearts. But, for this to happen, we need to slow down and concentrate on him.[330]

The only way to learn how to effectively meditate is to meditate. Although some hints or suggestions might assist a person in doing so, they are not offered as rules which must be followed, nor are they intended to confine a person in how he or she goes about engaging in the spiritual discipline of meditation. Thus, the following are suggestions only. Ultimately, each person should do what works best for him o her.

When a certain level of proficiency has been achieved in one's inward spiritual life, it is possible for a person to meditate at any time under almost all circumstances. However, for

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[323] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* 15 (rev. ed. 1988).
It is the focus on obedience and faithfulness that distinguish Christian mediation from its Eastern and secular counterparts. *Id.* at 16. Eastern forms of meditation seek to become detached from the world and losing individuality into the cosmic mind. The longing is to be free from the burdens of life and released into the impersonality of nirvana. There is no God to be attached to or to hear from. Detachment is the ultimate goal. Eastern meditation seeks to empty the mind whereas Christian meditation seeks to fill it. *Id.* at 20-21.
[324] *Id.* at 17.
[325] *Id.* at 16.
[326] *Id.* at 19.
[327] *Id.* at 23, 24.
[328] *Id.* at 24-35.
[329] Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* 172 (2005).
[330] *Id.* at 173.

beginners and experts alike, it is important to allocate some regular time (perhaps daily) for formal meditation. To be successful, "[w]e must pursue 'holy leisure' with a determination that is ruthless to our datebooks."[331]

Curb distractions. Find a place which is quiet and free from disruptions – away from a telephone, television and other persons. A contemplative view, such as a lovely landscape, is helpful. And, it is best to utilize the same spot on a regular basis rather than hunting for a different location each time.[332]

In one sense it can be said that posture makes no difference. One can pray at any time in any place in any position. The best approach is for each person to discover a position which is most comfortable and least distracting. Regardless of the posture assumed, the "aim is to center the attention of the body, mind, and the spirit upon 'the glory of God in the face of Christ.'" (2 Corinthians 4:6).[333]

Meditation does not require the emptying of the mind so that nothing is there. But rather, in meditation we seek to open up our minds to God. When one undertakes mediation, he or she accepts an invitation to apprehend God. As we meditate, eliminate our preoccupations so that our minds can focus on God. "Meditation is simply *focused* thinking."[334]

3. Meditation on Scripture

The fundamental importance of meditation on scripture is evidenced by the fact that it is mentioned more than 50 times in the Old Testament.[335] No spiritual habit will do more to transform one's life toward being more like Christ than daily meditation on scripture. To establish friendship with God is to think about his Word throughout the day - i.e., the spiritual discipline of meditation. One cannot be God's friend without knowing what God says. You can't love God without knowing him and you cannot know him without knowing his Word. God reveals himself through his Word.[336]

To meditate on God's Word, select a verse, chapter or book of the Bible. Don't hurry through it. Memorize a short portion so as to keep it before you. Akin to a cow chewing its cud, keep returning to the scriptural text with mind and heart.[337]

Although there are several forms of meditation, meditation on scripture is the central to spiritual growth and transformation.

> Whereas the study of Scripture centers on exegesis (explanation or interpretation of text), *the meditation of Scripture centers on*

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[331] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* 27 (rev. ed. 1988).
[332] *Id.* at 28
[333] *Id.* at 28.
[334] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* 90 (2002).
[335] John Ortberg, *Life You've Always Wanted* 74 (2004) (Participant's Guide).
[336] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* 90 (2002).
[337] Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* 173 (2005).

> *internalizing and personalizing the passage*. The written Word becomes a living word addressed to you. This is not the time for technical studies, or analysis.... [W]ith a humble heart receive the word addressed to you. .... Dietrich Bonhoeffer says "just as you do not analyze the words of someone you love but accept them as they are said to you, accept the Word of Scripture and ponder it in your heart...." This is meditation.[338] (Emphasis supplied)

Resist the temptation to pass over a biblical passage superficially. Rushing reflects our internal state which needs to be transformed. Instead, focus on a single event, a parable or a few versus or even a single word and permit it to take root. Try to live the experience. See it, smell it, hear it, taste it, feel it. Rather than trying to dissect the experience, enter into it. Enter the story not as a passive observer, but as an active participant.[339]

John Ortberg offers suggestions for meditating on God's Word.[340]

- Ask God to meet you in scripture. Acknowledge that he is present with you. Ask him to begin to wash your thoughts. Anticipate that God will speak to you through his Word. You may be deeply moved in reading or be prompted to take a particular course of action.

- Read the Bible in a repentant spirit. Read it with a vulnerable heart, realizing that reading for transformation is different from reading to find information or to prove a point. Resolve to obey the scriptures.

- Meditate on a fairly brief passage or narrative. Read scripture slowly. When certain words or thoughts stand out, let them sink into your heart and allow God to use them to speak to you. If you are reading a story, use your imagination to envision the setting and what was happening. "Success" in meditation is not to get through ã quantity of scripture but to get the scripture through to you.

- Take one thought or verse with you through the day. Fruitful living comes to the person who meditates on scripture "day and night" (Psalm 1:1-3). Before you go to sleep at night or as soon, as you wake up, choose a single piece of scripture on which to meditate throughout the day. You'll discover wonderful truths!

- Allow this thought to become part of your memory. Memorizing scripture is a powerful means to transform your mind. It's not how many words you memorize that matters; it is what happens to your mind as you immerse it in scripture.

These are offered as suggestions, not as rules. Different people find different ways to effectively meditate on scripture.

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[338] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* 29 (rev. ed. 1988).
[339] *Id.* at 29-30.
[340] John Ortberg, *Life You've Always Wanted* 83 (2004) (Participant's Guide).

Meditation is not some mysterious ritual practiced by isolated monks. But rather, meditation is simply focused thinking. Thinking about God's Word over and over in one's mind is meditation on scripture. God shares his secrets with us if we develop the spiritual habit of thinking about his Word.[341]

F. PURSUING INTIMACY WITH GOD THROUGH THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE OF REFLECTION

The spiritual discipline of reflection calls for us to stop what we are doing long enough to analyze and reflect on where we have been, what we have learned, and why we are pursuing the direction in which we are headed. Reflection includes periods of silence and meditation, thinking through and even journaling the activities and events in our lives to enable looking back to evaluate the words we have spoken, the actions we have performed, and the attitudes we have displayed.

The discipline of reflection is akin to seeing one's life in a mirror, who we really are. It defines our realities and sets a course to follow, the direction ordained for us by God. We need to open ourselves to seeing who we truly are in light of what God calls for us to become. We need to hear his voice and to listen to how others see us. This starts by taking time to stop our activities long enough to look back, garner strength from God's guiding hand, and look forward to growing in faithfulness to his desires for us. Failing to do so deters spiritual growth leading to a more Christ-like life.[342]

G. PURSUING INTIMACY WITH GOD THROUGH THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE OF PRACTICING THE PRESENCE OF GOD[343]

Although many Christians know much about God, they don't experience his presence in their lives. They know Jesus only as the forgiver of sins and as Lord of their lives, but fail to understand and experience the whole dimension of relating to him. Yet Jesus asks us to come into relationship with him.

> I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. – (John 15:15)

As one professor said, if Jesus were to explain this verse to someone personally, Jesus might likely say the following.

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[341] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* 90-91(2002).
[342] Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church; 10 Traits of a Vital Ministry* 73 (1999).
[343] This section draws from Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transforms Us* 60 (2005); Bill Hybels, *Too Busy Not to Pray* 169 *et seq.* (revised and expanded 1998); Stephen A. Peay, "Practicing the Presence," August 11, 1996 (sermon); and Bruce G. Epperly, "Practicing the Presence of God in Ministry," Alban Weekly, Sept. 5, 2011.

> I want to relate to you as your forgiver and Lord, but also, I want to be your friend. …I'd like for you to think about me during you day. I want you to know you're never alone, to feel that wherever you go and whatever you do, there's a companion by your side. *I want you to discover my presence in your daily life*.[344] (Emphasis supplied.)

If God is truly omnipresent, we are always in his presence. We might ignore him, but we cannot evade him. However, we become so preoccupied with our activities and to do lists, we commonly fail to look for God sightings during the day. Brother Lawrence, a cook in a 17th French monastery, gave the world the phrase *the practice of the presence of God*. Become aware of the presence of God in one's own life.

God is present everywhere and present in every encounter. We are always in his presence. He is with us in church, in our solitude, in our family and friends, at work and in everything that we do. Thus, each moment provides an opportunity for us to enter into personal contact and intimate relationship with our God. Every encounter offers an opportunity to experience God's blessings and to praise him. However, if we are to experience an encounter with God, "if we want to encounter God, and this should be the desire of every believer, …we have to begin to practice his presence."[345]

Practicing the presence of God is said to be like a God hunt. Look for him in the car, at work, at home, while resting, when helping someone, etc. Look for him in everyday things or happenings whether they be objects, occurrences or other people. Take time, even though it may be only brief moments. Anywhere under any circumstances one can meaningfully communicate with the Lord who wants to enjoy a friendship with us through Jesus. It is a way of living into a deeper awareness of God in our lives.

In practicing the presence of God, first we need to be prepared to receive that which God offers to us. We come to God on his terms, not on ours. So, beginning to practice God's presence involves having our eyes, ears, heart, mind so that one's whole-self is open to the ways in which God might want to speak to us. How do we do this? Jesus provides the model. Repeatedly we see in scripture that Jesus took time to pray and rest in the presence of his Father.

> Quiet time, even if it's only a few moments, can make all the difference for us as we seek to practice God's presence in the midst of our busy world.[346]

Second, to experience being in the presence of God, we need faith. We need to look to God rather looking to ourselves. Understand that we are in God's presence and seek to be aware of it. "[J]ust know that we're in God's presence."[347] Have faith in his presence and look for him in unexpected places.

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[344] As quoted in Bill Hybels, *Too Busy Not to Pray* 171- 172 (revised and expanded 1998).
[345] Stephen A. Peay, "Practicing the Presence," August 11, 1996 (sermon).
[346] *Id.*
[347] *Id.*

With practice, the experience of God's presence will become increasingly real.

> Practicing the presence is a way of living into a deeper awareness of God's activity in our lives. Through many small pauses we begin a habit of turning our heart toward God. Through these acts of attention, we express our intention to live in union with Christ.... [P]racticing the presence is more about personal relationship than strategy. Practicing the presence of Christ is simply a way we love him and stay connected to him throughout the day.[348]

Enjoy God's presence. Awareness of his presence as a distinct reality in one's daily life offers one more way to connect with God in a loving, intimate personal relationship.[349] Being aware of his presence is to experience

- the joy of being in the company of a loving God,
- divine companionship with a faithful, dependable, eternal friend,
- basis for trust and confidence in his power knowing that life cannot throw anything in your way which one cannot handle with God, and
- increased compassion for other human beings by growing more like Jesus.[350]

It is God's will that "we live in his presence and enjoy him forever."[351]

H. PURSUING CONNECTING WITH GOD THROUGH THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE OF FASTING

Fasting has been part of the Judeo-Christian tradition for millennia. Scripture and spiritual literature include many references to people fasting for a variety of reasons. Calling people to go without food for a period of time separated them from the daily routine of food preparation and eating. This made available increased amount of time allocated to and focusing on God.

> For people struggling with giving time to God, choosing to practice fasting can directly address the inability in their busy lives to give time to God.[352]

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[348] Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transforms Us* 60 (2005).
[349] Jan Johnson, *Spiritual Disciplines Companion: Bible Studies and Practices to Transform Your Soul* 106 (2009).
[350] Bill Hybels, *Too Busy Not to Pray 175-179* (revised and expanded 1998).
[351] *Id.* at 179.
[352] Stuart R. Merkel, A *Strategy for Employing Individual and Communal Spiritual Disciplines for Spiritual Growth at Gurnee Community Church* 76, November 2008.

The pangs of hunger directed attention on their weakness and dependence on God.[353] Jesus began his ministry with a 40 day period of fasting. He also practiced fasting prior to healings and to overcome temptation. In various Christian traditions fasting plays an important role in preparing to embrace a liturgical season such as Lent in which fasting reminds us of Jesus giving up his life for us.[354]

The practice of fasting is giving up something.

> Fasting is 'the voluntary abstention from an otherwise normal function' - most often eating - for the sake of intense spiritual activity. The spiritual activity that goes on during fasting is a purposeful attention to God.[355]

Fasting can take many different forms. For example, give up food for a period of time and/or abstain from television, shopping or some other favorite activity. Fasting has proven to be one of the more difficult of the spiritual discipline in modern day culture. Denial of self of something we want is neither something we are comfortable with, nor do we feel is necessary. However, fasting is not meant to be comfortable and it is necessary. We know that to accomplish something serious, e.g., learn a language, enter a profession, etc., requires effort, discipline and denial of something in order to do so. One gives up something to gain something else.[356] As the late Bishop Fulton J. Sheen said, "Actually there are two philosophies of life: one is first the feast and then the headache, the other is fast. Fast then feast. Deferred joys purchased by sacrifice are the sweetest."[357]

What is the spiritual discipline of fasting? First, what is it not. "Fastening is not a magical method to manipulate God into doing our will. Nor is it a spiritual way to lose weight. But rather, in fasting one can open him or herself to seeking God's will and grace in ways beyond the normal habits of worship and prayer. While fasting, a person can connect with God on a one-on-one basis, offering God the time and attentiveness we might otherwise spend eating shopping or watching television.[358]

Fasting helps us as we seek focusing ourselves around God. When one sets aside time and devotes it to God, he or she can be reminded of the need for God's power. Fasting from food offers the opportunity for a powerful experience when done for the right reasons. However, food is not the only context for fasting. One can fast from other things such as fasting from restaurants, TV, the internet, smart phones, shopping, a specific activity such as golf, etc. If there is something in one's life that is hard to give up, such is a prime candidate for fasting. If the results

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[353] *The One Year Study Bible: Arranged in 365 Daily Readings* (NLT) 774 (study note) (2011) (2nd Edition, Tyndale House Publishers).

[354] Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* 219 (2005).

[355] Stuart R. Merkel, *A Strategy for Employing Individual and Communal Spiritual Disciplines for Spiritual Growth at Gurnee Community Church* .96, November 2008.

[356] Stephen Peay, National Association of Congregational Christian Churches Devotional Booklet, February 17, 2003.

[357] As quoted in *id.*

[358] Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* 219 (2005).

from doing so is a greater dependence on God, discerning his will, enhancing one's personal relationship with him, the sacrifice is well worth making.[359]

However, beware of and avoid fasting for the purpose of gaining approval of others. The Pharisees voluntarily fasted twice a week to impress people with their holiness. Jesus made clear,

> When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. [17] But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, [18] so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Matthew 6:16-18)

Fasting, as is true with other spiritual disciplines, should avoid being self-centered. This should not to be done to make oneself look good in the eyes of others and gain praise. But rather, exercising a spiritual discipline should be God centered. When engaging in prayer, good deeds, giving, fasting, etc., it is well to ask oneself "Would I do this if no one else knows that I did it?"

Whatever form fasting takes, the goal is to grow closer to God. The purpose of fasting is to enable us to focus and remind ourselves that we are more than physical bodies. It is a way to spend more time with and more clearly focus on God bringing us into a renewed relationship with him.[360]

The spiritual discipline of fasting is akin to practicing the spiritual discipline of practicing the presence of God. Both serve an intentional effort to set aside time for God in efforts to connect with him in a personal relationship.

I. PURSUING INTIMACY WITH GOD THROUGH THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE OF OBEYING GOD'S CALL AND DISCERNING GOD'S WILL

1. Obeying God's Call

Scripture is clear. We are called upon to obey God. "Surrender yourself to the LORD ...." (Psalm 37:7) Christ said "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." (Luke 9:23)

> *The operative word – follow*: When Jesus said, "Follow me," he defined faith. Faith goes much deeper than just believing that Jesus is the Christ; the proof of faith is following him.[361]

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[359] *The One Year Study Bible: Arranged in 365 Daily Readings* (NLT) 774 (2011) (study note) (2nd Edition, Tyndale House Publishers).
[360] Stephen Peay, National Association of Congregational Christian Churches Devotional Book, February 17, 2003.
[361] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* 118 (2006).

If we are to follow him, then he must be our leader to whose leadership we must submit to and obey.[362]

A faith that embraces discipleship (following Christ) is only real when one actively obeys. As expressed by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "*Faith is only real in obedience*."[363] Christ provides the greatest example of obedience by his acceptance of undergoing agony on the cross.

Scripture envisions discipleship as permeating all spheres of living. The authority of Jesus is to affect all that we are and all that we do. Jesus should be the Lord in our hearts in homes, workplaces, thoughts, relationships, moral decisions, social consciousness, internal life, personal relationships and social involvement. We are to seek, to know, and to live the mind and the will of God. However, in reality, many believers relegate their faith to their personal, private realm. Religion is a private affair with little influence in their public lives. Too commonly, believers unconsciously remove their Christian hat when they walk through the door into the workplace and other aspects of living and dealing with others.[364]

The spiritual discipline of obedience counteracts this all-too-common tendency. It seeks to have Jesus the Lord or Master of our lives. There are

> people who have a sincere desire to be more spiritual and develop a closer relationship with God.... [However,] they also want to be independent and chart their own course and follow their own agenda on their own terms. But becoming closer to God requires that you abandon your agenda and seek first the Kingdom of God. It means instead of being your own boss, you allow Christ to be the boss of your life.[365]

Obedience leading to spiritual growth means aligning one's will and freedom to the will of God and trusting that God knows what is best for us.

Surrendering to God is not simply a one-time event. There is the moment of surrender and then there is the practice of surrender. The practice of surrender is both moment to moment and is lifelong. The spiritual discipline of surrendering to and obeying God should become a daily habit. When we surrender to God through our obedience to him, we are surrendering to his grace, love and wisdom.[366] Thus, *living a life of obedience is a positive goal, not a negative obligatory duty*.

Obedience in the biblical sense does not mean that we are to become doormats and weak-kneed non-entities. God did not create us as puppets. Our obedience it is rooted in God's good and loving intentions for each of us. God does not force obedience upon us. We have the freedom to choose. Our obedience allows God's to shape our choices, relationships and vocations. These

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[362] *Id.* at 118-19.
[363] As quoted in *id.* at 107 (2006).
[364] Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* 27-29 (2003).
[365] Lonnie Richardson, "Winning the Inner War," August 8, 2015 (sermon).
[366] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* 83 (2002).

we are able to freely choose. We choose to obey because scripture has made clear that God knows the best way for us to live. Obedience to God frees us from the control of our own stubborn self-will and enables us to discern and do what is best for us.

> Scripture makes clear that God has a plan for us and knows the best way for people to live. Submission [obedience] is trusting that God's instructions concerning life are good for us. Instructions to [love,] forgive and serve are not intended to abuse us but rather to set us free to be who we are meant to be.[367]

Christ made clear that obedience is a precondition for an intimate relationship with God. "You are my friends if you do what I command." (John 15:14) While we are friends with God we are not equal to God. He is our loving leader whom we follow. We obey God because we love him and trust that he knows what is best for us. We want to follow Christ because of our gratitude for all that he has done for us and because the closer we follow the deeper our friendship with God becomes. Real friendship is active rather than passive. Love motivates us to obey. God treasures not only our great but also our small acts of obedience every day.

The spiritual discipline of obedience is not a stand-alone discipline. Bur rather, it is an integral part of being formed by worship, by God's Word, by prayer, by solitude, by silence and listening, and by meditation. Obedience is a foundation of being transformed into a more Christ-like life and of growth in a personal relationship with God. Thus, it is essential that a disciple-making church effectively communicate this message to its members and others so as to help them personally understand, appropriate, and live the attitude of loving obedience.

Yes, the concept of obedience poses a negative connotation for many. The idea of seeking God's can be an intimidating prospect since we're not sure what to expect. However, God's will is not all that mysterious. It is not all that complicated. Simply, God wants what is best for each of us. It is not something to be afraid of. It is not something to dread because God cares for us more than we care for ourselves. God wants what is best for you, and even furthermore God is willing to help you get it. It is important that for a person to come to the realization that obedience to God is a positive and joyful step in progressing in one's Walk with Christ.[368]

2. Discerning God's Will

a. The Promise to Guide

Each of us is constantly confronted with decisions, large and small, as to how to live our lives. One's life is the sum total of the decisions he or she makes. Choices have impacted one's past, and choices yet to be made will shape one's future. Good choices are critical.[369] However, there are times when we meander around alone trying to reach decisions when we really need to stop and ask for direction, but from whom?

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[367] Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* 119 (2005).
[368] Lonnie Richardson, Sermon, June 28, 2020.
[369] Andy Stanley, *Discovering God's Will: How to Know When You Are Heading in the Right Direction* 10 (2004).

> The God who made us is present always, every day in our lives – ready, willing and able to guide and direct us when we stop long enough to ask for direction.[370]

Scripture reveals explicit promise of divine guidance by which we may know what God wills for us. Guidance emerges from our relationship with God who promises to guide those who walk with him.

> I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you. (Psalm 32.8)

Jesus promises to lead those who follow him. "He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out…. [H]is sheep follow him because they know his voice." (John 10:3, 4) God has plans for us and they are good. As Jeremiah said,

> 'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. (Jeremiah 29:11)

God is ready and willing to make known his will to us. "The Lord will guide you always…" – (Isaiah 58:11) "He guides me along the right paths…." – (Psalm 23:3) And, "He will instruct them in the ways they should choose." (Psalm 25:12) The presence of God's guidance is a reality. Christians who miss his guidance simply demonstrate that they have failed to seek and discern his guidance.[371]

Although God promises to guide us, we can't force him to provide the guidance or help that we think we need. "There may be a good reason for his sometimes remaining silent."[372]

When one wants to know what God wants him or her to do, pray. God guides us through prayer. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." (Philippians 4:6) Ask God, talk with him about your problem, admit your concerns and confusion. God listens.[373]When seeking God's guidance, we need to ask and when we ask we need to be prepared to listen and do his will rather than insisting upon doing things our own way. (For a fuller discussion on God answering prayer, see Section I.A.2. above.) "Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him…." (Psalm 37:5) It has been well and concisely said "Don't ask God to guide your footsteps if you are not willing to move your feet."[374] It does little good to seek to discern God's will if one refrains from attempting to follow it. When we commit to doing God's will and trust him, we can then expectantly wait for him to act and guide. "Every time we say yes to God, we will get a little more sensitive to hearing him the next time.[375]

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[370] Lonnie Richardson, "God's Help When the Way Is Not Clear," April 2, 2017 (sermon).
[371] J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* 232-33 (1973).
[372] John Ortberg, *God Is Closer than You Think* 82 (2005).
[373] Lonnie Richardson, "God's Help When the Way Is Not Clear," April 2, 2017 (sermon).
[374] Anonymous.
[375] John Ortberg, *God Is Closer than You Think* 85 (2005).

> Seeking God's guidance is an intentional choice. It is not a passive avoidance of responsibility, a shortcut to making decisions, or a way to escape risk. Seeking God's guidance involves prayer, exercising judgment, wisdom, initiative, choice, and responsibility. To seek God's guidance means learning to listen for the Spirit in all things and to be relentlessly responsive to pursuing God's will. God guides us not so we will perform the right actions but so we will learn how to become the right kind of people, so we will learn how to live in the context of seeking his kingdom.[376]

But even though we commit, trust and wait, the question still remains, how do we discern God's will for us.[377]

b. Discerning How God Guides Us

Discernment is to distinguish one thing from another. For the person seeking to follow Christ, the question of discernment is whether what we hear is from God, rather than from other voices, and, if so, what is he trying to tell us. Discernment usually starts as a process when there is a decision to be made. On a personal basis this may simply be asking God for daily direction, guidance and help.[378] Before we can discern, we must first listen. When we hear, perceive or feel something, we need to discern if this is what God is telling us. If it is, then apply that to the decision and/or action with which we are confronted.

God has created us with a free will. We have the option of accepting or rejecting his invitation to servant-hood. It is rare that God will so overwhelm us with his message that is so clear that we lack freedom to choose. We will rarely, if ever, experience God answering our prayers by speaking to us in such a clear, loud voice that there is no mistaking that this is God's speaking.[379]

If we expect or require that God answers us in a particular way (e.g., standing in front of us speaking in clear English with appropriate evidence that he is God), it is unlikely that we will discern his guidance for us. Furthermore, we must be alert to competing voices. As 1 John 4:1 expresses, "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." Thus, we need to be alert and receptive as to how God is most likely to provide guidance. Since there are no limits as the manner which God chooses to provide us with guidance, how can one be sure that what he or

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[376] John Ortberg, *Life You've Always Wanted* 81 (2004) (Participant's Guide).

[377] *See* the DVD program, John Ortberg, "God Is Closer than You Think," a six week small group program format aimed at helping people experience God's presence in their lives, hear God speak in understandable ways, and discover God's desire to be with you. In "Hearing God" (a six session DVD program good for small groups), Dallas Willard (in dialogue with John Ortberg and Richard Foster) offers his insights and biblically based guidelines to hearing God's voice.

[378] John Ackerman, *Listening to* God 80 (2001).

[379] Roy M. Oswald , Robert E. Friedrich Jr., "Discernment, Theology, and Prayer," June 25, 2012 (Alban Institute).

she hears or senses is truly coming from God? The more common ways, either separately or in combination with one another, include the following.

(1) Discerning through Scripture

In the Bible God sets forth his general will for all people in all places in all circumstances. "Your [God's] word is a lamp under my feet, a light on my path" (Psalm 119:105).

> Perhaps one of the reasons we so often feel like we're stumbling around in the dark is that we have not turned on this light. When we study it, read it, make it a part of us, it is then there for us, like a light, when we need it.[380]

By attending to scripture we can discern his will on a whole range of subjects. The Bible makes clear that certain things are right and certain things are wrong for not only people in general, but also for each of us in particular. In these areas, he has already expressed his will for us to follow. God continues to speak to us through scripture.

> The simple truth is, the more you read the Bible, the better you will have a sense of God's will for your life. It is the instruction manual for living.[381]

Read the Bible with the mindset of seeking and learning God's will for your life.[382] Furthermore, and importantly, *"[A]ll leadings that come from God are consistent with his Word, the Bible.*[383]

With regular and methodical Bible reading and study, one often finds a particular reading which jumps out as being appropriate to the circumstances in which he or she finds him or herself.

> The Bible may not parallel your own situation exactly, but as you learn to study it properly, it offers an invaluable look inside the mind of God. And that is a vital perspective when your goal is discovering God's will....

The Bible is the best blueprint for understanding how God thinks and guides us.[384]

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[380] Lonnie Richardson, "God's Help When the Way Is Not Clear," April 2, 2017 (sermon).
[381] Lonnie Richardson, "Does God Guide Me,?", June 21, 2015 (sermon).
[382] Lonnie Richardson, "What About God? Can God Guide Me?," July 8, 2018 (sermon).
[383] Bill Hybels, *Too Busy Not to Pray* 160 (revised and expanded 1998).
[384] Andy Stanley, *Discovering God's Will: How to Know When You Are Heading in the Right Direction* 54 (2004).

(2) Discerning through Discovering Our Gifts

God's leadings are *consistent with his gifts to us*. Usually, God's leadings are consistent with the person he created a person to be. God is not likely to design a person for one purpose and then call him or her to fulfill another purpose.[385]

> To be sure, he loves to stretch our abilities and expand our potential, and that often involves leading us along untried paths. That does not mean, however, that he ignores our gifts and inherent interests. After all, he gave them to us in the first place so that we could serve him more effectively. Instead, he strengthens our natural abilities and builds on them.[386]

Thus. identifying God's gifts to us offers another and important means of discerning God's will for each individual. God provides us with gifts to be used. Yet,

> [m]any people pray to know the will of God in their lives without realizing that his gifts to us can express his will for us![387]

In one of his parables, Christ spoke of three servants to whom their master entrusted three talents (money). Two made use of their talents whereas the third feared to risk his and buried it in the ground. It was not used, hence did not grow. Upon his return, the master was furious with this servant. (Matthew 25:14-30) Some Christians adopt this ostrich-like approach with respect to their God given talents. They either ignore or fail to use them. As expressed in this parable, we Christians are responsible for using our God given gifts and should expect to be accountable for failing to do so.[388] "Faith does not deepen through being allowed to stagnate, but through being applied."[389]Thus, as one seeking to grow in his or her Walk with Christ, he or she needs to discern and use his or her God given gifts in discerning God's guidance and responding to his call for his or her life.

Sometimes God may lead us along untried paths which seen inconsistent or beyond the abilities which he has gifted us. This does not mean we are to ignore our gifts and inherent interests. But rather, God may be seeking to stretch the abilities so that we may more effectively serve him Here he strengthens and builds on our natural abilities. However, if one senses a leading the appears completely contrary to who God made one to be, test this leading very carefully by other means.[390]

For consideration of God given gifts, discerning one's gifts and his call for people to use those gifts, see PART THREE Section III.B.3. below and PART FIVE Section VIII.B.2 below.

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[385] Bill Hybels, *Too Busy Not to Pray* 162 (revised and expanded 1998).
[386] *Id.*
[387] Alister McGrath, *Doubting: Growing Through the Uncertainties of Faith* 86 (2006).
[388] *Id.* at 86-87.
[389] *Id.* at 87.
[390] Bill Hybels, *How to Hear God*, p.22-23 (1999) (pamphlet, Inter Varsity Press).

(3) Discerning Through the Holy Spirit

God guides us in our personal situations through the Holy Spirit which "is not an impersonal life-force or power, but God's personal and active presence in the world."[391] The better we come to know God, the better we will recognize his voice. Examples of how God speaks to us by his Spirit include (i) answering us when we pray (listen), (ii) instilling a strong desire in us to do something, and (iii) more unusual means such as visions and dreams.[392] When one stays attuned to the Holy Spirit, he or she will develop a sense of what God wants one to do.[393]

There are times when we just strongly feel or just know, on non-intellectual basis, that we are being guided by the Holy Spirit. Feelings are those things occurring inside of us which are not the product of our reason. This includes insights, intuitions, emotions, and movements. A good question to ask is whether one's feelings are leading toward or away from God?[394] Do they lead towards reflecting "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control?" (Galatians 5:22-23)

Also, distinguish between those feelings which are deep and lasting and those which come and go. Furthermore, feelings need to be expressed and tested in a safe group. However, beware of sensed promptings separate from the Word of God as revealed in scripture.

(4) Discerning through Reasoning and Common Sense

Being a Christian does not require us to abandon reason and common sense. The New Testament encourages us to think. Reason is that which is informed by common sense, scholarship and tradition which includes church tradition, sacraments and history. Don't be deterred or discouraged from using one's intellect and commonsense. "Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this." (2 Timothy 2:7) Since God created us with a mind, clearly he intends and expects us to use it.[395]

(5) Discerning through Involvement in Servanthood

God's leadings generally involve servanthood. Counterfeit leadings often are relatively easy to discern. They tend to be self-promoting or self-serving. For example, I feel compelled to do something in Honolulu in the middle of a cold Midwest winter rather than accomplishing something here at home. Watch out if a leading promises easy money or fame, perks and toys. In contrast, one can usually sense that a leading is from the Holy Spirit when it calls for one to be humble, serving or encouraging someone else, or giving something away.[396]

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[391] Jeffery W. Barbeau, "Who Is the Holy Spirit, *Theology Questions Every9one Askes: Christian Faith in Plain Language* 130 (2014) (edited by Gary M. Burge and David Lauber).
[392] Nicky Gumbel, *Alpha Questions of Life: An Opportunity to Explore the Meaning of Life* 101-104 (2003).
[393] Lonnie Richardson, "What About God? Can God Guide Me?," July 8, 2018 (sermon).
[394] *Id.* at 86, 88.
[395] *Id.* at 104.
[396] Bill Hybels, *Too Busy Not to Pray* 163-164 (revised and expanded 1998).

c. Testing Our Discernment of God's Guidance: Standards for Discernment

In attempting to discern whether what we believe to be the voice of God does in fact come from God, we need to test our perception of what God calls us to do. In doing so, ask God in prayer to reveal his will and get one's heart ready to do God's will whatever it may be.[397] When searching for God's truth as to any problem (e.g., grief, job crisis, spiritual problems, etc.), bounce the ball off any, or combination thereof, of the aforementioned leadings: (i) scripture, (ii) discovering one's gifts, (iii) compelling spirit, (iv) reasoning and common sense, and (v) involvement in serving others. This can be any order. But, at some point, one has to bounce the ball off scripture.[398] Apply the teachings of scripture. While the other leadings can be useful, scripture is critical. Ultimately, our perception of the voice of God must be tested against God's Word as revealed in scripture. Is what we are discerning as God's will for us consistent with the Bible? Does it promote love? If not, it cannot come from God who is love.[399] On the other hand, if the applications of these tests are affirmative, one can be reasonably sure that he or she has correctly discerned God's will for him or her. Truth can emerge from one or more of the five experiences.

Similarly, Bill Hybels maintains that a leading is probably from God when it (i) is consistent with his Word, (ii) is congruent with who he created one to be, and (iii) requires some sacrifice or steps of faith. However, he raises cautions as to those leadings which

- require a major life changing decision within a short period of time,
- require one to go deeply into debt,
- require one to shatter family or friendship relationship, and/or
- causes unrest in the spirit of mature Christians, friends or counselors.

Although such leadings should not be automatically rejected, assuming they are consistent with scripture, they should be considered very carefully.[400]

d. Where to Start in Discerning God's Voice

In seeking do discern God's voice through the practice of one or more spiritual disciplines, where does one start? There are two basic approaches: individually and relationally.

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[397] Casey Helmick, "How to Discern God's Will," OutreachMagazine.com, October 21, 2018.
[398] Rob Fredrickson, "Classic Questions of Cosmic Consequence (Introduction to Theology)," January 16, 1994 (Seminar, First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa) (based on notes prepared by Jon S. Hanson).
[399] Nicky Gumbel, *Alpha Questions of Life: An Opportunity to Explore the Meaning of Life* 102 (2003).
[400] Bill Hybels, *Too Busy Not to Pray* 164-165 (revised and expanded 1998).

(1) Individually Discerning[401]

When one *individually* seeks to discern God's voice, there are numerous books and programs which describe numerous and various spiritual disciplines and suggestions on how to practice them.[402] Through the practice of these disciplines, one seeks to hear God. Several have been raised in the discussion above. However, since we are pursuing a relationship with God, don't spend all one's time reading books about spiritual disciplines. Instead, be aware of God's initiative. Ask him and pay attention to him.

This is not to suggest that effort should not be made to learn about various spiritual practices and then try them. Failure to do so limits one's horizons and opportunities. However, it does say they we should not simply rely upon and dutifully practice a host of disciplines suggested by a church, some of which may not work for us. Instead, learn about and try some disciplines and do so in situations in which you are comfortable. Most importantly, notice where God speaks to you most often whether through scripture, enjoying nature, engaging in relationships. Watch and pray. Pay attention to God's presence or absence. Listen.

(2) Relationship Discerning

Although God does guide people individually, he also speaks through others. Seeking advice is important in reaching good decisions. The Book of Proverbs affords numerous bits of wisdom and advice.

- [A] wise man listens to advice. (Proverbs 12:15)
- [P]lans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed. (Proverbs 15:22)
- Make plans by seeking advice. (Proverbs 20;18)

The need to distinguish between messages from God and possibly conflicting messages from other sources highlight the importance of not only our own gift of discernment but also the importance of always testing our options within a community of faith.[403]

> God does guide the individual richly and profoundly, but he also guides groups of people and can instruct the individual through the group experience.... [Jesus assured] that when a people genuinely gathered in his name his will could be discerned. The... [Holy] Spirit would utilize the checks and balances of the different believers to ensure that when their hearts were in unity they were in rhythm with the heartbeat of the Father.[404]

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[401] Ackerman, *Listening to God: Spiritual Formation in Congregations* 63-64 (2001).

[402] *E.g.*, Gordon T. Smith, *Listening to God in Times of Choice: The Art of Discerning God's Will* (1997) and M. Blaine Smith, *Knowing God's Will: Finding Guidance for Personal Decisions* (1991).

[403] Roy M. Oswald and Robert E. Friedrich Jr., Discernment, Theology, and Prayer (1996) (Alban Institute).

[404] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* 176-77(rev. ed. 1988)..

Many people do best in a group in which their experiences are affirmed. With the aid of community, we can sort out what we are hearing. Keeping to ourselves ensures that we won't develop a vocabulary for our spiritual experiences, won't learn from others and won't experience and enjoy the validation which comes from telling our story and eliciting responses from others.[405] Help each other pay attention to God and to what God is doing in their lives.[406] (Later discussion focuses attention on the critical importance of participating in genuine relational small groups which includes their role in helping to discern God's voice.) "Matters of the highest importance can be brought to the believing community for discernment."[407]

However, it is essential to obtain counsel from the right people, through a counsel of saints (saints meaning other believers). Obtaining a range of advice can be important. But, don't simply seek out people whom we know will agree with us. However, although seeking advice is a means to help discern God's will for us, ultimately our decisions are between us and God. The responsibility is ours. Don't shift responsibility on to others whose advice may or may not be correct.

3. When God Is Silent

Even though a person seeks to hear God's voice, God may remain silent. However, one should not be discouraged. God does listen, but he isn't simply an answering machine. He does speak when he has something to say. Also, one may fail to hear his voice more often for failure to listen and/or failure to schedule times of silence and solitude enabling communication to occur. To enhance the likelihood of hearing, in addition to carving out blocks of time for listening to God, keep one's ears tuned to listen each day throughout the day.[408]

In short, God has a specific will for each of us. However, too often we fail to discern his call and his will goes wanting. We need to concentrate on making our decisions in our day to day living based on our understanding of scripture, the input of our community, and our personal discernment. Make our decisions carefully, "but we need not be terrorized by the specter of 'missing God's will' if we seem to have a path that wavers a bit. Remember that God is for us and will work things out for our good."[409] (Romans 8:28)

J. "FOLLOW ME" WEAR

Andy Stanley, lead pastor of North Point Church, Atlanta and founder of North Point Ministries (consisting of 6 campuses and average attendance of 38,000 people), created) a DVD study entitled *Follow* (2014) which serves as the primary basis for the discussion in this section.[410]

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[405] John Ackerman, *Listening to God: Spiritual Formation in Congregations* 64-65 (2001).
[406] For a starting approach, *see e.g., id.* at 67.
[407] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* 181 (rev. ed. 1988).
[408] Bill Hybels, *Too Busy Not to Pray* 150-151 (revised and expanded 1998).
[409] Vincent Pacote, "How Should We Live?" *Theology Questions Everyone Theology Questions Everyone Asks: Christian Faith in Plain Language* 178 (2014) (edited by Gary M. Burge and David Lauber).
[410] Andy Stanley, *Follow* 47-52 (2014) (DVD and (Participant's Study Guide).

Often one can tell who or what a person follows by what he or she wears. For example Green Bay Packer fans may wear Packer sweat shirts, other items featuring a Packer logo, or even cheese wedges on their heads. Intense Notre Dame fans dress like leprechauns. Similarly, religious people may tell you who or what they follow through the way they dress. A Muslim woman might wear a hijab, a Buddhist monk typically wears a red, yellow or orange robe, and Sikh men wear dastars and grow their beards. In order to know who or what someone follows by what he or she wears, what should a follower of Jesus wear? A nonbeliever might say a cross on a chain, a t-shirt showing "John 3:16", or perhaps a placard on which there is printed "Sinners burn in Hell."

> But Jesus didn't call his followers to wear gold crosses, T- shirts, or placards with hateful rhetoric. When it came to follow wear, he had something entirely different and more challenging in mind.[411]

The apostle Paul, in his letter to the people at the church in Colossae in Greece, explains what Christ wants his followers to wear.

> Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, *clothe yourselves* with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. (Colossians 3:12) (Emphasis supplied.)

That is, Christians dress up in these characteristics.

- *Compassion* – The original Greek word translated here as compassion means to "experience such overwhelming love for others that you feel it in your gut."[412] Christ calls upon his followers to feel such compassion even for those who are wrong or have caused suffering on themselves through poor choices. Convey to them that you genuinely feel what they are experiencing.

- *Kindness* – Christ wants his followers, without compulsion, to be kind to others, to provide something people need when they cannot provide it themselves. Loan your ability and strength to others.

- *Humility* – Reflects seeing oneself accurately in relationship with others stemming from their relationship with God. Christ followers are nothing more than citizens of humanity, the same as everyone else. Despite a person's class, wealth, education and talent, the great equalizer is that everyone is loved by God. Followers of Christ approach others as peers regardless of who they are and what they have accomplished or not accomplished.

- *Gentleness* – Many perceive the world as punishing gentleness; one cannot get ahead by being gentle. However,

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[411] *Id.* at 48.
[412] *Id.* at 49.

> Gentleness is the decision to respond to others in light of their strengths and weaknesses rather than in light of [y]our strengths.[413]

A gentle person does not converse from a position of who they are or what they have accomplished, but rather they engage at the level with whom they are conversing. This approach has to do with communication and nothing to do with condescension.

- *Patience* – Patience is conducting oneself at the speed of other people rather than forging ahead at one's own desired speed.

Rather than centering on rules and traditions of religion, or simply to make a point which he could have done in 15 minutes instead of three years of ministry, Christ focused on relationships. Shortly before he went to the cross, Jesus said "A new command I give you: Love one another, as I have loved you, so you must love one another." (John 13:34) Paul challenges Christ followers to clothe themselves with these characteristics of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Why? Because, God is a, loving God who calls us to love one another. "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud." (1 Corinthians 13:4)

> Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity (Colossians 3:13-14).

Paul challenges us to wear these characteristics which made Christ so attractive to people who were different than him. The way you love people is how you treat them. Don't mistreat people for whom Christ died. And remember, God has been compassionate, kind, gentle, patient, and forgiving with us.

However, treating others as God treats us not easy. It is so outside our normal human instincts that, to succeed, we need to call upon God to help.

> Reach out to God for his help in putting on compassion. Ask him to help you pause so that you don't react to someone else based on what he or she should have done. Declare to God that, even though you are better than some and worse than others, all people are his children. Ask for his help in approaching others with humility. Tell you heavenly Father you want to be kind. Ask him to bring to mind opportunities to loan you strengths to others. Ask him to teach you to be patient and gentle with others, to learn to move at other peoples' pace,[414]

Andy Stanley offers an approach for developing these attributes. In the quiet of the morning and/or at other times during the course of the day (especially when about to engage

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[413] *Id.* at 51.
[414] Id. at 56.

others), take a moment to pause and think, about one or more of these characteristics. Ask God for his help. In doing so, Stanley offers an easy remainder check list CHK FLC PG which is easily verbalized as "CHECK FLICK PG."

C = compassion
H = humility
K = kindness

F= forgiveness
L = love
K= kindness – (repeating the above to enhance the above verbalization)

P = patience
G = gentleness

Continually ask God for help in internalizing and practicing these characteristics of love.

God wants us to identify ourselves as followers of Christ through reflecting his love. These characteristics are command, not option. They flow from the commands of Christ. They provide the path to guide and internalize practical Christian living. They reflect God's love. Jesus calls upon us to make a difference. When Christians do not dress properly in these characteristics, others tend to turn away from coming to or growing in Christ. The way you love people is how you treat them. God makes a difference in us through his love, and wants us to make a difference in others through us. Thus, wearing/reflecting these attributes is a fundamental element in being a follower of Christ. The spiritual discipline of "follow me" wear calls for persistent on-going asking God to help oneself develop and practice compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience and forgiving as God forgives us. This is a spiritual discipline that needs to be learned, understood, encouraged and practiced.

K. PURSUING INTIMACY WITH GOD THROUGH ONE'S OWN UNIQUENESS

No two people are exactly alike. God created each of us differently. People possess different looks, personality traits, intelligence levels, interests, etc. God grows different people in different ways. Understanding one's own uniqueness is central in discerning what it takes for each of us to grow in following Christ.[415]

Often people believe they should try to stricly emulate a person or writings whom they greatly respect such as their pastor, spiritual leaders such Billy Grahm, C. C. Lewis, Mother Teresa, friends, etc. While this might work for some, for most this quite likely will result in frustration. God does not ask why you didn't act more like someone else. He created each of us as a unique person. He made you, He knows how you operate and the way you are meant to connect with him. Trying to connect with God by simply copying someone else can lead to giving up or stagnating in one's spiritual growth.

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[415] Eric Parks and Casey Bankford, "When Discipleship Gets Personal," OutreachMagazine.com, March 7, 2012.

However, quitting should not be the response Instead, continue to try, but do so on one's own frequency in connecting with God. This does not mean that it is okay to choose or reject the mission or various stages of discipleship and still be a follower of Christ. The various elements of Mission, Covenant and the various Stages of Discipleship (the latter discussed later in PARTS FOUR and FIVE) are critical. Furthermore, one is not off the hook when it comes to commitment and disciplined sustained effort. These are essential. However, the point here is that one should be cautious about trying to force oneself to be something or someone he or she is not when seeking to follow and grow toward a more Christ-like life.

To best experience regular interactions with God on one's own frequency leading to transformational spiritual growth, one must consider the way he or she is constructed. Yes, in following Christ, there are essentials such as prayer, attention to scripture, participation in authentic community and serving others. However, one does not have to do them in exactly the same manner as others do. To grow through living on one's own frequency, one needs to understand his or her (i) spiritual pathway, (ii) learning style and (iii) various personality traits. These are clusters of preferences which are important in discerning best how to experience God leading to transformational spiritual growth.[416]

1. Spiritual Pathways

Things that make people different in how they experience spiritual growth include different spiritual pathways. "Spiritual pathways are the avenues and/or environments where one most easily and effortlessly connects with God."[417] Different respected authors express in somewhat different terms pathways for spiritual growth.

> Our individual uniqueness means we will all experience God's presence and learn to relate to him in different ways.[418]

John Ortberg sets forth seven spiritual pathways one or more of which may resonate with different individuals.[419]

- *Intellectual Spiritual Pathway* – People on this pathway experience God when they are challenged as they learn more about him. They study scripture. When addressing a problem, they tend to rely on analytical thought. Sound teaching appeals. They are energized by stimulating conversation and debates. They study scripture. Sermons and teaching, not music, focus their minds in worship. They feel closest to God when learning about him through great books, intellectual conversations, sound teaching and thinking about theology. This spiritual pathway reflects what Jesus said in the Great Commandment; "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul *and with all your mind.*" (Matthew 22:37) (emphasis supplied)

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[416] *Id.*
[417] *Id.*
[418] John Ortberg, *God Is Closer Than You Think* 110 (2005).
[419] *Id.* at 109-123.

However, inherent in this pathway is the danger of becoming all head and no heart.[420]

- *Relational Spiritual Pathway* – Those following this pathway discern a deep sense of God's presence when they are involved in significant relationships. This spiritual pathway is reflected when Christ promised that "where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:12) Small groups and community experiences are considered essential. They sense and hear God more in conversations than in reading books. However, relational types need to guard against two dangers. Superficiality may arise when one gets spread too thin in a multitude of relationship which lack challenge and depth. Also, there is the danger of becoming too dependent upon others. A bit of solitude and silence may free one from becoming addicted to what others think.[421]

- *Serving Spiritual Pathway* – People on this pathway experience God's presence most tangibly and real when they are actively helping others. Often, they have a spiritual thought or special moments sensing God's presence when serving the needs of others. They feel connected to God by doing rather than by thinking. They need to be plugged into communities in which they have meaningful serving opportunities. This pathway is reflected in Jesus' statement that "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." (Matthew 25:40) The danger for these people on this spiritual pathway is thinking that God is only present when they are serving. They need to stretch by learning to receive as well offer love. Also, they need to resist the temptation to resent others who don't serve as much as they do.[422]

- *Worship Spiritual Path* – People on the worship spiritual pathway sense something deep inside being released when offering praise to and adoration of God. They resonate with the psalmist who wrote "Lets us go to the house of the Lord." (Psalm 122) They possess the gift for expression and celebration. In worship they sense the presence and reality of God. In worship they become alive and expressive. They need to experience worship on a regular basis. However, be aware of cautions. Don't judge those who are not as expressive. Don't demand that God reproduce one worship experience or emotion the next time since doing so can point to the experience rather than to the God to whom our experience points. Don't demand or judge a worship service by the absence of reproducing a certain emotional response. Stretch spiritual growth by engaging in study to be deeply rooted in the knowledge of God.[423]

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[420] *Id.* at 112-13: Eric Parks and Casey Bankford, "When Discipleship Gets Personal," OutreachMagazine.com, March 7, 2012.
[421] John Ortberg, *God Is Closer Than You Think* 113-115 (2005); Parks and Bankford *id.*
[422] Ortberg *id.* at 115-16; Parks and Bankford *id.*
[423] Ortberg *id.* at 116-17; Parks and Bankford *id.*

- *Activist Spiritual Pathway* – Those on an activist spiritual pathway experience God through activities that require a high level of energy and a passion for action. They thrive on challenges and causes in which, depending on God's presence and guidance, they can use all their energy and zeal in serving God by advancing his kingdom. An activist needs a cause. However, cautions are needed. One may get so excited about a cause that he or she exploits people to reach the desired end. Also, God may be used simply as a means to achieve one's own objective. An activist might need some spiritual path balance by spending time in solitude and reflection to enable God to speak about what is truly motivating him or her.[424]

- *Contemplative Spiritual Path* – One drawn to a contemplative spiritual pathway experiences God most when he or she have time to think deeply without distraction. They need large blocks of uninterrupted time alone. Reflection comes naturally. God is most present when distractions and noise are set aside. Making time to listen to God in solitude and silence is vital for his or her spiritual health. Current society tends to counter this path with its demands for time and involvement. Reading contemplative books and making time to for silence and listening to God are vital to this person's deepening sense of God's presence and spiritual growth. Becoming involved in significant relationships, regular acts of serving and/or involvement in outreach helps keep one re-tethered to the outside world within which one lives.[425]

- *Creation/Naturalist Path* – People on the creation/naturalist pathway are those who connect with God most when they are in or around nature's settings by experiencing the world God created. Being in outdoors in nature replenishes and energizes. Creation opens one's spirit to God the Creator. Such experience can be augmented if one offers prayer or engages in meditation while in nature. Jesus illustrates this pathway when he withdrew from people to go into the mountains or to be near a lake, and there commune with his Father. He wanted to be out in the creation. Nevertheless, people on the creation spiritual path need to guard against using nature as an escape.[426] Resist thinking I don't need church when I can worship God on my own outside in nature.[427]

John Ackerman sets forth types of spirituality as one pursues intimacy with God; (i) the "intellectual or thinking" type, (ii) the "feeling" type (iii) the "mystic" type, and (iv) the "visionary or doing" type.[428]

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[424] Ortberg *id.* at 17-19; Parks and Bankford *id.*

[425] Ortberg *id.* at 119-20; Parks and Bankford *id.*

[426] John Ortberg, *God Is Closer Than You Think* 120-21 (2005); Eric Parks and Casey Bankford, "When Discipleship Gets Personal," OutreachMagazine.com, March 7, 2012.

[427] See Section I.C.4. *above* considering why it is necessary to go to church.

[428] John Ackerman, *Listening to God: Spiritual Formation in Congregations* 43 *et seq.* (2001).

- "Thinkers" favor coming to God through the Word by Bible study, sermons, lectures and study. Content and a coherent way of thinking about God and matters of the spirit are important.

- "Feelers," want to come to know God through their feelings and intuition. The presence of God is felt.

- Mystics find silence, mystery and imageless approaches best enables them to grow spiritually.

- "Doers" tend to find God first through doing things for the kingdom of God They are passionate about transforming society, social justice and/or individual acts of compassion.

As a person seeks to experience God and his transforming power, he or she should seek to learn his or her style of spirituality. But, where does one start?

In determining which spiritual pathway(s) one should embrace the unique way God created him or her. Don't simply copy someone else or act upon envy of the manner others attempt to experience God. Pursue one's own pathway which is most helpful to you in connecting with God. Assess what comes most naturally. Incorporate the spiritual disciplines and activities which fit into one's on rhythms of life. Most likely this will require repeated experimentation.[429]

Discerning between the voice of God from other voices is both an art and a gift. And, the best mode of discernment differs for people with spiritual styles.[430]

> For "thinkers," God is usually known best in the word." …For "feelers," God is usually revealed first in heart knowledge, in the language of relationships or music. For those whose style is "being," God may be known first in the stillness. …And for those whose spiritual path in primarily "doing," God may first be revealed in action, with reflection coming only afterward.[431]

Reading and learning about spirituality and the varying paths to further one's spiritual growth is a helpful start in discerning one's own spiritual path. However, just reading alone can be superficial. In addition, relational small groups play a vital and important role. In a group of people, one can see differences in people's spirituality types and recognize that one's own viewpoint is limited. Just seeing friends and fellow parishioners, who are different from oneself, stretches the mind. It is important that people have an opportunity to learn what works best for them, thus the need to be aware of the alternatives. First, discern and affirm one's natural starting

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[429] John Ortberg, *God Is Closer Than You Think* 121-22 (2005).
[430] John Ackerman, *Listening to* God 80-81(2001).
[431] *Id.* at 81-82.

place, but then be sensitive to when God calls us to include another style of growth as well. Thirdly, focus on the way God comes to us.[432]

2. Learning Styles[433]

Discovering one's learning style is another important component to finding the best wave length to connect with God. Understanding how one best processes information and learns, better enables a person to discern how he or she might best approach God. There are five primary learning styles.

- *Auditory Style of Learning* – If one learns best by listening, perhaps background music enhances what you are doing. Learning by listening to speakers in various formats such as radio, lectures, sermons, etc. offers the best environment for connecting with God. Concentrate on listening rather than taking copious notes may serve best.

- *Classroom Style of Learning* – If you learn best in a classroom, you most likely enjoy more than one style of learning. The combination of auditory, visual, and discussion benefits you more than others. You learn best when physically engaged in a hands-on activity in the company of other people. Taking tests and measurably tracking your progress is energizing to you. You like checklists and getting things done.

- *Social Style of Learning* – If you learn best socially, you communicate well with people verbally and nonverbally. You typically prefer learning in groups or classes, or you like to spend one-on-one time with a teacher or an instructor. You heighten your learning by bouncing your thoughts off other people and listening to how they respond. You prefer to work through issues, ideas, and problems with a group.

- *Verbal Style* – If you learn best verbally, you like to write, read, and talk. It is easier for you to remember information once you have written it down or explained it to someone else.

- *Visual Style* – If you learn best by watching, you remember new information best through images and pictures. You might visualize through books, blackboards, screens, TVs, etc. You can easily visualize objects, plans, and outcomes in the way you remember them looking.

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[432] *Id.* at 56.

[433] This section draws primarily on Eric Parks and Casey Bankford, "When Discipleship Gets Personal," OutreachMagazine.com, March 7, 2012.

3. Personality Traits[434]

Each element of one's personality enters into one's relationship with God. Somethings come more naturally to a person. Certain types of spiritual practices are more likely to energize as compared to others. Thus, understanding one's personality is as important as one's spiritual pathways and learning style for connecting with God.

Assessing personality styles has become quite common to aid in discovering strengths, weaknesses, passions, and skill sets. It has been said that there are nine basic types of personalities. In reading descriptions of each, one should start thinking which one reflects him or her and how it applies in seeking to connect with God.

- The *reformer* is disciplined, strong, responsible and organized. Such person, possessing a strong moral compass (including honesty and integrity) is able to overcome adversity. He or she likes hard work hard, checklists, clear communication, and situations where there are clear right and wrong answers. A caution, being a perfectionist, this type of personality may become judgmental and relationally cold.

- The *helper* is one who is altruistic, generous, enthusiastic, thoughtful, and sympathetic. Such person tends to be caring, a listener and dependable. He or she likes to help others in need, nurture, encourage and is interested in the lives of others. A caution, such persons have a difficult time saying no and sometimes care too much how others think of them.

- The *achiever* is driven, industrious, confident, and energetic. Such people tend to be leaders. They are contagious and people want to be a part of the things they do. To be successful they like to enhance their abilities and skills. However, these types being driven and ambitious are likely to mask their inadequacies and may try too hard for the applause of people.

- The *individualist* is one who is imaginative, honest, profound, inquisitive, and passionate. He or she feels things deeply, is creative and looks for the positive side in difficult situations. Because this type of person tends to feel things deeply, he or she tend to hold grudges.

- The *investigator* is intelligent, independent, and sensible. Such people are observant, understand details, and are solution-oriented. They analyze a large amount of information and develop clear explanations for complex things. Priding themselves on logical thinking they might become insecure when not knowing the answer to a dilemma.

- The *loyalist* is authentic, dependable, sacrificial, warm, and discerning. This personality commits to a cause and stands up for what he or she deems right.

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[434] This section draws primarily on *id.*

These people go to great lengths to accomplish a mission. Since they possess an enormous sense of responsibility, they may suffer from a sense of not doing enough and worrying about outcomes they cannot control.

- The *enthusiast* is optimistic, versatile, resilient and curious. He or she is willing to try almost anything and have fun doing it. This type of person tends to be, involved in a variety of activities and enjoys adventure. However, there is a tendency to over commit.

- The *challenger* is one who is resourceful, self-confident, persistent, and decisive. People with this type of personality are rarely intimidated and are inspiring to follow. Such personalities like to take charge and help those who cannot help themselves. They have a strong work ethic and a high energy level. But, this personality may approach a danger zone in setting unrealistic expectations and fail to care properly for their heart, body, and soul.

- The *peacemaker* is one who is patient, unpretentious, good-natured, open minded, and kind. Such persons serve as excellent mediators and promote healthy community. They are skilled at keeping peace among family, friends, and coworkers. They are naturally drawn toward spiritual things and possess a strong desire for developing a deep connection with God. However, due to their commitment to peace and harmony, they may resist engaging in tough conversations and the resolving of conflict which leads to disengagement and becoming passive.

4. Summary

People do connect with God without knowing their most suitable spiritual pathway, learning style, or personality. However. often not having discovered an effective way to select and practice spiritual disciplines, they give up trying to practice spiritual disciplines. While we all vary to some degree in the manner we grow toward a more Christ-like life through connecting with God, other believers, other persons through serving and those outside the faith, the destination is the same, i.e., growing toward a more Christ-like life.

God has created us with our own individual uniqueness. Such uniqueness includes the best way for each of us to more readily connect with him. Prayer, spending time with God's Word, worship, active and meaningful participation in authentic Christian community, serving, and evangelism efforts to reach those outside the faith are essential for every person regardless of his or her particular pathway, learning style, or personality. It is important for the individual to discern and apply how his or her unique characteristics best relate to these core components of growing as a follower of Christ. Knowing and applying one's personal characteristic in selecting and practicing spiritual disciplines can serve as an immeasurable catalyst to sustainable spiritual growth.

II. CONNECTING WITH OTHER BELIEVERS

The first characteristic of a person growing as a disciple or follower of Christ is a person *seeking to connect with God by actively pursuing a loving intimate relationship with him* (discussed in Section I. above). The second mark of discipleship is *connecting with other believers by lovingly sharing life with them* (discussed immediately below). The third mark of discipleship is *connecting with others (whether they are believers, doubters or non-believer) by lovingly serving their needs* (discussed in Section III. below). The fourth mark of discipleship is *connecting with those outside the faith by evangelism* (discussed in Section IV. below).

A. THE CALL

1, God's Intent for Us

In Genesis 2:18 God says it is not right for man to live alone. At its core, this statement emphasizes the importance of people connecting with others – marriage being the most profound expression of this reality. When one is not in meaningful relationships, he or she loses perspective, there if fear of intimacy with others, one tends to become self-centered, and isolation brings mental, physical and spiritual poor health.[435]

Since God is love, his very nature is relational. He has always known meaningful relationships. He identifies himself in relational family terms: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.[436] Living in a Trinitarian community, God not only exemplifies living in relationships, he also intends that we too are to live in loving community. He commands us to live a life of love. Love others as you love yourself. This is part of God's Great Commandment. Relationships, not acquisitions or achievements, are what matter in life. Love cannot be learned in isolation. Life is meant to be shared.

Not only does God command that we live a life of loving one another, when he created man in his own image, God created us with the need for relationships. From God's perspective, living life alone is not good. Living life alone does not accurately reflect the One whose image we bear.[437] Thus,

> *[O]ne of God's biggest dreams for us is authentic community* – the kind of meaningful relationships that are best characterized by oneness with Him and with one another.[438] (Emphasis supplied.)

2. Christian Fellowship: Meaningful Relationships

Entering and developing meaningful relationships involves conversations. But not any conversation will develop meaningful relationships. Most conversations lack depth. Our verbiage tends to be filled with superficial clichés, facts, opinions, etc. Authentic Christian

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[435] Andy Stanley and Bill Willits, *Creating Community: 5 Keys to Building a Small Group Culture* 29-33 (2004).
[436] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* 117 (2002).
[437] Andy Stanley and Bill Willits, *Creating Community: 5 Keys to Building a Small Group Culture* 35-36 (2004).
[438] *Id.* at 40.

fellowship is not superficial coffee level chit chat, attending church business meetings and/or participation in social gatherings. Relationships based upon such interactions tend to lack depth. Causal relationships do little to contribute to life transformation. Such conversations tend to be a way of life, for many. "But if this is the essence of … [a] person's communications, the relationship will stall on a superficial plateau."[439]

> In reality, it is only when honest feelings and emotions are shared that real people can be known, loved and helped.... [B]y limiting the depth of our communication, we become shallow in our relationship with him. But God knows us, and he wants to have genuine communication with us.[440]

> Real fellowship is *experiencing life together.* It arises when people are honest about who they are and what is occurring in their lives. Real fellowship occurs as we pursue and build meaningful relationships with fellow believers in relational small groups.[441]

However, too commonly a person chooses to live a self-reliant and independent life. He or she is afraid of being vulnerable to others. Being known, admitting our feelings and failures shames us. We keep at arm's length from others as a defense mechanism. Asserting a sense of confidence and self-control keeps our weaknesses and struggles out of the reach of others. This leads to being alone when we struggle with loneliness, temptation and pain. However, hiding the real me from others also hides the real me from me. Maintaining our image with others is a lonely, self-destructive road.[442]

In contrast, Christian fellowship does not simply mean attending church on Sunday morning. It isn't enough to hear the sermon and walk out with no connection to anyone. In addition to nourishing ourselves with God's Word and spending time in prayer, we also need the nourishment that comes from spending time with other believers. It's important to plan into our schedule regular times for gatherings with other believers, to encourage and build each other up, to share love, laughter, pain, and sorrow.

> Building relationships, ministering to one another with spiritual gifts, meeting practical needs, and establishing caring, loving, healing fellowships are all part of being the people of God.[443]

Pursuing fellowship in a community of believers is an essential spiritual discipline as one grows toward becoming a Fully Devoted Follower of Christ. Doing so is a mark of discipleship.

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[439] *Life Application Bible* (NIV) 897 (revised 1991) (introduction to Psalms).
[440] *Id.*
[441] Jon S. Hanson, "Getting Connected: Importance and Nature of Relational Small Groups," (presentation on behalf of the Fox River Congregational Church Discipleship Team at the Group Link Conference, February 24, 2013).
[442] Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* 123 (2005).
[443] Linus J. Morris, *The High Impact Church: A Fresh Approach to Reaching the Unchurched* 127 (1993).

In a fellowship, Christian believers participate with others in various activities on our path to spiritual growth.

> The members of the body must be in contact if they are to sustain and be sustained by each other. Christian redemption is not devised to be a solitary thing.... The [Christian] life is one that requires some regular and profound conjunction with others who share it. It is greatly diminished when that is lacking.[444]

Sharing our lives with others always embraces an element of risk. Authenticity, interdependence and becoming known by others engender costs. But the alternative is living a life disconnected from God. By opening ourselves to others, in the presence of Christ, we learn how to become a safe group of people bringing God's welcoming embrace to both ourselves and to others.[445]

The early church shows us the way. After Jesus had physically departed, the early church only had one another to depend upon. They ate, learned and worshipped together. Similarly, today our faith is strengthened in fellowship with others who encourage, love and hold us accountable. "The early church is a model of what God intended – that we travel through our journey of faith and life in community."[446]

To reemphasize, God did not design us to journey alone.

> God created us for community and interdependence – with him and with others. God is never alone. He is Trinity. And we are created in his interdependent image. We need others. We need their wisdom in unmasking defense mechanisms that keep the truth at bay.[447]

One cannot grow spiritually in isolation. We need to be a part of a church and community because spiritual maturity is about learning to love like Jesus. You can't be like Jesus without being in relationship with other people. It's all about love -- loving God and loving others.[448]

> No one can develop a mature spirituality alone. To be a Christian is to be called into community. It is to become a functioning part of the body of Christ.[449]

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[444] Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of Disciplines*: *Understanding How God Changes Lives* 186-87 (1998).

[445] Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* 121 (2005).

[446] Upper Room (Daily Devotional), p.17, September 11, 2019.

[447] *Id.* at 123.

[448] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* 176 (2002).

[449] Andy Langford and Mark Ralls, *Beginnings: an Introduction to Christian Faith* 175 (2013) (a participant's companion). Christian fellowship was a foundational belief and practice among the forebears of Congregationalism. Underlying the Puritan concept of church was the concept of fellowship. By deemphasizing the institutional church based upon clerical hierarchy, the Puritans created a dynamic church in which fellowship among the saints in their worship of God became a central reality. Governor William Bradford described the Plymouth church as the Lord's free people joining themselves together through a covenant into a church in the fellowship of the gospel. One of the

One cannot learn to love by himself. He or she needs to develop relationships with different kinds of people in order to learn and practice loving others. The Bible calls this being in "community," which is another word for fellowship. It is essential to find a church family and become involved in some kind of frequent (e.g., weekly) small group gathering. An effective small group is more than simply a Bible study. It offers time for interacting, sharing, questioning, and praying for each other. It is the context of a meaningful Christian fellowship community where we learn to love.[450]

Yes, spiritual pilgrims must ultimately walk their own paths, but wise pilgrims seldom try to go it alone. We make erroneous assumptions about ourselves which need to be challenged. "None of us is so wise or enlightened that we cannot learn from others."[451] A foundational element for people to mature in their faith is regularly and meaningfully connect with other believers. We need each other for support, for wisdom, for perspective, for accountability, for encouragement, for help, and for prayer. As Proverbs 15:22 sagely expresses, "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed." Though each of us has our own unique perspective, we need others to help us navigate our way. We need support in our process of transformation. And, as followers of Christ, "Regular and powerful companionship becomes a life-changing vehicle of God's grace."[452]

B. SMALL GROUPS

Since Christian fellowship is a spiritual habit of major importance, we need to learn how to lovingly share life together. Although some fellowship occurs in the context of large gatherings such as worship services and the interactions before and/or after the services, in of themselves, such offer little likelihood of developing relationships in depth. Instead, participation in a small group or groups is crucial. "Christianity is not a solo sport.... You will never reach your spiritual potential unless you are connected to other men [and women]."[453]

It is important to appreciate the mutual support afforded in a small group context. Don't get isolated and having to cope with the pressures placed on you by society on your own. We all need support and encouragement by other Christians. Spend time with others whose worldview is similar to yours. Be able to discuss common problems such as how to cope with the pressures brought on Christians by society in general, by colleagues at work, or by family and friends in particular. Don't simply go to church. It is essential to get involved in some type of relational small group. Encourage fellow Christians and let them encourage you.[454]

The concept of a Christian small group emerges from Jesus himself. Although Jesus engaged large crowds, he invested most of his time with his small group of 12. He and his 12

Puritan central themes was spiritual communion of Christians. The Puritan concept of fellowship was the belief that Christians can exert a beneficial influence on one another. Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* 132-33 (1986).

[450] Rick Warren, *40 Days of Community: What Are We on Earth Are We Here For -- Devotional* 13 (2012).

[451] Timothy C. Geoffrion, "Giving Up on Finding Christian Community," Alban Weekly, November 10, 2008.

[452] Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* 122 (2005).

[453] Steve Sonderman, "This is a Football," No Regrets Conference, Elmbrook Church, June 14, 2016.

[454] Alister McGrath, *Doubting: Growing Through the Uncertainties of Faith* 120 (2006).

disciples travelled together, ate together and learned together. The relational element in Jesus' model is at the heart of becoming a Fully Devoted Follower of Christ. Following Christ is not something that is simply taught, it must be lived. Relational Small Groups (RSG) (a subject considered later in some detail) foster the development of meaningful relationships in which every person senses love, care, belonging, trust, encouragement, support and accountability. Such relationships are crucial to spiritual formation and are central to the Christian experience. Failure to connect in a RSG tends to result in stagnation in a person's spiritual growth. It takes an authentic relationship building community to form a disciple. Let's make no mistake. Participation in RSGs is crucially important if we are to spiritually grow toward a more Christ-like life. Pastor, Lonnie Richardson very directly and emphatically stated that participation in a RSG should not be considered an option; it is a must![455]

III. CONNECTING WITH OTHERS THROUGH SERVING

In addition to pursuing an intimate relationship with God and pursuing Christian fellowship in the church by sharing life with other believers, the third mark of growing in one's discipleship Christ is the spiritual discipline of *connecting with others through serving.*

A. SERVING AS A SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE: THE CALL

Christ calls upon us to "love your neighbor." We demonstrate our love for others by reaching out to and serving their emotional, physical, relational and/or spiritual needs.

We are all members of the body of Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:27) Each one of us is a part of that body and has a role in how the body functions. "God has no other hands and minds in the world but ours.... God is still calling ordinary people to do his work and assuring us that he will be with us as we do."[456]

> For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

Active serving in Christ's name constitutes an integral part of our responding to God's call. As expressed in 1 Peter 4:10,

> Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

In short, we are explicitly called to serve others.

What we do in serving others defines whether or not we are indeed God's people or merely serving our own interest under the guise of being religious. "Scripture and history make

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[455] Jon S. Hanson, "Getting Connected: Importance and Nature of Relational Small Groups,", Group Link Conference, Fox River Congregational Church, February 24, 2013.
[456] Lonnie Richardson, "To Be Like Mary," December 20, 2015 (sermon).

clear that both our Congregational identity and our integrity as Christians are rooted not in what we say but in what we do for Christ and his kingdom."[457]

A follower of Christ

> always seeks to become more like the one he or she follows. For the Christian disciple that means becoming more like Jesus by becoming more fully engaged in God's work in creation. That was what the ministry of Jesus was about. It is what Christ's disciples are about as well. It is here that faith is put into action.... But this isn't just about the end product of discipleship. It is also a way to continue to grow as disciples.[458]

To grow as disciples, Jesus calls his followers to go beyond intellectual agreement or learning. Scripture is not something just to be read and studied. Jesus seeks persons who are doers of the Word, not simply hearers of the Word (*see* James 1:22).

The second Great Commandment commands us to "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:38) Christ's command raises the stakes as to what it means to love. In doing so, Christ calls upon each of us to serve others.

> I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." (Matthew 25:40)

Serving (often termed ministry) is rooted in seeing and caring as God sees and cares. God cares about everybody. Jesus possessed a radical love and compassion for all. It is in our loving and serving others that we demonstrate our coming to know God.[459] Christ's radical love extends to all people. In scripture passages such as these, Christ is calling upon us as individuals and collectively as the church to lovingly serve not only persons within our church fellowship, but also serve all people whether or not they are believers and whether or not they are in our church community.

Christ did not spend most of his time in church (synagogue). The outside world has been and continues to be his workplace. In our search to connect with God in a personal relationship with him,

> get outside more, Get in the streets. You might or might not meet God at church, but you are *guaranteed* to run into him where people need him desperately.... When we look after the welfare of others, we promote and participate in God's kingdom work. When we engage ourselves with a kingdom agenda, we are brought into contact with the King! People who help their neighbors are

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[457] Michael P. Halcomb, "Missions: The Task That Unites Us," *A Past with a Future Continuing Congregationalism into the Next Millennium* 112 (Steven Peay, ed. 1998).
[458] Jeffrey D. Jones, *Traveling Together: a Guide for Disciple-Forming Congregations* 59 (2006).
[459] Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* 145 (2005).

> positioned to see God. And when it comes to being good to yourself, it doesn't get any better than hanging out with God![460]

Connecting with others through serving both persons within and outside the Christian community is the third major mark of discipleship. Scripture is not something just to be understood. It calls us to action. It calls us to serve.[461] Every Christian is called to serve. A non-serving Christian is a contradiction in terms.

> Every man [or woman] is a starter. In God's economy there is no such thing as second string. Every one of us has been gifted by God and has a role to play in the unfolding of God's redemptive plans for the world. If you are not presently serving in your church it is time to get off the bench and into the game.[462]

A good way to start the day is to pray for bring to me someone today whom I can serve in some way.[463]

Furthermore, the spiritual discipline of serving others "offers the opportunity to relinquish pride and selfishness when required to place others first before oneself."[464] Since Adam and Eve, pride has been a consistent human problem. It is so deep in human nature that it is easy to even become proud of one's spiritual growth. Pride is so subtle that it can lead to preoccupation with oneself and comparative worth with others. Jesus said the essence of spiritual life is to love God and to love people. Pride destroys that capacity. In contrast, serving others liberates us from the contest of seeing who is greater and helps us recognize that the world doesn't center on us. Instead, serving others helps us train in the process of humility.[465] "The grace of humility is worked into our lives through the discipline of service."[466] However serving simply to impress others loses its intrinsic power to help one to enter into the life of the kingdom.[467]

Learning and practicing the spiritual discipline of serving constitutes a fundamental component of growing more toward a Christ-like life in our thoughts, feelings and actions which, in turn, enhances growing in our personal relationship with God.

B. NATURE OF SERVING

Serving others (ministry) reflects loving help, caring and sharing the love of God in the world. Serving consists of offering time and talent for the care, protection, support and nurture

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[460] Reggie McNeal, "The Path to Discipleship Applauded by Jesus," OutreachMagazine.com, May 5, 2014.

[461] Lonnie Richardson, "Beyond Life-as-Usual Service: Downward Mobility in an Upwardly Mobile World," March 3, 2008 (sermon).

[462] Steve Sonderman, "This is a Football," No Regrets Conference, Elmbrook Church, June 14, 2016.

[463] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* 140 (rev. ed. 1988).

[464] Stuart R. Merkel, *A Strategy for Employing Individual and Communal Spiritual Disciplines for Spiritual Growth at Gurnee Community Church* .76, November 2008.

[465] John Ortberg, *Life You've Always Wanted* 89 (2004) (Participant's Guide).

[466] Richard Foster as quote in *id.* at 92.

[467] John Ortberg, *Life You've Always Wanted* 96 (2004) (Participant's Guide).

of other people. Acts of serving offer hands in effectuating the second greatest commandment "Love your neighbor as yourself," (Matthew 22:38)

Love can be a loaded word. What does it mean in the context of serving others? To love your neighbor is not an emotion. It is an act of will. That is, to love your neighbor is not only to want what is best for him or her, but also it is to act accordingly.

As expressed in the recommended Mission Statement, we are to connect with both Christian believers and those outside the faith through lovingly serving their physical, emotional and spiritual needs.

1. Serving More than Good Deeds

a. Christ's Command

In John 13:34 Jesus gave a brand-new command. "I want you to love one another. I have loved you, so you must love one another." Here Jesus took something commonly used as a noun, i.e., something you fall into. Instead, he used it as a verb. Love is a verb. It is something one does. It is an act, not simply a feeling.[468] It is something to be learned and practiced.

Jesus expressed his love for us by acting. He did so by taking the nature of a servant in human form. In doing so, he reflected that he wanted a relationship with us. In connecting with other through serving their needs, value them more highly than yourself. Treat the other person as the most important person in the room, as more important than yourself. Love is a verb. Act accordingly.[469]

Importantly, in addition to offering loving service to those in need, we need to understand the nature of Christian serving involves more than simply performing doing good deeds. There are a lot of effective social service organizations which are not churches performing good deeds. This raises the question, as Christians and a part of a Christian church, is simply serving others enough. Or, do we need to, in some manner, communicate that we are doing it in the name of Christ. In John 13:35, Jesus said "By this *everyone will know that you are my disciples*, if you love one another." This strongly suggests that we should take serving to another level and couple our serving with a visible presence of Christ in our serving others.

This passage reveals that loving one another is the mark which Jesus gives to label a person as a Christian. If we want others to know that we are Christian, we must reflect this mark.[470] Thus, visibly reflect the presence of Christ in our lives in a loving manner when serving and/or interacting with others.

Christian serving the needs of others is an important means by which the world discovers the love of God. Jesus said let them see your good deeds.

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[468] Lonnie Richardson, "Staying in Love," August 7 & 14 (2016) (two part sermon series).
[469] *Id.*
[470] Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Mark of a Christian* 14-15 (1970).

> You are the salt of the earth. …You are the light of the world…. [L]et your light shine before men, *that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*" (Matthew 5:13-16) (Emphasis supplied.)

And,

> If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 4:11)

It is through our serving that God blesses the earth.[471] When believers incarnate the values and the lifestyle of Christ (i.e., become more Christ-like) through serving people's needs, they function as the salt and light in society. When we do so, we may contribute to bringing them, as well as ourselves, closer to God.

b. Reluctance

For various reasons, many of us are reluctant and embarrassed to mention Jesus when we are serving people. This may stem from not being prepared to relate our own stories in a culture in which many have expressed an aversion to Christianity. As a result, often people needing Jesus are not being introduced to him. They are underserved when we don't offer them the opportunity to hear and understand the good news he brings. Certainly, we want to avoid being associated with those who imperiously announce their religious convictions by badgering persons with fire and brimstone news or challenging their life choices without stopping to serve them. However, persons who are being served don't expect the server to lack a belief system of some sort. They just do not want it to be jammed down their thoughts.[472]

> As we serve people, we should not pull back from sharing our best with them. We should be able to identify the reason for the hope that we have in us (1 Peter 3:15). People deserve to know how much Jesus cares for them and the full measure of life he wants for them. That information, coming from someone who is being a servant to them, shows up in the right packaging….
>
> Helping people who need to be helped and doing good to others have value in and of themselves. After all, in the Bible story told by Jesus himself, the Samaritan didn't try to convert the person he helped….
>
> [However], we are not availing ourselves of enough opportunities to connect our motives to Jesus. It's okay to obey him and serve him by serving people in our lives. And I think it's okay for them to know it, especially when they bring it up…. Doing good deeds eventually leads to a discussion of motives and beliefs. We do not

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[471] Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* 145 (2005).
[472] Reggie McNeal, "The Path to Discipleship Applauded by Jesus," OutreachMagazine.com, May 5, 2014.

> have to shy away at that point from sharing our own experience.[473]

Ultimately, people's biggest needs are spiritual since they will spend more time in eternity than they do in their current lives.

> When we reach out to help others but don't tell them about their need for a Savior, we're cheating them out of an opportunity for the spiritual healing that they may not even know they need.[474]

Thus, we are called to reflect the care and compassion of Christ by not only serving a person's physical and emotional hurts but also by addressing his or her spiritual condition.

> The truth is that when we serve others as Jesus did, we also open up more opportunities to share the Gospel. As the old saying goes, "We have to be good news before we share the good news."
>
> But we must share the good news! Otherwise, we're merely humanitarians who are no different than the Kiwanis Club. And our mission is infinitely more important than that.[475]

c. Serving and Humility: Counter Force to Pride and Self Righteousness

In his parable condemning a Pharisee who pridefully prayed in public indicating that he was better than others, Christ draws focus on pride as a deeply rooted human condition. Throughout scripture God repeatedly denounces pride.[476] Pride leads us to be preoccupied with ourselves and our comparative worth with others. Jesus taught the essence of spiritual life is to love God and to love people. By keeping us self-centered, pride undermines our capacity of doing so. In contrast, in the process of serving, we learn and practice humility.

Humility gives us the freedom to stop trying or pretending to be what we are not. It allows us to accept our "appropriate smallness" so we can cease being preoccupied with ourselves and instead focus on and serve other people as Jesus would if he were in our place."[477]

> The primary reason Jesus calls us to servanthood is not just because other people need our service. It is because of what happens to us when we serve.[478]

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[473] *Id.*
[474] Lee Strobel, "Shortchanging the Good News," OutreachMagazine.com, May/June 2007, p.126.
[475] *Id.*
[476] E.g., Leviticus 26:18-19, Proverbs 16:5, Luke 18:9-14, Luke 20:46-47.
[477] John Ortberg, *Life You've Always Wanted* 91 (2004) (Participant's Guide).
[478] *Id.* at 95.

"[T]he grace of humility is worked into our lives through the Discipline of service."[479] This, in turn, better enables us to love God and other people. Serving others serves as a counterforce to pride and self-righteousness.

Clearly, we shouldn't serve in a manner conveying the sense that we are prideful and/or better than others. Christ calls upon us to serve the needs of others. A distinction can be drawn between self-righteous serving and true serving.

> Self-righteous service requires external rewards. It needs to know that people see and appreciate the effort. It seeks human applause – with proper religious modesty of course. [In contrast, t]rue service rests contented in hiddenness. It does not fear the lights and blare of attention, but it does not seek them either.... [T]he divine nod of approval is completely sufficient.[480]

Self-righteousness is rooted in self-serving, not in the spiritual discipline of serving. Despite whatever religious trappings, it centers on the glorification of the individual.[481] "Acts of servanthood done to impress others lose their intrinsic power to help us enter the life of the kingdom."[482]

In summary, serving others can be seen from two viewpoints. From the viewpoint of the person providing the service in humility, he or she grows toward a more Christ-like life by responding to Christ's command and modeling Christian serving regardless of whether the recipient is aware that the service is being done in response to Christ's call. However, from the perspective of the recipient of the service, the failure of serving to somehow reflect a visible presence of Christ does little or nothing to bring that person closer to Christ. The key, whenever possible, is to serve with a visible presence of Christ in a manner to bring glory to God, not in a manner to augment our own pride or project "I am better than you image" to the recipient.

2. Range of Serving

Every Christian is called to serve. Whenever one uses his or her God-given abilities to serve others, he or she is fulfilling his or her calling. Every ministry is important, either in or outside of the church, whether large or small. There is the service of small things involving acts of helpfulness in our daily lives. These arise in multiple situations wherever people live together. Then there are large tasks requiring great sacrifice for a moment. Small things require constant sacrifice.[483] Serving others in small ways can assume many forms including helpfulness, safeguarding the reputation of others, common courtesy (thereby affirming another's worth), hospitality, listening, compassion, patience, sharing the Word, etc.[484]

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[479] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* 130 (rev. ed. 1988).
[480] *Id.* at 128.
[481] *Id.* at 129.
[482] John Ortberg, *Life You've Always Wanted* 96 (2004) (Participant's Guide).
[483] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* 135 (rev. ed. 1988).
[484] *Id.* at 135-39.

> Our role in serving God may receive lots of attention, and there's nothing wrong with that. *But when it comes to serving the Lord, all roles are important - even those that seem to be minor.* The apostle Paul summed it up well in his letter to the Colossians: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart... It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (Colossians 3:23, 24, NIV). That's a great reminder for us all.[485]

And, Paul again reiterates that using one's gift(s) on behalf of God, whether in large or small ways, is important. Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that nothing you do for the lord is ever useless. (1 Corinthians 15:58)

In addition to the recommended Mission Statement for our church, our current Vision Statement calls upon and expects our members to engage in the spiritual discipline of serving.

> We envision a Christian fellowship expressing its love for others by serving, in the name of Christ, their spiritual, emotional and physical needs.... [486] (Emphasis supplied)

Thus, the spiritual discipline of serving is embedded in what we are to be about both individually and collectively as a church.

3. Using God's Gifts: Growing in Serving

Christ calls upon us to serve. He modeled serving by saying "he did not come to be served, but to serve...." (Matthew 20:28) and by the way he lived his life and conducted his ministry. Thus, the spiritual discipline of serving should not be approached in a casual, unthinking manner. From both the perspective of a church whose mission includes both serving others and disciple-making of its members and from the perspective of an individual seeking to grow into a more Christ-like life, achieving the most meaningful serving depends upon discerning where each person can best and joyfully serve the needs of others with the love of Christ.

God has vested in his church the enormous responsibility to perform his work. When one comes to Christ and becomes a member of a church, he or she becomes responsible for participating in the mission which God calls the church to do. However, all are not called to do the same thing. Each Christian possesses his or her own special God given gift(s). For individuals to best play their role, they need to discern their gifts and look for and be receptive to opportunities to serve using those gifts.[487]

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[485] Upper Room (Daily Devotional), May 3, 2014.

[486] Fox River Congregational Church, Vision for the Future of Our Church (adopted June 22, 2003).

[487] *The One Year Study Bible: Arranged in 365 Daily Readings* 1015 (NLT) (2011) (study note) (2nd Edition, Tyndale House Publishers).

a. All Are Gifted

As noted above and importantly reemphasized here, the Bible tells us "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." (1 Cor. 12:27) "[T]here are many parts, but one body." (1 Cor. 12:20). God has no other hands and minds in the world but ours. He calls ordinary people to do his work and assures us that he will be with us as we do. A good way to start the day is to pray for bringing to me someone today whom I can serve in some way.[488]

God has blessed each of us with different sets of gifts. Paul writes

> We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying,[489] then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. (Romans 12:6-8)

Scripture's expression of God's call on us to discern and use our gifts serving occurs again in Ephesians.

> "[Christ] gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up…. (Ephesians 4:11-12)

However, the gifts we are called to employ are not limited to those listed in these above expressions. Scripture goes on to say "Each of us should use whatever gift we have received to serve others." (1 Peter 4:10)

There are some who

> think that to be a disciple means witnessing to hundreds or preaching to crowds, and many disciples do these things. But no less important is the disciple who cheerfully does the little things every day that make other people's lives more pleasant and productive. We all have some kind of talent that we can devote to further our Lord's kingdom. All we have to do is identify that skill or talent, decide to use it for the Lord — and then get up and actually do it.[490]

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[488] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* 140 (rev. ed. 1988).

[489] Prophesying is more than seeing the future. In the biblical sense, prophesying more commonly involves, preaching, exhorting and explaining God's will. *The One Year Study Bible: Arranged in 365 Daily Readings* (NLT) 870 (2011) (2nd Edition, Tyndale House Publishers) (study note).

[490] Upper Room (Daily Devotional), August 18, 2017.

Every gift is important.

Some of the parts of the body may involve more glamorous jobs, while other parts perform less desirable tasks. Yet every job is necessary and every part of the body must function in the manner it was created to function. An eye was not created to hear, nor an ear to smell. However, when each part of the body does what it was made to do, the body will be healthy, happy and holy.[491] "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10) That is, each of us has a role to play and each role is important whether it seems small or large.[492]

> The Bible says spiritual gifts are abilities God bestows on every believer for the common good of the body or Christ. They are a large part of the answer to the question, "What should I do with the life God gave me?"
>
> .... [The Bible makes clear that] every spiritual gift is a reflection of God's nature that you carry within you. And because your spiritual gift reflects God's design and direction for your life, you'll find great passion, joy, and satisfaction in expressing it. Your spiritual gift also will be a place of deep spiritual formation in your life, as God uses it both to powerfully connect you to him and to expose areas of your soul that need his forgiveness and redemption.[493]
>
> .... God's hands have commissioned each of us to do the work of Christ and that we are called to become an "every member ministry." Your ministry is every bit as important as mine. Each one of us has received at least one spiritual gift. We are to use our gifts in ministry to help build up the body of Christ.[494]

Moving words by Saint Teresa of Avila, reinforce the call on each of us to use our spiritual gifts doing the work of and following Christ.

> Christ has no body but yours, No hands, no feet on earth but yours, Yours are the eyes with which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, Yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours.

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[491] Kevin Clark, "Our Covenant Connections," January 2016, First Congregational Church, Mukwonago.
[492] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* 230 (2002).
[493] Nancy Ortberg, "How Do I Discover My Spiritual Gifts? 3 Ways to Discern How God Wired You," October 2008 (christianitytoday.com).
[494] 2016 Annual Report of First Congregational United Church of Christ (Eagle River, Wisconsin) (Pastor's comments).

> Yours are the eyes with which he looks compassion on this world.
> Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

Saint Teresa prayed that these words offer an ever-present reminder to each of us for each and every day of our lives. That is, we have a role in bringing forward God's love, justice and compassion, "'on earth as it is in heaven."[495]

What are the God-given gifts we each possess and how they can be best used in response to God's call to ministry? Such gifts and where best applied need to be discerned.

> For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

Thus, it is critically important that each member of the church pray about two questions, what gifts has God given me and how is God calling me to apply those gifts to build up the body. We need to serve the function we were made to serve.[496]

b. Discerning One's Gifts

God's call to us is based upon the gifts which he has given us. Part of our uniqueness rests upon these gifts. They shape our personality and abilities. Thus, the first dimension in becoming equipped for serving is to recognize the gifts which God has granted to us. Such discernment is essential since our gifts are the means through which we participate in God's mission in the world. It is crucial for each of us to learn, know and nurture our gifts which, in turn, lead to a sense of what God is calling us to do.

The above comments are not intended to suggest that all or even most acts of serving are monumental undertakings. We encounter numerous situations every day which offer the opportunity to be nice and helpful to people. This does not require specific skill training or a church community to discern God's call. Instead, it simply requires a loving attitude on our part reflecting God's love and our willingness to take some small action expressing that love. A thought, start each day with a prayer that may encounter a person for whom you can provide some, no matter how small, service.

> Anytime you use your God-given abilities to help others, you are fulfilling your calling.... Each of us has a role to play, and every role is important. There is no small service to God; it all matters.[497]

Often, God given gifts are so much a part of us that we tend not to be aware of them. If not discovered, we shortchange God, ourselves and others as we continue to operate without understanding of who we are and the qualities that make us unique. Hence, often we need a

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[495] 2016 Annual Report of First Congregational United Church of Christ (Eagle River, Wisconsin) (Moderator's Comments).
[496] Kevin Clark, "Our Covenant Connections," January 2016, First Congregational Church, Mukwonago.
[497] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* 229-30 (2002).

community of faith not only to discern and call forth our gifts, but also to develop and apply them to God's glory. It is in the community where we are known and where we trust others to listen so that we can better discern our gifts and the call to which God wants us to apply those gifts. God's call is not alien from the essence of who we are. God's intention is always that we fulfill our true-self.[498]

In growing in one's Walk with Christ, one needs to understand and practice the spiritual discipline of serving others. We need to learn and accept that serving consists of offering our resources, time, talent and treasure for the care, protection, and nurture of other people. In addition, this spiritual discipline calls upon each individual to discern those God given gifts that he or she possesses which God is calling on him or her to use. In some contexts, depending upon the person and the serving ministry involved, this may also call for some training and skill development. In short, one's spiritual gifts and call need to be discerned and his or her knowledge and skills need to be developed and practiced. A person who serves the needs of others in response to the second Great Commandment to '"love your neighbor as yourself" progresses further along in his or her Walk with Christ.

C. SERVING THROUGH GIVING (TITHING AND OFFERINGS) AS A SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Too often, at least to some degree, people view donating to their church as simply a means to pay the bills, to support a service project or a mission, or to enable various fellowship projects or social activities in which members partake. Stewardship is viewed primarily in the context of a church's financial campaigns. Giving of one's time, talent or treasure is perceived as something akin to a non-compulsory church membership fee which we lump together with our other discretionary expenditures.

However, giving of one's time, talent and treasure is not an investment in nor is it a trade with God by using our cash to get something from God. Christian stewardship recognizes "that nothing we have really belongs to us. Everything we own belongs to God. We are simply stewards of his wealth, his gifts, his opportunities …."[499]

"Financial stewardship is a spiritual discipline."[500] The spiritual discipline of financial stewardship embraces the spiritual discipline of tithing and offerings which emerged in the Old Testament._Malachi was the last of the Old Testament prophets. This was a time of spiritual apathy for the nation of Israel. They had returned from 70 years in exile in Babylon, but spiritually, as a nation, they were far from God. Malachi confronted the sins of the people including the priests. Through Malachi, the Lord said,

> ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you…," (Malachi 3:7)

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[498] Jeffrey D. Jones, *Traveling Together: a Guide for Disciple-Forming Congregations* 56-57 (2006).
[499] Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* 197 (2005).
[500] Lonnie Richardson, "The Sacred Challenge," November 3, 2019 (sermon).

That word "return" means repent, turn away from the way you have living. Turn toward God and his way of life. Despite generations of hypocrisy and unfaithfulness, the Lord was willing to forgive them, to bless them, and to restore them.[501]

The people then asked, how are we to return, i.e., what do you want from us, God?

> But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?
>
> In *tithes and offerings*. You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole *tithe* into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. (Malachi 3:8-10)

Here God calls for tithing.

To understand the emphasis on tithing recognize that here the people are guilty of the worst kinds of sins—exploiting the poor, marital unfaithfulness, spiritual adultery. Yet the first thing the Lord asked them to do is to give their tithes and offerings. He didn't say, "stop chasing after pagan wives and do justice and love mercy" Of course, he certainly wants them to address these things. But rather, the first thing he tells them to do, the thing that will spark spiritual revival, is to take an offering. Because, when they start giving generously and obediently, these other areas of their lives will fall into place.[502]

A tithe is the fundamental giving unit in the Old Testament. It is one-tenth of a person's income which is to be given back to God.

> A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD. (Leviticus 27:30)

The tithe was non-negotiable. It was part of people's covenant obligation to God. The tithe was to be given first, before anything was kept for oneself.[503]

Tithes funded the work of the temple by covering the living expenses of the entire tribe of Levites, who served the temple, as well as the priests. Tithes provided for the general fund, the day-to-day operating expenses of the temple and its ministry. In today's terms, often people find it hard to get excited about supporting the general fund of the church. Rather than their money going to overhead like light bulbs, curriculum or salaries, they'd rather give directly to missions or to other benevolent offerings. Yet, funding the church is what the tithe is for—to support the worship and ministry of God's people.[504]

As Malachi expressed, God also called for offerings which generally refer to gifts, beyond the 10 percent tithe. Offerings were gifts to meet a special need—to support the widows

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[501] *Id.*
[502] *Id.*
[503] *Id.*
[504] *Id.*

and orphans, or simply to express gratitude and trust in God. The Lord expected both tithes and offerings from the people; the tithe to support the ongoing ministry of the temple, and the offerings to meet special needs.[505]

The question can be and has been raised as to whether the spiritual discipline of tithing is relevant to Christians. Does God expect believers today to give at least 10 percent of their income to his work? The New Testament does not mention nor specifically teach tithing. But if it was so important in the Old Testament why not? Our Senior Pastor Lonnie Richardson offers several reasons underlying the continued importance of this spiritual discipline.[506]

- First, because our giving is to be inspired by love, not law.

- Second, tithing was already the accepted starting point for giving to God. Jesus and the disciples tithed for their whole lives. To be a Christ-follower is to do what Jesus did and he tithed and even more so.

- Third, the New Testament is replete with examples of giving beyond a 10% tithe. The early church, see Book of Acts, actually sold their possessions to support one another and the ministry. When Barnabas sold a piece of property, he brought the full amount, 100 percent of the sale price to the Lord. Macedonian believers, who were themselves poor, out of their extreme generosity gave as much as they were able, and even beyond what they were able. The New Testament doesn't explicitly require tithing because for many people, 10 percent isn't enough to express their gratitude and commitment to God.

It is true that the New Testament doesn't command tithing. But it clearly teaches us to give proportionately, a percentage of our income. (1 Corinthians 16:1-2)

The financial discipline of stewardship is one of prime importance.

> Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Cor. 9:6-7)

God wants a cheerful giver. Christ is our model. He demonstrated the ultimate giving of oneself for others. Thus, giving should be a cheerful, voluntary and generous offering of God's gifts of resources, time, talents and treasure for the benefit and love of God and others. A follower of Christ seeks to live as a steward of the resources which God has entrusted into his or her care. A follower of Christ is characterized by generosity rooted in God's generosity to us. Tithing and offering is the biblical model. It reminds the giver of the abundance of God for us.

Although tithing is not a law, it is a spiritual discipline. Giving 10% should not be viewed

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[505] *Id.*
[506] Id.

as the maximum toward which we strive, but rather a step on our path as we reflect on that God has blessed us abundantly and that we want to be as generous with others as God has been to us.

Some have held and today continue to hold the belief that a Christian life should be one of poverty. However idealizing poverty is a dangerous illusion. The spiritual discipline of stewardship, requires both possessions and giving. Retaining wealth in of itself is not the problem. Guilt over the mere possession of goods is not scripturally based. But rather, as Paul said, it is not money or the gain of money, but the love of money which is the root of all evil. (1Timothy 6:10) The spiritual discipline of giving is giving to help others, not simply giving to become poor. Being poor no way to help the poor. The spiritual discipline of giving is the right use of one's possessions. The idealization of non-possession simply abandons wealth for others to choose how wealth is handled. Possession and the right use of material wealth is a spiritual discipline of the highest order. Riches are not holy, nor are they evil. They are creations which we are to put to God's use.[507] The discipline of tithing and offerings deserve on-going attention by those seeking to follow Christ.

D. SUMMARY

In short, connecting with others through serving becomes a spiritual discipline when one makes doing so a regular practice rather than just a here and there task to accomplish. When a person does so conscious of and obedient to God's call, using one's gifts regularly and serving others constitutes engaging in a spiritual discipline. Flowing from serving, transformation can occur since he or she offers him or herself for God's purposes rather than his or her own. Believers should recognize that serving others offers them the opportunity to strengthen their relationship with God, better understand God's purposes for their lives, and grow in their spiritual own walk.[508] Giving of one's time, talent and treasure constitutes another essential element of Christian living. Tithing and offering is a spiritual discipline which needs to be learned and practiced.

IV. CONNECTING WITH PEOPLE OUTSIDE THE FAITH: (EVANGELISM)

A. EVANGELISM AS A SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE: THE CALL

Evangelism involves reaching out to a variety of people including unbelievers, doubters, those who may have been involved in church at some point but no longer participate in a church community on a regular basis, and church-goers who are looking for a new church affiliation either because of a change in personal circumstance (e.g., a move) or dissatisfaction with their current church affiliation.

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[507] Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives,* 193 *et seq.*(Chapter 10 – Is Poverty Spiritual") (1988).

[508] Stuart R. Merkel, A *Strategy for Employing Individual and Communal Spiritual Disciplines for Spiritual Growth at Gurnee Community Church* .101-02, November 2008.

In his ultimate sacrifice on the cross, Christ demonstrated a loving obsession for all people. Embracing the worst man had to offer, he came to redeem our failures, not condemn our sins. Christ was not consumed by money, power or fame. Instead, he demonstrated a loving obsession for everyone. He expects his followers, including us, to share this magnificent obsession and to introduce people to God[509] when he said "Come follow me.... and I will make you fishers of men." (Matthew 4:19) And, he also said that we would receive the Holy Spirit and be his witnesses (Acts 1:8). Both of these passages remind us that as Christians we are to be evangelists. "[L]et your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your father in heaven." (Matthew 5:6) This is what we are to be about. And, of course, in the Great Commission, Christ commanded that we that we "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father and of the son and of the holy spirit ...." (Matthew 28:19)[510] Once we accept Christ as lord and savior, we become responsible to share him with others. We are God's ambassadors proclaiming his gospel to the world. Outreaching to those outside the faith is every Christian's business."[511]

Not only are we called to reach out to others, we should want to do so. A friend cares about what is important to his or her friend. The more we seek to become God's friend, the more we should care about what he cares about. And, God cares most about the redemption of his people. He wants all of his lost children to be found. So, for us to be God's friend, we need to tell our friends about God." To be a friend of God, we must care about all the people around us. Friends of God continually reach out to their friends and others in ways to encourage and lead people toward coming to and maturing in Christ.[512]

> [A] disciple of Jesus [today] should be just as passionate as his first disciples, thinking about those who don't know Jesus yet and doing whatever possible to see them come to learn about him.[513]

"God has given... [us] the incredible opportunity to participate in his mission of reconciliation through announcing the good news of Jesus Christ to the world."[514] Letting others know the good news about Christ and about one's life in Christ, by word and deed, may prove to be some of the most satisfying experiences one enjoys.

B. IMPORTANCE OF EVANGELISM: REACHING OUT TO OTHERS

How important is it that each of us engage in reaching out to others for Christ? To whom does it matter?

- *It matters to God.* The Bible is clear. God so loves and treasures all his people that he sent his son Jesus Christ to seek and save them. Since they are of prime

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[509] Bill Hybels, *Just Walk Across the Room; Simple Steps Pointing People to Faith* 28 (2006).
[510] *See also* Jesus parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin in which there is great heavenly rejoicing when the lost is found and repents. – (Luke 15:1-10). "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us." 2 Corinthians5:18).
[511] Donald N. Bastian, *Belonging (Free Methodist Church): Adventures in Church Membership* 136 (2002).
[512] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* 96-97 (2002).
[513] Dan Kimball, "WWHDD: "What Would His Disciples Do?", OutreachMagazine.com, December 8, 2015.
[514] D. Scott Hildreth, "What Evangelism Is and Is Not," OutrcachMagazine.com, October 22, 2020.

importance to God, if we are truly followers of Christ, they must be of prime importance to each of us.

- *It matters to those not yet reached.* Christ calls each of us to be his on-going instruments to communicate God's love and his offer of forgiveness, salvation and eternal life. If we don't share Christ with people we come in contact with perhaps no one will. Thus, what we choose to do or not do, can impact others positively or negatively for eternity.

- *It matters to each of us individually.* Yes, there are costs in time, energy, preparation, risk of rejection and life complications. However, evangelism also offers substantial personal rewards including adventure, purpose, challenge, fulfillment, spiritual growth, enduring investments in that which lasts, and the honor of being God's agent. And, importantly, the time and effort spent on reaching out to others are enduring investments in our own Walk with Christ. The costs are really investments that pay permanent dividends.

- *It matters to our church.* Each time we own our church Covenant, we personally and specifically commit to "witness the power of God's love to all people as revealed through Christ." Thus, when we reach out to others, we foster the fulfillment of our church's mission as well as our personal covenant commitment. In doing so, we contribute to sustaining the church's vitality as a viable instrument in growing and nurturing God's family and the growth of our church.[515]

So, returning to the question, is it important for each of us to reach out to others for Christ? The answer is an unambiguous Yes! *It is important to God, to those we reach (or fail to reach), to each of us as individuals, and to the vitality of our church.*[516]

At the same time, it is important to remember that ultimately it is God who transforms people, not us. We are agents for God. In reaching out to others, God uses us. In the process we come closer to God.[517]

C. ELEMENTS OF EVANGELISM: MARKS OF DISCIPLESHIP

The task of evangelism is so important that Christ's Great Commission is reported not only in each of the gospels (Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:47-49, John 20:21), but also in the book of Acts in which Christ says "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8) We are all ambassadors for Christ. We are called to witness, to reach out to others, to share the Gospel and to contribute to leading people to accept Christ as Lord and Savior.

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[515] Jon S. Hanson, "Where Congregationalism in Growing the Family of Christ," pp.23-25, September 5, 2007 (article prepared on behalf of the Congregational Church Development Division for the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches).
[516] *Id.* at 25.
[517] Lee Strobel, "All Part of the Adventure," Outreach Magazine, January/February 2007, p.142.

FRCC's Evangelism Team Mission Statement expresses the basic elements of evangelism. This provides a bit more specificity than does the recommended overall Mission Statement for the church. However, the two are entirely consistent with each other.

> *The Mission of the Evangelism Team of Fox River Congregational Church (FRCC) is to reach out to people; share the good news of the Gospel; and encourage them toward accepting Christ as Lord and Savior, toward participating in Christian fellowship with other Christian believers of FRCC, and toward maturing in Christian faith within our Christian community.*[518]

This sets forth foundational elements of the spiritual discipline of evangelism which constitutes the focus of the spiritual discipline of evangelism. The foundational elements of evangelism include the following.

1. Reaching Out to People

Christ says "go and make disciples." To go means to reach out to people. This requires contacting people and communicating with them. Without engaging in some form of contact with others, one cannot carry out any of the various elements involved in making disciples. There are various ways to reach out to people including witnessing and sharing the good news.

2. Witnessing for Christ

We are all witnesses for Christ. Christ said "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

> We are ambassadors for Christ. We are called to bear witness for Christ, to reach out to others, to proclaim the Gospel and to contribute to leading people to accept Christ as Lord and Savior.[519]

Witnessing embraces modeling and telling the difference Jesus has made in one's life. A witness simply relates what he or she saw, heard or experienced and how Christ has influenced his or her life. Witness is showing, whether by words or actions, what Christ has done for him or her. Show what happens when Christ comes into your life.[520] Every follower of Christ has a story to tell of God's work in his or her life. Lonnie Richardson defines witnessing as "simply a matter of telling your story about who you love and what the love has done for you.[521] God speaks to the world through us. We each have a wealth of experiences which God wants us to use to reach out to others and bring them into God's family.[522]

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[518] Fox River Congregational Church Evangelism Team Mission (adopted by the Team, November 13, 2012).
[519] *Id.* at 8.
[520] Lonnie Richardson, "Managing the Faith: Spiritual Life Priorities," January 4, 2004 (sermon).
[521] Lonnie Richardson, "Tell Your Story," June 13, 2013 (sermon).
[522] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* 289 (2002).

Respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit to open one's mouth and heart for the sake of others in the everyday comings and goings of life. A witness shows by words and/or actions what Christ has done for him or her. The desire of witness is "to share the life-changing love of Jesus" with others.[523]

3. Sharing the Good News of the Gospel

At some point the good news of the Gospel needs to be shared with those we are seeking to bring to Christ. In order to meaningfully accept Christ as Lord and savior, one needs to grasp at least a basic understanding of the Gospel message. The timing and the manner of sharing can vary from person to person.

In addition to reaching out and contacting unchurched persons, witnessing and sharing the gospel, further elements in the evangelism process include, encouraging others toward accepting Christ as Lord and Savior, encouraging others toward participating in Christian fellowship with other believers in our church and encouraging others toward maturing in Christian faith within our Christian church community.

Involvement in the evangelism process, in some manner, is a critical element in one's growth in his or her Walk with Christ. The spiritual discipline of evangelism is not to be shunted to the side assuming that this is someone else's responsibility. For a fuller explanation of the these and other elements in personal relationship evangelism to which we are all called, see PART FIVE Section IX.C. below.

To reemphasize, reaching out to those who have not yet decided for Christ is fundamentally important to God, may decisively impact eternity for the persons we reach or fail to reach, vitally effects and benefits each of us in our Walk with Christ, and critically affects the growth and vitality of our church. To use the terminology made prominent by Willow Creek Community Church, as individual members of FRCC, we should all strive to become "contagious Christians."

V. PRINCIPLES GOVERNING THE PRACTICE OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Although there are numerous spiritual disciplines of widely varying natures, many of which have been discussed above, there are some basic principles governing their practice which are generally applicable. These include personal responsibility, training, do with others, and perseverance.

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[523] Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* 160 (2005).

A. PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

The responsibility of the individual concerning the practice of spiritual disciplines to enhance the likelihood of experiencing God's transformation power is considered more fully above in PART TWO, Section III.B,2.

However, it should be noted that persons can experience unintentional spiritual growth through practice of spiritual disciplines without consciously focusing on spiritual growth. There are practices in the Christian community that are experienced less as an exercise for spiritual growth and more as a responsibility or expectation of some ritual or role in the church. For example, church members typically attend worship services without viewing doing so as a spiritual growth experience. The same can be said with respect participating in a serving opportunity, inviting someone to church and other common church activities and rituals. These are not practiced as spiritual disciplines, but rather as participation in life of the church. Nevertheless, participation in these various roles offer the potential for some spiritual growth.

In contrast, spiritual growth more likely occurs, and to greater effect, when an individual practices a spiritual discipline intentionally for the purpose of personal spiritual growth. This is characterized by one's personal drive toward a deeper understanding and experience of God.

As Dallas Willard states

> [t]he spiritual life is a life of interaction with a personal God and it is pure delusion to suppose that it can be carried on sloppily....[524]

Intentional spiritual maturity occurs when Christ followers "take matters into their own hands to venture towards discovering God on their own effort."[525] Although the venture can be spurred by church efforts, it remains a personal and sacred experience. In short, intentional spiritual maturity, although enhanced by church effort, requires focused personal effort for the purpose of spiritual growth.

This focused personal effort is commonly characterized by three characteristics.[526]

- Select a spiritual discipline focusing on a particular spiritual weakness thereby choosing wisely the discipline(s) that will make a more significant difference.

- Commit a significant amount of time to the practice of spiritual(s) discipline. Spiritual maturity occurs when a discipline is practiced routinely over time so as to go deeply into the soul.

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[524] Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines; Understanding How God Changes Lives* 153 (1988).
[525] Stuart R. Merkel, *A Strategy for Employing Individual and Communal Spiritual Disciplines for Spiritual Growth at Gurnee Community Church* 70 November 2008).
[526] *Id.* at 70-73.

- When practiced faithfully, the spiritual discipline activity should visibly impact how one's life is lived both in public and private circumstances.

B. TRAINING

Scripture presents Jesus followers as persons engaged in a disciplined way of life. Paul instructs "train yourself to be godly." (1 Timothy 4:7) Scriptural teachings manifest that our growing as followers of Christ (discipleship) requires learning, training and then practicing spiritual disciplines. The road toward becoming more Christ-like in our thoughts, feelings and actions is a road of spiritual disciplines manifesting the marks of discipleship. Like athletes who need disciplined training to be successful, leading a Christian life requires a disciplined practice of spiritual disciplines.

> Significant transformation involves training to do something – not just trying. Spiritual disciplines are training exercises to give us power to live in the kingdom.[527]

We are a work in progress so long as we permit the Holy Spirit to shape and transform us through the learning and practicing spiritual disciplines which lead us toward a more Christ-like life.[528] Without regular and focused exposure to the foundations of faith, the "chances of Christians consistently making choices to reflect biblical principles is minimal."[529]

In seeking to engage in spiritual disciplines, it needs to be recognized that one cannot practice all the spiritual disciplines at once. Instead, view them as garden tools. Pull out the one or more which meets your need at that particular moment.[530]

Furthermore, we are not called to engage in spiritual disciplines all of the time. Don't have angst whenever not engaged in spiritual disciplines. Practice them. Then use them when needed. Some disciplines will become staples of your spiritual diet. Others might be used only occasionally in special situations.

However, when the practice simply becomes routine, we need to disrupt it to avoid engaging in empty rituals. A danger spiritually is learning *how* and forgetting *why* resulting in just going through the motions of praying without thinking, worshiping without thinking, taking communion without thinking, prayer without thinking, spending time with God's Word without thinking, etc. God wants more than simply ritual, memory and routine. Inject some degree of creativity. A change of place and/or a change of pace when engaging in a spiritual discipline may reinvigorate what had become a meaningfulness rote of activity. One way to snap out of a spiritual slump is disturb one's routine by experimenting with other spiritual disciplines. In short,

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[527] Dallas Willard, *Living in Christ's Presence: Final Words on Heaven and the Kingdom of God* 42 (2014).
[528] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* 197 *et seq.* (2006).
[529] George Barna as quoted in Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship Making Disciples A Few At a Time* 27 (2003).
[530] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* 197 *et seq.* (2006).

disrupt your routines and recommence the adventure in another way. Create a margin for spiritual spontaneity and listen to God.[531]

It should be noted, however, that putting spiritual disciplines into practice does not imply that salvation is somehow earned. As noted earlier, God offers grace for those believing, receiving and accepting Christ as Lord. Salvation is not earned.

> [Salvation] is by grace and through faith. However, as a believer, you do take effort to grow—but that does not earn you a relationship with God. It just *puts you in the right place where God can grow you as a believer,* saved by grace. As Dallas Willard has explained, "Grace is not opposed to effort; it is opposed to earning."[532] – (emphasis supplied)

Furthermore, one should not let the learning and practice of spiritual disciplines become one's mission in of themselves apart from the two Great Commandments and the Great Commission. The practice of spiritual disciplines "help us grow in the ability to love God and people – the true indicators of spiritual well-being."[533]

C. DO SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES WITH OTHERS

Don't go it alone. A major element in the success of the Weight Watcher program is that participants periodically gather in groups. They draw encouragement from one another. Not only do their mutual commitments support each other in maintaining their diets, but also knowing that participants give account of their progress enhances the likelihood of each person's success, especially as compared to dieters lacking the mutual support and accountability of a group.[534]

We need encouragement and accountability in our spiritual growth. Training involves constant repetition which requires discipline. Since self-discipline is rare, especially on an on-going long-term basis, we need others to hold us accountable. Few, if any, make spiritual breakthroughs without the support of others.[535]

D. PERSEVERANCE MAKES TRANSFORMATION A REALITY[536]

Training and trying are not the same thing. Trying occurs when one attempts to reach goals without the proper tools. Attempting to run a marathon with no training will not lead to success. Similarly, trying to grow as a disciple does little if we don't train to do so. Training occurs when we commit to organize our lives around the practices and teachings of Jesus. When we train and practice spiritual disciplines long enough, new habits are created enhancing the likelihood of God, in some mysterious way, transforms us into a more Christ-like persons in our

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[531] *See* Mark Batterson, *Wild Goose Chase* 41 (2008) (Chapter 3, "Dictatorship of the Ordinary, Coming Out of the Cage of Routine).
[532] Ed Stetzer, "4 Strategic Steps for Better Discipleship," OutreachMagazine.com, March 13, 2013.
[533] John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted* (Participant's Guide) 24 (2004).
[534] Donald N. Bastian, *Belonging (Free Methodist Church): Adventures in Church Membership* 136 (2002).
[535] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* 199 (2006).
[536] *Id.* at 143, 203-06.

thoughts, feelings and actions. Transformation requires time as new and good habits slowly replace the bad habits of old. Perseverance is required as we grow in our Walk with Christ.

VI. CHOOSING OUR PATH

A. LIFE'S GREAT QUESTIONS

Each of us is confronted with foundational questions as to how we will live our lives. A person can respond with deliberate consideration and decisions followed by committed practices. Or, he or she can respond by simply ignoring the questions and live in whatever manner the moment prompts him or her to do. But, regardless of the how a person answers, there are short, long and/or eternal consequences.

The basic life centering questions include the following.

- *What will be the center of my life?* – Who am I going to live for and build my life around? Whatever is at the center of one's life is that person's god. What is my unshakable center? The response determines whether, whom and how we worship and with whom we seek a loving relationship.[537]

- *What will be the character of my life?* – What type of person will I try to be? Here the response determines whether I will seek to become a follower of Christ (a disciple), i.e., person growing toward a more Christ-like life in my thoughts, feelings and actions. Such growth evolves from learning and practicing spiritual disciplines. Remember, a person takes his or her character with him or her into eternity.

- *In what community will be the center my life?* – This raises the question of whether to actively and regularly participate in a church fellowship of Christian believers.

- *What kinds of contributions do I want to make?* – This raises the question of *serving*. By discerning one's spiritual gifts, passions, abilities, personality and

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> Who we are is defined by who or what we worship – who or what we put first in our lives and invest our lives in.... [We] only have three things we can give or invest: our time, our talents and our treasures.... There is only one God, and he is the only one worthy of our time, talents and treasure. If we give ourselves to anything else, we are worshipping idols. An idol can be something as tangible as a statue, as was common in Bible times. But it can also be something as intangible as a career or hobby.... It is really anything we use to define ourselves above our relationship with God.

Curt Landry, "Our Identity is Tied to Worship," OutreachMagazine.com, December 21, 2018.

experiences, one can better discern where he or she can best serve rather than doing so on a haphazard basis.

- In relating to other people, *what (if anything) will be important to communicate to them?* – This raises the question of our commitment to reach out to others in a manner to help leading them to accepting Christ as Lord and Savior and to bring them into a community of believers for fellowship and spiritual growth.

The manner in which we respond to questions such as these translates into whether or not we grow toward living a more Christ-like life in our thought, feelings and actions so as to grow toward becoming a Fully Devoted Follower of Christ. It is critical for people to explore life's great questions and then begin (or invigorate) their journey with Christ through the selection and practice of spiritual disciplines meaningful to them.

B. MARKS OF DISCIPLESHIP: SUBSTANTIVE CONTENT AREAS OF DISCIPLE-MAKING EXPERIENCES

In summary, a follower (disciple) of Christ seeks to grow more like Christ in his or her thoughts, feelings and actions as he or she Walks the Path of becoming a Fully Devoted Follower of Christ. As considered in this PART THREE, there are four fundamental categories of spiritual disciplines. They provide the substantive content areas for disciple-making experiences. Persons involved in the various elements of these foundational spiritual disciplines reflect marks of discipleship as they grow in their walk toward becoming more Christ-like.

Among the marks of discipleship are the following.

(1) *Connecting with God through pursuing a loving and intimate personal relationship with him*

- habit of prayer
- habit of spending time with God's Word
- habit of regular, meaningful and transforming worship
- habit of silence, solitude, silence and listening
- habit of meditation
- habit of reflection
- habit of practicing the presence of God
- habit of fasting
- habit of obeying God's call and discerning God's will
- habit of "follow me" wear
- habit of pursuing intimacy with God through one' own uniqueness (trying different types of spirituality)

(2) *Connecting with Christian believers through, love, caring and sharing life together*

- habit of active participation in Christian fellowship

- habit of an active and regular participation in a small group
- habit of giving time, talent and/or treasure in supporting advancing the mission purposes of the church

(3) *Connecting with Christian believers and non-believers through serving their physical, emotional and spiritual needs*

- habit of serving the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of others
- habit of discerning and developing one's gift for serving others
- habit of stewardship: the cheerful giving of one's time, talent and treasure (tithing and offerings)

(4) *Connecting with people outside the faith through lovingly witnessing the good news of Christ and bringing them into congregational life*

- habit of reaching out to people
- habit of witnessing for Christ
- habit of sharing the good news of the Gospel
- habit of encouraging others toward accepting Christ as Lord and Savior,
- habit of encouraging others toward participating in Christian fellowship with other believers in our church
- habit of encouraging others toward maturing in Christian faith within our Christian community

It is incumbent upon each of us as individuals and collectively as a church to actively choose to grow in these four fundamental areas evidencing these marks of discipleship through the practice of spiritual disciplines associated with each. In doing so, it is important to recognize that the pursuit of these four relationships interrelate, interact and reinforce one another. Pursuit of one, contributes to the pursuit of the others. Thus, one discipline need not, nor should not, be done in isolation to the exclusion the others.

Furthermore, it should be noted that focusing on these spiritual disciplines is not intended to derogate the value of other spiritual disciplines. Also, as indicated above, it is not expected that a person will be become highly proficient and active in developing and practicing all of these habits. However, the more one engages in these various disciplines and discerns which are more effective in developing his or her personal relationship with God, the more one sets the stage for God to exert his transforming power.

As considered above, there are four fundamental categories of spiritual disciplines which mark a person growing and transforming into a disciple of Christ. These are (i) getting connected with God, (ii) getting connected with other Christian believers, (iii) getting connected with others (both believers and non-believers) through serving, and (iv) getting connected with people outside the faith. Several habits or spiritual disciplines under each category offer means for persons to grow in their Walk with Christ. These provide the substantive content areas for disciple-making experiences. To better equip members of our church (and others) to grow in their spiritual maturity, it is incumbent that we, as a body of Christ believers, enhance existing

and develop new means to assist persons in establishing habits that promote spiritual growth through "getting connected" in these four fundamental areas of spiritual disciplines. We need to offer encouragement, teaching, training and supporting experiences to better enable our members (and others) in growing towards becoming Fully Devoted Followers of Christ.

PART FOUR:
PROCESS OF DISCIPLE-MAKING EXPERIENCES

The first of the three principal elements undergirding an effective disciple-making church is *defining with clarity and embracing the disciple-making mission of our church* (considered in PART TWO above). The second principal element undergirding an effective disciple-making church is *knowing and fostering participation in the content of disciple-making experiences, i.e., spiritual disciplines, which lead to the accomplishment of the Mission* (considered in PART THREE above and PART FIVE below). The third principal element undergirding an effective disciple-making church is *understanding the nature of the process, where people need to go, i.e., stages of disciple-making, which progressively move people along the path of growing in their Walk with Christ.* To this process-the stages of disciples-making we now turn.

The recommended Mission for FRCC focuses on what God wants people to become (growing toward a more Christ-like life) and what we need to do to progress in such growth (pursuing connecting in relationships with God, other believers, those in need through serving, and people outside the faith through evangelism. The content of disciple-making experiences consists of meaningful practice of various spiritual disciplines. Here we turn to the process of disciple-making experiences, i.e., understanding where people need to go. This involves establishing a spiritual growth path, stages of disciple-making, which promise to effectively deliver the content of disciple-making experiences.

I. ESSENTIALITY OF MOVEMENT

Growing as a disciple is the process of believers becoming transformed into the image of Christ.

> As a church, in business terms, we are in the disciple-development business. The product is transformed lives - an expanding body of Christ-like people. The role of… [the church] is to motivate and better enable individuals to progress in their Walk with Christ by moving to deeper levels of spiritual maturity and levels of commitment. This requires a series of processes designed to move people through various stages of development.[538]

Spiritual growth is predicated on movement. "Churches are filled with people who have attended [worship] services for their entire lives, yet are still spiritual babies."[539]

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[538] Fox River Congregational Church, Foundational Standards and Outline of Comprehensive Strategy Applicable to Each Mission Purpose Team: General Standard Applicable to All Mission Purpose Teams, adopted by Congregation, June 6, 2004.

[539] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message* 332 (1995).

A strategic approach is needed to infuse into the lives of the people of the church the various aspects of the profile of growing as a follower of Christ. To be an effective disciple-making church, everything a church does must mesh together to engender life transformation. The selection, development and implementation of disciple-making experiences need to be based upon the mission purpose of the church and be designed to provide a straight-forward and clearly understood spiritual growth path that moves people through the stages of spiritual growth toward accomplishing the mission of growing more Christ-like in one's thoughts, feelings and actions.

> A spiritual growth path is necessary for a church to effectively multiply fully devoted, transformed, knowledgeable, ministering, witnessing, reproducing disciples of Christ.[540]

Needed is "a pathway to lead people step-by-step from the point of initial contact with the church to spiritual maturity."[541]

All too common, in many if not most churches, a significant if not substantial segment of the church membership remains essentially unchanged in terms of their spiritual growth. They are not being transformed. At least in part, stagnation of believers stems from the lack of an intentional church process to move them along in their Walk with Christ. A disciple-making church needs a ministry which moves people into situations in which they are more likely to be transformed by God. The lack of such process results in congestion and stagnation. Also, congestion posed by a host of church events, activities and committee meetings may further impede peoples' spiritual growth. Such church environment works contrary to the expectation revealed in the Bible that calls for believers' lives to be transformed.[542]

As considered earlier, we do not transform ourselves. In his time frame and in his way, God transforms us when we place ourselves in his presence. God seeks to transform people into his image. Since he does the transforming, what role does the church play in the process?[543]

Partnering with God in a manner consistent with that to which he calls us enhances the probability of success. The church's role is to put people in places where God is most likely to transform them. This is achieved by implementing and effectuating a disciple-making process which moves people through greater levels of commitment in their pursuit of the four critical relationships of connecting with God, other believers, both believers and unbelievers through serving, and those persons outside the faith. Research evidences that there is a significant relationship between the vibrancy of a church and the presence of an intentional planned ministry process designed to move people along in their spiritual growth. Movement consists of progressing through the steps in the process (i.e., the stages of disciple-making) which cause people to move to greater levels of commitment. Each of the stages contributes to a deepening in one or more of the four critical relationships.

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[540] Linus J. Morris, *The High Impact Church: A Fresh Approach to Reaching the Unchurched* 171 (1993).
[541] *Id.* at 171. "A path, a discipleship process, is necessary in order to ensure effective life change of believers within a congregation." Ed Stetzer, "On the Path to Discipleship," OutreachMagazine.com, December 1 2015.
[542] *See* Thomas S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples* 136-139. (2006).
[543] *Id.* at 138..

George Barna's research revealed that only 1 out of 5 believers stated that their church has in place some systematic means to evaluate the spiritual maturity and commitment to maturity of its congregation. However, 9 out of 10 believers in the same survey said they would seriously consider their church's recommendation to pursue a spiritual path if one were clear and made available to them.[544]

Without movement, programs, events or other activities are simply ends unto themselves. The ministry process must be about moving people. People need to be moved beyond their perpetual comfort zone. To respond to the challenge of moving people through the process, both the church and the individual need to be intentional in movement through the stages of disciple-making. It is the development of a clear spiritual path and the means to traverse such path which demands our church's attention.

II. STAGES OF DISCIPLE- MAKING

By God's design, spiritual growth occurs in the context of process. Thus, in response, we should design and implement a procedural path of programs which leads people to places where God is most likely to transform them. Programs, at each disciple-making stage, should be designed to contribute to growth in one or more of the marks of discipleship (i.e., connecting with God, other believers, serving and reaching out to those outside the faith. Each stage in the disciple-making process consists of one or more programs, events or other activities partaking of the nature of that stage. Every person should participate in one or more programs at each stage since the very nature of each stage of programs is essential to spiritual growth. However, it should be recognized that an individual person's spiritual growth through the various stages of disciple-making may not be as neatly sequential as suggested by the ordered discussion of these stages.

The purpose here is to set briefly set forth the key stages of disciple-making laying out the procedural path one traverses in growing toward a more Christ-like life in his or her Walk with Christ. The content of the various stages will be considered in more detail in PART FIVE below.

A. CONVERSION PROCESS

A person initiates becoming becomes a follower of Christ by accepting him as Lord and Savior.

> It is an act of faith in him as our Savior, an act of submission to him as our Lord. …It is a definite act. …It is an individual act. …You can become a Christian in a moment, but not a mature Christian. Christ can enter, cleanse and forgive you in a matter of seconds, but it will take much longer for your character to be

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[544] Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship Making Disciples a Few at a Time* 54 (2003).

> transformed and shaped to his will. ...[However,] a moment of commitment will lead to a lifetime of adjustment.[545]

One initiates becoming a follower of Christ by accepting him as Lord and Savior. The process leading up to and including conversion is the initial stage in connecting with God. The conversion stage of disciple-making consists of the thoughts, feelings, experiences and/or relationships leading to this decision and commitment. Among the essential experiences is obtaining at least a rudimentary understanding of the basics of faith.

B. VITAL TRANSFORMING WORSHIP

A maturing follower of Christ continually pursues an intimate relationship with God. Foundational in this growing intimacy is participation in vital transforming worship. God's first great commandment is that you shall "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." (Matthew 22:37) The New Testament, here and elsewhere, calls upon us to worship God. He calls for total response, commitment and obedience.

Through reverence, awe, submission, praise and thanksgiving of God, a worship service affords a time and place where we can encounter our living God. Christ promised to be with us when we gather in his name. In worship, we collectively as a community, as well as personally, have the opportunity of connecting with him. Here we respond to God's invitation to enter a personal and intimate relationship with him.[546] Failure to move from one's initial experience with Christ to regular and deeply personal involvement in worship promises an abrupt halt in one's pursuit of an intimate relationship with God. Thus, central in Christ's church is loving worship of God. "Worship...must be at the heart of the church's life."[547] Meaningful worship is a crucial stage in effective disciple-making.

C. LEARNING THE BASICS OF THE FAITH

For those who are newcomers to the faith, movement along the spiritual path requires understanding the basics of the faith beyond the initial rudimentary understandings underlying the conversion decision to accept Christ. Gaining this greater understanding of the basics of faith may occur in the context of any one of several stages of disciple-making. This may happen as early as the conversion stage, result from teachings during worship services (from sermons or otherwise) or occur later, e.g., during the process of becoming a member of the church or at some point in the context of participating in a small group. However, whatever the context, proceeding to, within and beyond the basics of faith disciple-making stage is a foundational element for one to grow in his or her spiritual formation. This stage of disciple-making can also serve as a valuable refresher experience for on-going members of the church.

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[545] John Stott, *Basic Christianity* 165-66 (2008).
[546] Jon S. Hanson, "Why Are We Here?," January. 11, 2004 (sermon).
[547] John H. Westerhoff, III, Living *the Faith Community, The Church That Makes a Difference* 53 (1985).

D. PERSONAL SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES NURTURING FAITH

As previously considered, spiritual disciplines are the content of disciple-making experiences. One learns and practices spiritual disciplines in the pursuit of connecting with God, connecting with other believers, connecting with others by serving their needs and connecting with those outside the faith. To grow in one's Walk with Christ a person needs to progressively engage in various spiritual disciplines. The disciple-making stage of practicing a personal spiritual discipline(s) (including, e.g., prayer, spending time with God's Word and worship) to connect with God in a loving intimate relationship with him is not a one time or one place exercise. It is an-on-going stage of discipleship which interrelates with other stages such as participation in small groups, growing in serving and growing in sharing Christ.

E. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP IN A COVENANT COMMUNITY: GETTING TO KNOW OUR CHURCH

A critical stage in one's journey with Christ is becoming a part of Christ's family by becoming a member of and being assimilated into a local church. Being a fully devoted follower of Christ includes commitment to the Christ community and understanding what that means in the context of the local church. This involves learning what church membership is about including its mission, covenant, expectations, organizational structure and, in the context of FRCC, doing church in the Congregational Way.

As a condition of membership, one needs to learn, understand and commit to the mission purpose of the church both from the perspective of what the church collectively seeks to do and, most importantly, the responsibility of and expectation for the individual to grow more Christ-like in his or her thoughts, feelings and actions. Stagnating as a nominal Christian does not suffice. A critical role of a disciple-making church is to create expectations that will foster growth in their Walk with Christ. Low expectations lead to low results. Clear communication of the mission and the process (stages of discipleship) of connecting with God, other believers, others through serving and people outside the faith is essential to being an effective disciple-making church. And, of course, knowing, understanding and continuing to commit to FRCC's mission applies to all church members as well as those newly coming onto the scene. Committing to the mission of the church occurs when one owns the covenant as a condition of membership in the church.

F. ASSIMILATING INTO THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

Importantly, becoming a church member does not end the journey. But rather, one's Walk with Christ progresses toward the next stage of disciple-making. As newcomers are drawn to the church, through evangelism efforts or otherwise, the church should endeavor to quickly assimilate them into church life which reduces the likelihood that they will drop out. The key is the more friends a newcomer makes, the more likelihood that he or she will become involved. People try out a church for a variety of reasons. They stay primarily for one of two reasons – friendships and meaningful ministry involvement. The assimilation stage of disciple-making embraces assimilating efforts both (i) before persons become members, thereby enhancing the likelihood that they will opt to do so, and (ii) after becoming members thereby enhancing the

likelihood of an on-going active participation in the church's mission and growth in their Walk with Christ.

G. SMALL GROUPS

1. Relational Small Groups (RSGs)

The best place for sustained life change occurs within the context of intentional relationships. The best place for encouraging intentional relationships is in a small group.[548]

As previously discussed in PART THREE, Section II.B., participation in relational small groups is foundational for a person's spiritual growth.

> The dynamic at work in a cell [small] group] is different from what happens in a large gathering [e.g., worship services, other large church events], or within me as an individual. The facets of community are personal intimacy, accessibility and availability, physical contact, communication, care and help, accountability, relationship, conversation, unity, focus, and group ministry. They can't be duplicated in the same way and intensity in a large group or in the life of one individual.[549]

Christians are called to belong, not just to believe. Developing meaningful relationships, in which every person possesses the sense of love, care, support, belonging and accountability, is central to the Christian experience. Becoming a disciple requires that we walk alongside others, where life rubs up against life, in order to encourage, equip and challenge one another in love to grow toward more Christ-like lives. Most nurturing of a spiritual life occurs in committed on-going relational small groups. Following Christ is not something that is simply taught. Following Christ needs to be lived. The relational element in Jesus' model must be at the heart of becoming a Fully Devoted Follower of Christ.

To reiterate earlier conclusions,

- on-going relational small groups (often referred to as RSGs) constitute a virtually indispensable element for those seeking transformation toward a more Christ-like life and a growing relationship with God,

- relational small groups need to be an integral part of the church structure, not merely an appendage or an after-thought add on. and

- every church member and attendee should effectively be encouraged to become involved in a relational small group.

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[548] Andy Stanley and Bill Willits, *Creating Community: 5 Keys to Building a Small Group Culture* 76 (2004).
[549] William Beckham, *The Second Reformation: Reshaping the Church for the 21sst Century* 61 (2005).

2. Short Term Small Groups

The popular trend in churches today is conducting short term small group programs for a limited duration of four to eight weeks. Although much good can come from such groups, when standing alone, their prime failing is the lack of developing on-going deepening relationships with other believers after these groups conclude.[550] Nevertheless, short term small groups can serve various important functions. These are further discussed in PART FIVE, Section VII.C.1. below and are simply noted here. These five functions are

(i) teaching the *basics of faith,*

(ii) sparking *spiritual growth*

(iii) exploring *theological questions for adult faith formation,*

(iv) provide *training* for engaging in disciple-making activities

(v) serving *as a bridge to relational small groups*

In short, progressing to and becoming active in small groups, both short term and ultimately relational small groups, constitutes major advancement in growing through the stages of disciples-making.

H. & I. GROWING INTO SERVING AND INTO SHARING CHRIST

The disciple-making stages of conversion, worship, basics of faith, personal spiritual disciplines nurturing faith, getting to know the church and church membership, assimilation, and participation in small (especially relational) groups nurture us in growing toward a more Christ-like life. In these earlier disciple-making stages, primary focus is on developing intimacy with God and one another. But there is more. Christ calls us to mission. We are to serve others and to reach out to those outside the faith. The other disciplines nurture us toward a Christian life style of not only pursuing intimacy with God and connection with other believers, but also to nurture us in serving and sharing Christ with others. In turn, serving others and sharing Christ better enables us to connect with God and other believers in intimate relationships.

J. SUMMARY OF THE STAGES OF DISCIPLE-MAKING

The stages of disciples-making are

- conversion process
- worship
- basics of faith
- personal spiritual disciplines nurturing the faith

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[550] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* 228 (2006).

- church membership in a covenant community: getting to know our church
- assimilation
- small groups
- growing into serving
- growing into evangelism.

We are a community of covenant-makers, not just members of an organization. Owning a membership covenant is the pivoting point where one moves from "ME" to "WE." It is about ME when conversion, faith development, and spiritual disciplines are introduced. It is about WE at the point of owning the membership covenant and continuing the progress to assimilation, small groups, serving, and sharing Christ.

Setting forth these stages clarifies a process or path for spiritual growth. After one accepts Christ (conversion), the worship service offers people opportunity to begin or deepen their connection with God. Gaining an understanding of the of faith is essential for continuing spiritual growth. Nurturing the faith begins in a rudimentary manner during the conversion process, progresses with exposure to the basics of faith and deepens throughout the life long process of growing in Christ's image. Getting to know the church, becoming a church member and being assimilated into the church initiates connecting with other believers in our church community. The next step is participation in short term small groups as a bridge to connecting with others believers in a deep and meaningful way which is accomplished through relational small groups. Failure to connect in a relational small group almost assuredly lessens, if not virtually stagnates, spiritual growth. The relational small group stage of the disciple-making process can substantially contribute to nurturing one's growth toward a Christian life style by deepening one's intimacy with God through the practice of spiritual disciplines, serving others and reaching out to and bringing in people outside the faith. Growing in serving others and reaching out to those outside the faith responds to the Great Commandments and the Great Commission. Through this path of disciple-making stages, people are challenged to come to worship, participate in small groups, deepen their intimacy with God through the practice of spiritual disciplines, serve in some ministry and reach out to those outside the faith.

Effective disciple-making calls for an intentional procedure designed to move people along in their spiritual growth. Movement is progressing along the path of the disciple-making stages which lead to increasing commitment in the areas of spiritual growth. In doing so, one places himself or herself in those situations in which God is most likely to exercise his transforming power. As a disciple-making church, it is incumbent on us to clearly set forth not only our disciple-making mission purpose, but also the disciple-making stages to, within and through which one needs to move in becoming a Fully Devoted Follower of Christ. However, this is not to suggest foreclosing the Holy Spirit from moving an individual in a manner outside the stages of disciple-making process recommended here.

Unfortunately, most churches pay little attention as how to move people to greater levels of commitment. In contrast, the above-described procedural path of disciple-making offers a process in which programs, events and other activities are intentional tools to move people along a growth path in their Walk with Christ. When specific programs are fitted to movement through

the stages of discipleship, rather than simply being isolated or non-integrated experiences, they provide disciple-making experiences leading persons toward more Christ-like lives. Each program needs to fit into a disciple-making stage leading to spiritual development. Organizing programs in this way promotes clarity and incentive for movement to the next stage. Without movement, programs are simply ends unto themselves. To reemphasize, *people need to be moved beyond their zones of comfort*. Participation in programs in each of these disciple-making stages is key to disciple-making. To respond to the challenge of moving people through the disciple-making process, a church needs a clear approach to intentional movement.

However, in doing so, it must be recognized by the church and individuals that disciple-making is incremental. It is one step at a time. We are imperfect works in progress. Striving to grow and change is a never-ending process. There is always another step in growing toward becoming more Christ-like. Furthermore, people progress at different paces. And, God does not abandon even the most stumbling disciple. "God is not surprised when we stumble and fall. Instead, God assures us that we are forgiven"[551] and guides us on our way.

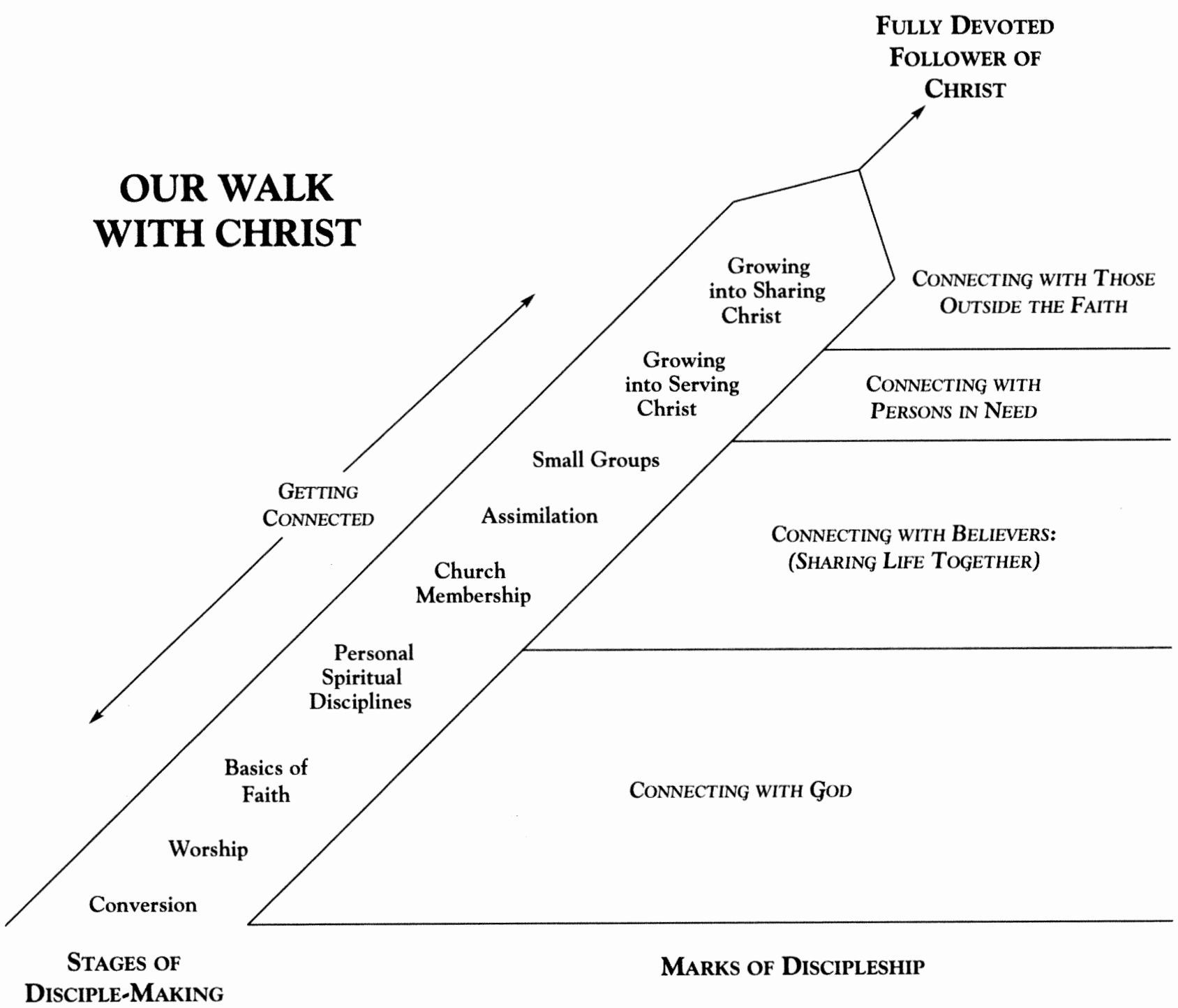
III. ILLUSTRATE PROCESS: WALK WITH CHRIST GRAPHIC

As a person walks the procedural path taking him or her to, within and through the stages of disciple-making, he or she grows in the four relationships of connecting with God, other believers, ministry through serving and reaching out to the unchurched leading to a more Christ-like life. The ministry process is about moving people. The graphic below[552] visually integrates the process of getting connected in these relationships with the stages of discipleship to which one moves to, within and beyond. It provides a visual image of the process to move people from little or no commitment to greater levels of commitment and spiritual maturity, i.e., the flow of church ministry in each person's life as one increasingly grows toward the image of Christ. The visual illustration reflects the procedural path for the church to put into place to move people toward a more Christ-like life.

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[551] Upper Room (Daily Devotional), 2015-08-20.

[552] The recommended graphic, which appears below, replaces the current graphic utilized by Fox River Congregational Church.


FULLY DEVOTED FOLLOWER OF CHRIST
OUR WALK WITH CHRIST
Growing into Sharing Christ
CONNECTING WITH THOSE OUTSIDE THE FAITH
Growing into Serving Christ
CONNECTING WITH PERSONS IN NEED
Small Groups
GETTING CONNECTED
Assimilation
CONNECTING WITH BELIEVERS: (SHARING LIFE TOGETHER)
Church Membership
Personal Spiritual Disciplines
Basics of Faith
CONNECTING WITH GOD
Worship
Conversion
STAGES OF DISCIPLE-MAKING
MARKS OF DISCIPLESHIP

Illustrating the ministry process is vital for clarity. The process resonates more effectively when it is visual. People remember graphics. In contrast, they are unlikely to live out and experience something which they don't remember. The process of the stages of disciple-making should become a personal vision for each person in the church. Presenting it in visual form better enables people to internalize the disciple-making process as their own. Etch the process in people's minds.[553]

IV. NATURE OF MOVEMENT

A. SEMI-SEQUENTIAL NATURE OF MOVEMENT

Inherent in the utilization of a graphic illustration of a path to follow in striving toward an end goal suggests that moving through the stages of discipleship necessarily occurs in sequential order. To some extent, however, linear progression is an over simplification of reality. Life can be messy and unpredictable. Growing in one's spiritual maturity may start in different ways and take some twists and turns which are not strictly sequential.

The possibility, perhaps even a likelihood, is that a person's efforts to grow toward a more Christ-like life, will be other than entirely sequential. For example, a person may be attracted to participating in a church serving opportunity before even considering becoming a church member. A serving opportunity may lead him or her to become involved in a small group which, in turn, leads to interest in the Bible. Or, a person might try attending worship services before reaching the decision to convert to Christ. The possible entry points to one's Walk with Christ are varied. Nevertheless, the graphic offers a guide and incentive for movement to better enable a person to grow in his or her Walk.

B. STAGES OF DISCIPLESHIP CUMULATIVE IMPACT ON CONNECTING

More than one stage of disciple-making can impact the pursuit of a particular relationship. For example, connecting with God is a progressive development as one moves through the stages of disciple-making. The initial connection often occurs at the stage of *conversion*. Increased connection occurs through the stage of regular *worship* and an increasing and deeper connection can ensue during the stage of *personally practicing spiritual disciplines* which is on-going throughout the life of one's Christian walk. Participation in small groups may lead to greater involvement in spiritual disciplines which deepens the connection with God. Also, connecting with other believers occurs at different stages, initially by becoming a *church member, assimilation* and participating in *short term small groups*. The disciple-making stage of relational small groups further deepens connections with other believers. In short, more than one (perhaps many) of the various stages of discipleship can vitally contribute to the pursuit of connecting in the four critical relationships.

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[553] Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples* 116-20 (2006).

C. BUILDING ON STAGES OF DISCIPLESHIP

Importantly, however, we should not read Our Walk with Christ graphic as suggesting that we leave one stage when go on to the next. But rather, we continue to build intimacy with God even as we move on to participation in groups. We continue to build relationships even after we embark in a serving ministry or evangelism. In other words, as one's progresses along the procedural path of disciple-making stages, he or she accumulates and continues to grow in the various marks of discipleship. Nevertheless, the suggested version of Our Walk with Christ graphic affords a simple and clear identification of our disciple-making mission purposes as well as indicates the path leading to the stages of disciple-making which needs to be traversed to grow toward spiritual maturity.

In short, "Our Walk with Christ" graphic provides a visual presentation of a procedural path consisting of a series of disciple-making stages which lead people to grow toward the image of Christ through the pursuit of the four relationships of connecting with God, other believers, believers and non-believers through serving and people outside the faith through outreach/evangelism. This visual image affords a simple clear conceptual means providing an overview of the ministry of our church and expectations for our members in their pursuit of growing as followers of Christ.

D. PLUGGING INTO ONE'S SEASON OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH[554]

The clarity of mission and the setting forth of the stages of discipleship provide the foundation for a person's spiritual growth toward a more Christ-like life. However, whether a church member or someone from outside the church, an individual is still confronted with the question as to where he or she should plug into church activities. In some situations, the road is apparent, e.g., attending worship service, a newcomers' class if not yet a member, etc. In other situations, the choice is nonlinear and less clear as to where to best connect into church offered disciple-making experiences.

As a disciple-making church, FRCC should develop a process to assist persons in connecting with the mission of the church by helping them identifying the spiritual season that they are in and what might be their next steps. "[H]elping people identify their unique season of spiritual growth facilitates connection."[555]

This is especially true as a church grows and offers more programs, small groups, and ministry opportunities. People are confronted with a variety of options and opportunities. Where do I start or go next? How can we as a church help respond to this question?

In doing so, one church developed an online portal into its spiritual growth process. The church offers a lot courses and small group experiences in addition to its weekly worship services. To make it simpler for a person to connect with these opportunities, GROWlink was developed to serve as an entry point. It has two parts. First, people self-identify the season of

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[554] Heather Schnese, "Help People Find Their Unique Seasons of Growth," OutreachMagazine.com, August. 19, 2014.
[555] *Id.*

spiritual growth in which they perceive themselves to be. GROWlink identifies six seasons and how can a person tell which one he or she is in. For each season, the program provides an explanation as to what the season may look like. Second, the church program helps people determine the next best step in their spiritual journey. Courses or classes appropriate for that season of growth, online resources and books are set forth as a basis for the individual to choose his or her next step.

Here at FRCC, whether by some sophisticated on-line program such as the one noted above and/or through a more personal approach of helping a person discerning his or her next step, consideration should be given to developing and implementing a means to better enable a person to plug into that type of experience best suited to his or her season of growth.

V. ESSENCE OF AN EFFECTIVE DISCIPLE-MAKING CHURCH

In short, the basic elements of a disciple-making church focuses on responding to three questions.

(1) What does God, hence our church, *want people to become*? We seek for people to grow toward becoming more like Christ-like in their thoughts, feelings and actions.

(2) To do so, what does God, hence our church, *we want people to do*? We want people to pursue the four critical relationship called for by Christ, i.e., connecting with God in a loving and intimate relationship through spiritual disciplines, connecting with other believers through sharing life together, connecting with those in need through serving, and connecting with those outside the faith in a manner to lead them to Christ and become a part of the church community.

(3) *Where do we want people to go*? Proceeding through the stages of discipleship in pursuit of these relationships offers a pathway toward growing toward a more Christ-like in thoughts, feelings and actions. Ultimately, participation in relational small groups is the most critical foundational element in one's spiritual growth.

To be an effective disciple-making church requires being crystal clear on what the church is trying to do. Clarity is based upon answering the three questions, what do we want people to become, what do we want them to do and where do we want them to go.[556] The recommended mission statement and stages of discipleship address these questions.

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[556] Andy Stanley and Bill Willits, *Creating Community: 5 Keys to Building a Small Group Culture* 76 (2004).

PART FIVE:
STAGES OF DISCIPLE-MAKING PROGRAM CONTENT

Following the procedural path consisting of the various stages of disciple-making leads a person to disciple-making experiences essential to growing toward a more Christ-like life. It is the role of our church to offer such experiences in meaningful ways. We now turn to the question of providing content at each disciple-making stage. In doing so, several programs or other resource materials will be suggested as possible content for various disciple-making experiences. However, it needs to be emphasized that many of these have been drawn from descriptions rather than having been reviewed in detail. These suggestions are offered to indicate the type of subject matter appropriate for the various stages of disciple-making and to provide a starting point for exploring and reviewing possible programs and materials for use.

I. CONVERSION

The conversion stage of disciple-making consists of the thoughts, feelings, experiences and/or relationships leading to and the actual decision to accept Christ as Lord and Savior. The conversion process (i.e., the process leading to a decision as well as the actual decision) is the initial stage in connecting with God in a loving and intimate relationship. This sets the person on the path toward growing as a follower of Christ.

Disciple-making experiences leading to conversion may vary significantly in nature and/or in number from one person to another. Often such experiences ensue from a variety of evangelistic outreach efforts, especially the development of a personal relationship(s) with a person or persons offering some degree of friendship and credibility. Nature of the worship service(s) and member participation in and responses to such services can serve as a powerful witness and an igniting factor for those outside the faith. Seeing members serving the needs of others and/or receiving such service often generates interest. Casual acquaintances, something heard on the radio or television, something read, etc. may be the spark leading persons to explore what this God stuff or church stuff is all about. Participation in informal non-threatening exploring Christianity small groups investigating the rudimentary basics of faith and responding to unbelievers' doubts and questions also constitute important elements in the conversion process.

At some point, the conversion process ultimately requires a person to affirmatively respond to the question "do you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior." Acceptance of and commitment to Christ is a highly personal and fundamental decision. Such commitment can be reached in a variety of ways in either public or private circumstances. There is no required formality which one must undertake. However, making clear what is involved and offering easy alternative opportunities ease the path and encourage a person to cross this bridge.

The ready understandability and availability of opportunities to receive Christ may spark a person to cross the bridge. Such opportunities include praying to receive Christ either alone, with a friend, a pastor offering a prayer of commitment during a worship service, altar calls, a visit with a pastor, prayer of acceptance in the context of a small group gathering, etc. At some point, whether it be a pastor, a friend who brought the unbeliever to church, a surrogate friend, etc., the question needs to be posed (not in a pressuring manner), "do you accept and commit to Christ as Lord and Savior."[557] In our church, the one formal/public opportunity to accept (or reaffirm acceptance of Christ) occurs when a person joins the church by owning the Covenant and/or by baptism. As noted, the church should ease the path to a decision by making clear and offering easy alternatives which remove deterrents to reaching a sincere commitment.

It is impossible to catalog all the factors and possibilities that contribute to an individual's journey toward accepting Christ as Lord and Savior. Suffice to say here, the church needs to actively develop and implement various experiences which move people to accepting Christ. As members of a disciple-making church, our role is to reach out to those outside the faith by initiating and/or contributing to those experiences which lead to a decision and facilitate the final move to cross the bridge. Creating various disciple-making experiences leading toward conversion are considered below in the context of other stages of disciple-making which include building caring relationships, Christian fellowship, witnessing Christ, exploring the rudimentary basics of faith, responding to questions of doubt, etc.

II. WORSHIP

The worship stage of disciple-making occurs early in the disciple-making process, either as part of the conversion process or shortly thereafter and continues throughout one's Walk with Christ. Here we consider the content of worship and the manner in which to deliver disciple-making worship experiences.

A. PURPOSE OF WORSHIP

Joyful praise and thanksgiving reflected the spiritual vitality of worship in the early church. Filled with the Holy Spirit, believers gathered together to interact with God through proclamation of scripture, prayers, and song. As the Westminster Confession expresses, "What is the chief end of man? To glorify God and enjoy him forever."[558] Worship acknowledges God as the creator and sustainer of all things, Jesus as the Lord of lords, and the Holy Spirit as the comforter, teacher and guide.[559] "Worship is about the praise of God for God's presence and power at work in the world." We glorify God by our reverence, awe, praise, gratitude and submission.

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[557] For Rick Warren's suggestions to encourage commitment and preaching for commitment, see *Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message* 302 -06 (1995) .

[558] *Id.* at 51.

[559] Linus J. Morris, *The High Impact Church: A Fresh Approach to Reaching the Unchurched* 125 (1993).

Christ promised to be with us when we gather in his name. Gathering as a body for worship, whether as a large segment of the church body or as a small group, offers a time and place where we have opportunity to encounter our living God. Worship must be one of a shared expectation that God will be encountered here this day. When this occurs, forgiveness and hope will be experienced and love will be known.[560]

In worship, we collectively as a community, as well as personally, connect with him. In glorifying God and we respond to his invitation to enter a personal and intimate relationship with him.

> *Worship allows us to experience the intimacy* with God as our loving Father, with Jesus as our Brother and Friend and the Spirit as the One who empowers us and guides us into all truth.[561] (Emphasis supplied.)

> Personal encounters with God are *one of the most powerful means God uses to transform* and heal us. When we experience His presence… we no longer perceive Him as some Distant God or abstract idea; He is real, living powerful and near.[562] (Emphasis supplied.)

By engaging in the spiritual discipline of regular worship (explored more fully in PART THREE Section I.C. above), we come into an increasing intimate personal relationship with God and grow toward a more Christ-like life in thoughts, feelings and actions through God's transforming power. Worship is key to responding to his invitation. Through our reverence, awe, praise, gratitude and submission in worship we respond to his invitation. In short, the primary purposes of worship are to glorify God, encounter God and respond to God's invitation to enter into a more intimate personal relationship with him.

Keirkegaard's metaphor of the theater offers an interesting perspective which further highlights what authentic worship is about. God is the audience. He is present to see and hear those present in a worship context. Those participating in the worship service are the performers. The key question is whether their performance is one of reverence, awe, praise, gratitude and submission in response to God's invitation? The pastor, through his or her sermons and prayers, those who lead the prayers and read the biblical selections and the music directors are the prompters seeking to prompt people to authentic worship. Authentic worship keeps the performers focus on the audience who is God with the assistance from the prompters. Those present at the worship service are the actors "who in all truth act before God."[563]

The disciple-making stage of worship comes early in a person's Walk with Christ and continues throughout one's life. It is the responsibility of a church is to communicate a clear understanding of the spiritual discipline of worship and offer worship opportunities fostering and enabling people to embrace genuine worship as part of their daily lives.

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[560] Michael W. Foss, *Power Surge: Six Marks of Discipleship for a Changing Church* 76 (2000).
[561] Linus J. Morris, *The High Impact Church: A Fresh Approach to Reaching the Unchurched* 124 (1993).
[562] *Id.* at 126.
[563] Soren Kiergaard, Purity of Heart is To Will One Thing 180-81 (1948) (Transl Douglas Steere).

B. DETERRENTS TO DISCIPLE-MAKING IN WORSHIP

Several distractions impeding the achievement of the core purposes of worship have commonly crept into worship services throughout churches in general. Since worship services are the primary occasions when the congregation gathers in significant numbers, they have become the vehicle for a wide variety of tasks. Information is shared, sick lists are communicated, intercessory prayer needs are met, money raising efforts occur, teaching occurs, weekly announcements are made, program support is encouraged, etc. However, although these are important, they do not serve the core purpose of worship. Not only do they get people thinking about what was communicated rather than upon the basic purposes of worship, they also disrupt the flow of worship.

Furthermore, to the extent people incorporate some preparation time for worship as an element of their spiritual discipline of worship, the interjection of announcements, etc. at the beginning or in the middle of the worship service detracts from the worship flow in those persons' experience. In turn, this may lessen the potential of the worship service as a catalyst for spiritual transformation.

Such distractions might be mitigated or avoided by presenting all announcements on the video screen prior to and after worship, as well as in other forms of communication (e-mail, newsletter, website, etc.). So long as the accompanying music is appropriate for pre-worship preparation, this mode of announcements should not prove to be unduly distracting.

Another distraction which diverts focus from authentic worship of God is ritual without understanding. What are the reasons which underlie some of the things that we do (e.g., the doxology, communion, baptisms, etc.) or don't do in worship? Lack of awareness and understanding by participants distract from the core purposes of worship.[564]

A significant factor undermining highly meaningful worship services is the failure of the worship service to maximize attendees involvement as participant in the worship service vis- –a -vis essentially being simply a spectator as to what is going on.

Our Puritan forefathers innovated the practice of involving the whole congregation in the worship service. Before the Reformation, in the Catholic mass, both instrumental and vocal music were performed by professionals or other trained musicians. The chancel and various side rooms also separated people from each other and from the altar where the host was elevated. Bibles were not within the province of church attendees. These factors all contributed to render the worship service a spectacle at which the lay congregation remained passive.

In contrast. Puritans implemented various changes to include worshipers as participants in the worship service. The interior of the church was rearranged enabling everyone to see and hear the entire service. The communion table was moved out of the chancel and placed closer to the entire congregation. Congregational singing was introduced. In short, the Puritans incorporated the right of the common people to join in the praise of God.

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[564] Fox River Congregational Church, Minutes of the Disciple-Making Task Force November 12, 2008.

Furthermore, and importantly, the Puritan worship services culminated with the sermon. This did not contradict the concept of congregational participation in the worship service. The Puritans emphatically did not consider sermons as a spectator activity. People attended with Bibles in their laps looking up and reading citations. After worship services, people discussed and argued about the meaning of scripture. Note-taking at sermons and repetition of sermons at home attest to Puritans expectations that worshipers be very attentive listeners to the sermons, hence active participants in worship. Puritans held the conviction that the Bible was where a person encountered God most directly, Puritan acts of worship emphasized reading the Bible, meditating on its meaning, listening to sermons and talking to others about their grasp of doctrine. Their emphasis on the Word made reading and the exposition of scripture the primary elements of the worship service. Puritans emphasized participatory rather spectator worship,[565] This is a lesson we should fully embrace and consider how can we more effectively enhance congregational participation in our worship services here at Fox River. One possibility is to introduce a discussion session following the worship service.

The biggest distraction from true worship is the focus on ourselves – our interests and worries. "When we see worship as a product to consume, i.e., a product to meet our needs, likes and dislikes, we practice a form of idolatry."[566] *The design of worship services, as well as personal attitudes brought to services, should avoid those things in worship which take the attention away from God.* For example, music can hinder worship when it shifts the focus from God to our feelings. Furthermore, God is not touched by traditions in worship which involve stale prayers, insincere praise, empty words and man-made rituals with little thought given to their meaning. Instead, God is touched by our passion for and commitment to him.[567]

Generally, Christians possess the heart to serve Christ. Nevertheless, not uncommonly they behave in ways that suggests that "it's all about me." Too often, in churches worship services, sermons, children's programs, length of services, etc. are designed around the demands of members. Church culture tends to view the customers as being right. Furthermore, volunteers work for free so expectation levels cannot be too high. In short, much of church is a product of a consumer culture.

In contrast, the Bible calls us to serve and follow Christ. We should recognize that it is an honor to serve. Worship should center on God. It is not about us. Sermons are not about us. We are not the central figures in the story. It's God's story.[568] *Worship should be a gathering of believers to exalt, encounter and respond to God.* Be aware that God is here, right now in this place. Make worship an experience about God and encountering God rather than about ourselves. Worship becomes a crucial element of discipleship when we break the habit of interpreting the events in God's story as centering on ourselves. In worship, the God whom we are to serve should be the drama's main character.[569]

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[565] Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* 123-24 (1986).
[566] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* 220 (2006).
[567] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* 66 (2002).
[568] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* 255-56 (2006).
[569] *Id.* at 218-19.

C. EVALUATING OUR WORSHIP SERVICES

Worship is something to be passionate about. If we are less excited about worship than yesterday's or today's football game, something is missing.[570] If we are to be an effective disciple-making church, we need to evaluate our worship services (as well as all other church programs and activities) in terms whether they promote spiritual growth – i.e., evaluate through the lens of disciple-making. Fundamental in this consideration is that authentic worship services are not solely or even primarily about us. To repeat, we are not the central figures in the story. It's God's story. Thus, there is the challenge to lead disciples out of a consumer culture which focuses worship centering on ourselves.

1. Questions to Ask

Worship planning should focus on two basic questions.

> What can we do to facilitate an encounter between God and God's people? [What can we do to keep our focus on exalting God?]
>
> What can we do to ensure that worship is genuinely participatory and not merely a spectator sport?[571]

Some more specific questions we might ask in evaluating our worship services include the following.

> Do the sermon, prayers, and hymns merely point to Christ, or do they show worshipers that Christ is in the midst of the congregation? Does the sermon point to the mystery, or does it give three points and a great quote? Are the hymns chosen to educate worshipers or to help people praise God? Are the efforts made to connect private and public reading of scripture, private and corporate prayer? Are people given opportunity to think their own thoughts about the Word or God, pray their own prayers, ask for the community's prayers? Do others beside clergy lead, tell about their life? Are worshipers encouraged to pay attention to God for themselves, or does the service encourage passivity? Can all worshipers, even outsiders, understand the words of worship and the reason for doing things?[572]

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[570] Gordon MacDonald, *Who Stole My Church* 133 (2007).

[571] Michael W. Foss, *Power Surge: Six Marks of Discipleship for a Changing Church* 96 (2000).

[572] John Ackerman, *Listening to* God 98 (2001). Stephen Macchia suggests that the key elements in a God exalting worship include

- prayer—adoration, praise, thanksgiving, confession, and petition
- reading the scripture
- preaching from God's Word for instruction, guidance,

Are worshippers encouraged to actively participate in the worship service? Do they bring or have access to a Bible during the service? In keeping the reality that the Bible is foundational in growing as a disciple of Christ, whenever possible and appropriate during the worship service are worshippers invited to open the Bible, follow along and read aloud along with the person reading the scripture? Furthermore, on the assumption that not all, especially newcomers, may know where to find the passage, provide information (e.g., page number) enabling them to do without embarrassment. Doing this regularly during worship services moves people to becoming more familiar with the text.[573]

Should printed sermon outlines be provided.? Should a devotional, tied to and integrated with the forthcoming worship service, be prepared in distributed by e-mail or otherwise during the week prior to the service? Doing so might better prepare and engage congregants for the worship service.

A prime place for people to begin to listen to God is during a worship service *if* the worship service offers significant periods of silence for people to do their own praying.[574] Are our services designed and implemented in a manner which engenders the likelihood of hearing God and experiencing God's transforming power? The real issue about worship is not about worship style, but rather the issue is whether worship offers an encounter with the holy, an opportunity to be touched by the transforming power of God. The test is how many worshippers would say that they have experienced the holy.[575] Listen to the members of our church as to how they experience worship.[576]

Authentic worship is GOD centered, not "WE" centered. Authentic worship happens when both our thoughts and our emotions are sincerely focused on God.

> … worship should be vital and transforming for those who participate in it. But, it can only be that when its focus is not on participants and their needs or hopes or desires, but the praise and presence of God.[577]

Passionate worship is the deliberate desire to encounter God. Worship can embrace a variety of elements. But, at its core, worship services should afford us a time and place where we encounter God. It offers us an opportunity to respond to God's invitation to enter into a personal relationship with him through reverence, awe, submission, praise, and thanksgiving. When a church offers

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encouragement, comfort, challenge, and rebuke
- baptism and communion
- singing songs and hymns that praise God and encourage believer
- affirmations of those truths we believe
- dedication to the service of God in our lives and throughout the world.

Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church; 10 Traits of a Vital Ministry* 54 (1999).

[573] Michael W. Foss, *Power Surge: Six Marks of Discipleship for a Changing Church* 97 (2000).

[574] *Id.* at 93-94.

[575] Jeffrey D. Jones, *Traveling Together: a Guide for Disciple-Forming Congregations* 82-84 (2006).

[576] John Ackerman, *Listening to* God 98 (2001).

[577] Jeffrey D. Jones, *Traveling Together: a Guide for Disciple-Forming Congregations* 85 (2006).

worship experiences focusing on these elements, it offers the participants profound experiences leading to transformation in the process of becoming more Fully Devoted Followers of Christ. Such worship experiences are vital part of being a disciple-making church.

To repeat, transformative worship services center on God's story. And, what a story it is. It is a story to be celebrated, not simply endured. Transformative worship is meant to be a time of grand celebration of the living, dying, and rising again of Christ for our salvation and the salvation of the world.[578] For too many people, worship is dull, intellectual, cold, or a form of emotional exercise which has little impact on a person's life for the rest of the week.[579]

> The purpose of worship is not to prove the Christ it celebrates, but to bring the worshiper so in tune with God's reconciliation through Christ that his death and resurrection become a lived experience. And telling and acting out the living, dying, and rising of Christ through celebration in worship makes the event real in the here and now. In Christian worship, we are not merely asked to believe in Jesus Christ, but to live, die, and be resurrected again with him. Life is not an intellectual construct, but a journey of death and rebirth. When our life story is brought up into the story of Christ's life, death, and resurrection, it then gains meaning and purpose....[580]
>
> ...In worship, the good news is happening again. It reaffirms the reality of God, the significance of life, and the worth of the human person. It creates, sustains, and enhances a relationship with God, it heals human relationships. Worship refreshes the soul, rekindles the spirit, and renews life....
>
> ... [W]orship is a celebration of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.[581]

In short, worship celebrates the Christ event. For transforming worship, a church needs to develop a means to *celebrate the Christ event that will communicate the death and resurrection of Christ into people's own personal experience.*

This focus has simple and profound implications for worship services including the manner in which we pray, the nature of the sermons delivered and the attitude in singing songs. What does it say about a sermon whose purpose is to teach about God or to instruct on the relevance of Bible to some aspect of people's lives? What does it say about prayers of petition to God?

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[578] Robert E. Webber, *Worship is a Verb: Eight Principles for Transforming Worship* 22 (3rd printing 1999).
[579] *Id.* at 23..
[580] *Id.* at 25.
[581] *Id.* at 27.

There has been some expression of concern that solely focusing on the core purpose of worship (i.e., respond to God's invitation to enter a personal relationship with him through expressions of reverence, awe, praise, honor thanksgiving, submission to him and awareness of his presence with us as we gather in his name) takes the individual out of worship. Is the lack of any focus on "me" a good thing?[582]

Our Pastor Lonnie Richardson has pointed out that theologically worship is about God. It is expression of adoration. Through focusing on expressions of reverence, awe, honor, thanksgiving, submission and awareness of God's presence in worship, the core purpose of worship, we avail ourselves of the opportunity to grow in our relationship with God.[583]

However, viewing and implementing worship services through the lens of the core purposes of worship and asking what this says about sermons, prayers and other elements of the worship service is not intended to suggest that sermons or prayers relevant to people and various aspects of their lives are inappropriate. Focusing on God in worship does not negate worship services incorporating the relevance of scripture, prayer and sermons to people. The approach is not to eliminate such sermons, prayers or the active participation of the person in worship, but rather to present them in the context of the core purposes of worship.[584] Worship should be transformational. It is essential that we do not lose sight of this core purpose. As Lonnie Richardson has said, focusing on God and on an individual's relationship and obedience to God are not mutually exclusive. The spiritual discipline of worship is about transformation. So, there is a major and appropriate focus on the individual in the context of his or her relationship with God and what God calls us to do.[585]

The core purposes of worship is to respond to the invitation of our Lord who loves us beyond all comprehension, so much so that he offers to share his life with us. We respond to this invitation by expressing our love for God through reverence, awe, submission, joy, praise, honor and gratitude.[586] Thus, fundamental to being a disciple-making church is offering worship experiences embracing these core purposes of worship. To be a disciple-making church, we need to continually review, evaluate, change where necessary, and enhance our worship services in accordance with the core purpose of worship. Let's be sure we make whatever changes are needed so as to remain correctly and constantly focused.

In addition to considering the questions raised above, in conducting evaluation of our worship services, exploring various other resources may also be helpful[587]

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[582] Fox River Congregational Church, Minutes of the Disciple-Making Task Force, November 19, 2008,

[583] *Id.*

[584] Jeffrey D. Jones, *Traveling Together: a Guide for Disciple-Forming Congregations* 85 (2006)
For suggested approaches to vital transforming worship services with opportunities for praise, reflection and celebration, *see id.* at 82 *et seq*.

[585] Fox River Congregational Church, Minutes of the Disciple-Making Task Force, November 12, 2008,

[586] Jon S. Hanson, "Why Are We Here?," January. 11, 2004 (sermon).

[587] *E.*g., Myles Munroe, *The Purpose and Power of Praise and Worship* (2005); R. C. Sproul, *How then Shall We Worship* (2013); and Robert Webber's work considered in Section C.4 below.

2. Fundamental Role of Sacraments of Communion and Baptism as Part of the Worship Service

a. What Is a Sacrament?

The word sacrament comes from the Latin word *sacramentum,* which means "something sacred." In the early church *sacramentum* came to mean many things sacred, including rites that had a hidden meaning. During the Reformation, based upon Scripture as a guide, the reformers limited the number of sacraments to two; the Lord's Supper and Baptism. These sacraments are visible signs and seals of something internal and invisible. They are means by which God works in us through the power of the Holy Spirit.[588]

> Sacraments make real rather than make true, that is, the sacraments are not essential for receiving God's revelation or grace. This revelation and grace are already present in the world, but this revelation of God and God's grace are celebrated in the sacraments. We celebrate what is, thereby both making us aware of it and making it real for ourselves....
>
> ...[T]he sacraments are actions we perform as community in order to make the truth it proclaims real in our lives."[589]

Early Congregational theologians referred to the sacraments as the "Gospel made visible" or as "seals of the covenant. Our Congregational spiritual ancestors viewed a sacrament as "a means of grace in which the individual believer encounters the real presence of God in a unique and powerful way."[590] "The sacraments are a sign and seal of God's grace, love, and forgiveness."[591]

b. Sacrament of Communion: The Lord's Supper

Beginning with Christ, the development and various understandings of the sacrament of Communion has a long and complicated history. The varying perceptions, interpretations and emphasis is reflected by the differing terminology applied to the sacrament of Communion. The term communion derives from the Greek word koinonia which has been translated as fellowship, sharing and, community. The term Eucharist comes Greek word translated as giving thanks, gratitude, etc. The term the Lord's Supper directly refers to and is a direct reminder of Christ's sacrifice which should be the central focus of what we call Communion. The term Mass comes from Latin word meaning "go, it is finished" which is spoken by Roman Catholic priests at the close of the celebration of the Lord's Supper.[592]

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[588] Reformed Church in America. RCA.org.

[589] John H. Westerhoff, III, *Living the Faith Community: The Church That Makes a Difference* 70 (1985).

[590] Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* 125 (1986).

[591] Ardyth Johnson, "Sacraments at Fox River Congregational Church," February, 2020 (comments for consideration by FRCC Task Force on Growing a Disciple-Making Church).

[592] Rob Fredrickson leading discussion on "Comparative Theological Views of Communion," October 3, 1993 at First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa, Wisconsin.

The contemporary theological views of communion vary considerably among different Christina denominations (Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Conservative Protestantism, and Mainline Protestantism). Similarly, historical differences have evolved over time as between Congregationalists. However, most, but not all, adhere to the belief that Communion (the Lord's Supper) is a sacrament, but it is understood to be symbolic, not supernatural.[593]

Inevitably in a free fellowship of a Congregationalist church, there are differences of interpretation and beliefs as to the sacraments. However, there is a common spiritual understanding. That is, through these means [sacraments] *God helps us to experience his presence, and seeks to lead us into ways of dedicated living.* We do not regard the sacraments as magical; **e**.g., with grape juice being transformed into the 'blood of Christ' or water becoming 'holy water.' Sacraments are spiritual rather than magical experiences.[594]

In the New Testament Jesus initiates two sacraments during his earthly life: The Lord's Supper (Communion) and Baptism. The sacraments are a sign and seal of God's grace, love, and forgiveness. Holy Communion is a sacrament of what God does. Jesus instituted the sacrament when he celebrated the Passover with his disciples. The connection of Jesus words as he breaks the bread and lifts the cup makes the sacrament a memorial of God's presence and the forgiveness of our sins through Jesus Christ. God uses natural means (bread and wine) to enable us to come to the Lord's Supper.[595] As Congregational historian A. Vaughn Abercrombie says, "[i]n like manner, the Lord's Supper, wherein believers partake of his body which was broken for us, and of his blood which was shed for many for the remission of sins, is to be celebrated in simple conformity with the recorded words of the institution."[596]

At Fox River Congregational Church, we affirm that Jesus Christ is the head of the Church and Jesus words of institution during the celebration of Communion are given for all believers, that he died for the remission of our sins. Our church emphasizes that once the bread and wine has been consecrated, the elements are received by the congregation as a memorial of God's forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ. With gratitude, we come to the Lord's Supper to

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[593] *Id.* For a history of the evolution of Congregationalists' views of sacraments, *see* John Rohr, *The Shaping of American Congregationalism* 47-49, 105-107, 168-170, 303-304, 380 (1992).

[594] Henry David Gray, "What It Means to be a Member of a Congregational Christian Church," (republished by National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, 1993).

[595] Ardyth Johnson, "Sacraments at Fox River Congregational Church," February, 2020 (comments for consideration by FRCC Task Force on Growing a Disciple-Making Church). For a discussion of the history and on-going evolution of the Congregational understanding of the Lord's Supper, *see* Steven A. Peay, "The Gospel Made Visible: A Consideration of the Congregational Understanding of the Eucharist and Its Implications for the Understanding of the Church as a Covenanted Body," January 15, 1998 (presented to Wisconsin Theological Society). In 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 (The New Oxford Annotated Bible Revised Standard Version) we have an example of Jesus sacred words for this sacrament. "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you, Do this in remembrance of me." In the same ways also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." Other scripture Readings for Lord's Supper are Matthew 26:26-30, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:14-20.

[596] A. Vaughan Abercrombie, How to Gather and Order a Congregational Church, Third Edition, National Association of Congregational Churches, Oak Creek,
Wisconsin, 1986 p.17.

receive God's self-giving and unconditional love in and through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.[597]

Arthur Rouner urges that the Congregationalist view of Communion as more than being a remembrance or commemoration to Christ. In his classic work *Congregationalist Way of Life*, Rouner expresses Congregationalists' view of the Lord's Supper.[598] In doing so, he highlights the fundamental purpose of the Lord's Supper as a part of Congregationalist worship.

> The touchstone of Congregational worship is the awareness of the congregation being a "gathered people." This means "gathered" around Christ – not by fiat, not by authority of an ecclesiastical organization… but voluntarily drawn only by the power of the Holy Spirit, as long ago the disciples were drawn. It is as we become a people [in worship] so gathered around Christ and his Word that our worship and all its symbols take on meaning.[599]

Worship is a sacred hour. The Lord's Supper is a critical component of this sacred hour.

According to Rouner, Congregationalists have four beliefs concerning the celebration of the Lord's Supper, commonly referred to as communion in Congregational churches.[600]

(i) The eating and drinking together has become the great act of Christian worship, a joyful experience of literally gathering around Jesus, the risen Lord. It was so precious and sacred that it came to be observed at regular intervals as a sacrament of the church. The Lord's Supper is a "Gospel Sacrament, not only because it was instituted in the Gospels, but also because this very act itself is a proclamation of the Gospel. That is, celebration of the Lord's Supper is an acting of the Gospel Message, just as preaching is the speaking of the message.

(ii) Congregationalists believe that Christ is really present, not physically (i.e., transubstantiation where the bread becomes the body and the wine becomes the blood) nor just as a memory (remembrance). Christ promised that whenever we share in his supper as a sacrament, he would come and be with us as surely as he was in the room with his twelve disciples. This is consistent with his promise that whenever two or more persons gather in his name, He shall be in their midst.- Matthew 18-20.)

(iii) The Lord's Table is a free table. All who love him are welcome to sit with him.

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[597] Ardyth Johnson, "Sacraments at Fox River Congregational Church," February, 2020 (comments for consideration by FRCC Task Force on Growing a Disciple-Making Church).
[598] Arthur A. Rouner, Jr., *Congregationalist Way of Life* 125-33 (copyright 1960 and 1972).
[599] *Id.* at 125.
[600] *Id.* at 130-33.

(iv) At the Lord's Table, Christ entered into fellowship with us. He sat down with the twelve and become one of them as he does today with us. Communion is done at a table, not at an alter like a sacrifice.

Henry David Gray also reflects the essence of many of the Congregationalists' sense of the essence of the critical importance of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

> By reverent repetition of the acts and words of the Supper, we are reminded of our Lord's life and death and resurrection, assured of His spiritual presence and united in fellowship with Him and with our fellow Church members.[601]
>
> It has been written that "Nowhere is God so near to man as in Jesus Christ; and nowhere is Christ so familiarly represented to us as in this holy sacrament." What is planted by the word is nourished by the sacrament. The sacrament, rightly administered and received can break through hardened ground so the seed can grow and bear fruit.[602]

The sacrament of communion is a special time for those in the covenant community of Christ. Variation in the manner of serving and/or the frequency of communion may enhance its efficacy. This is not to suggest prescribing a particular must do way or frequency, but rather to keep open the opportunity of variation in situations when such may contribute to greater understanding and experiencing Christ. An occasional variation may make an already special happening even more special.

To the extent participants in communion at FRCC understand communion essentially as a ritual memorializing Christ and opportunity to express thanksgiving for his sacrifice, perhaps the church should communicate a clearer and broader understanding of this sacrament. Ultimately, we should sense that this is a real experience in the presence of and with Christ in fellowship with him and each other. Yes, communion is a special time.

c. Sacrament of Baptism[603]

The symbol of baptism became a central image in the development of the Christian church. Like the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the sacrament of Baptism has an on-going history of varying understandings and beliefs.

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[601] Henry David Gray, "What It Means to be a Member of a Congregational Christian Church," (republished by National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, 1993).
[602] *Id.*
[603] Drawn primarily from Ardyth Johnson, "Sacraments at Fox River Congregational Church," February, 2020 (comments for consideration by FRCC Task Force on Growing a Disciple-Making Church); Steven A. Peay, "Living in the Garden: Baptism the Sacrament of Incorporation," (Sermon, August, 2, 1998); Steven A. Peay, "Build Strong Bodies," (Sermon, August, 3, 1997); Reformed Church in America. RCA.org.; *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* 73-74 (Ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan, 1993); and *Harper's Bible Dictionary* 92-93 (1985).

In the Christian context, baptism emerges from New Testament scripture. Matthew's gospel concludes with the Great Commission. The apostles then and we today are commanded to go tell the good news of God's love to all. Go plant the seed. (Faith is the seed.) Scatter it liberally and with love just as the Father has done. Then we are told to baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – (Mark 28:18-20). Thus, Baptism became central in the development of the Christian church.

(1) Initiation into the Church

The history of baptism in the Christian Church involves a vast and controversial theological debate which continues this day as to its meaning and practice. However, Congregationalists, as well as the Christian community in general, view baptism as a means by which the new Christians are placed within God's church. Furthermore, although Congregational thought, diverged a bit from the traditional understanding of baptism, it came back to the position that baptism was the act by which the follower of Jesus was purified, made a participator in Christ's life, and incorporated into his body which is the church.

- Water symbolizes cleaning and *purification* Scripture is replete with references to baptism as the act by which we are washed from sin, our hearts and minds cleansed and our lives set apart for the service of God.

> [Baptism] is a sacred moment of invitation, acknowledging what God as done. Water is a symbol of purification. It is used to mark the beginning of new life. The congregation whispers God's acceptance by promising to surround the one receiving baptism with love and support to enable one's journey toward wholeness in Christ Jesus.[604]

Adult baptism is an outward sign of a person's desire to seek cleansing of his or her life from sin.

- The one made pure is then empowered to live a new ethical orientation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Through baptism, we are plunged into the love of God revealed in the life of Christ. We become participators in Christ's life.

- Those who are baptized are then made a part of, incorporated into, the body of Christ. Baptism is not something we do for God, but that God does for us. It is both God's gift and our human response to that gift. We are drawn into the church – "Christ's body" – and prepared to own the covenant. Baptism is initiation into the fellowship of the church community.

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[604] Reformed Church in America. RCA.org. (Sunday October 1, 2000, World Wide Communion Sunday Sacraments).

(2) The Visible Gospel

The performance of baptism is loaded with symbolism. First, the liturgical action of threefold immersion in or pouring on of water[605] in the names of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit calls to mind the Trinity. Second, the threefold immersion or sprinkling also reminds us that, like Christ, we have died to self, have been in the tomb three days, and have risen as a new and transformed person. That is, baptism has been compared with Jesus' death and resurrection.

> Christians symbolically die to their sins and former lives, a death they share with Christ, and are buried with him; as they rise from baptism in purity, they share the new life brought by Christ's resurrection.[606]

Given this symbolism and understanding, it is clear how the Puritans could view this sacrament as a "visible Gospel." Reformers held that a sacrament is a visible means of an invisible grace.

Similarly, the Reformed Church in America expresses that baptism is the visible word of God.

> Baptism is a sign and seal of God's covenant of grace with us and our children. Baptism is the visible word of God that we are cleansed in Christ's blood, buried with him unto death, that we might rise with him and walk in newness of life. In the Reformed Church, baptism is always performed in the context of a congregation of God's people. The congregation commits itself to the spiritual nurture of the infant, child, or adult being baptized. Baptism is the mark of corporate as well as individual faith. The journey of faith that begins in individual baptism continues in the church community.[607]

(3) Nature of Baptism

The early Congregationalists saw baptism as being the Christian equivalent to Jewish circumcision, the mark of the covenant. To be in covenant is not our gift to God, it is God's gift to us. Baptism is not important because of what we do, but because of what God does. Baptism is our entrance into God's chosen people.

Baptism is not magic (although it comes close to that in the Catholic Church). One does not lose salvation because he or she has not been baptized. The water is symbolic, not magic. But rather,

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[605] A controversy concerning baptism is the issue as to whether is should be done by immersion or by sprinkling water. The descriptions of New Testament baptisms indicate that the person being baptized was dipped under the water. Going under water best fits the image of being buried with Christ in baptism. However, baptisms in the New Testament are not described in specific terms leaving room for diverse interpretations and practices to develop. *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* 74 (ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan, 1993).

[606] *Harper's Bible Dictionary* 92 (1985).

[607] Reformed Church in America, RCA.org.

> Baptism is an act of God's grace and our response is one of belonging to the church and living our daily discipleship. So it is, that we are born into God's grace and we shall live and die in God's grace. In celebrating baptism we, 'the body Christ' the church, acknowledge God's loving presence and action in our lives.[608]

(4) Why Get Baptized?

After a person has accepted Christ as Lord and Savior, a next step is baptism. Similar to marriage, as one is beginning his ongoing journey with Christ, "[b]aptism serves as the wedding band of the Christian faith, an outward symbol of the internal commitment… made to God."[609]

Reverend Chris Hodges offers several reasons why a person should decide to get baptized.[610]

- First and foremost, follow the example set by Jesus who prior to his public ministry went to the Jordan to be baptized immediately followed by God's voice that he was well pleased. God's own son was baptized showing his own commitment to his Father and his Father's mission on earth. Is this not enough for us to follow suit?

- Second, Jesus does not merely suggest that a person should be baptized only if he or she feels like it. He says in Mark 16:16, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." New "[b]elievers who are serious about their faith should… should view baptism as an act of obedience."[611]

- Third, getting baptized demonstrates the change that has occurred in one' life. Baptism shows that one has been saved from death by the resurrection "not because our bodies are washed are washed clean by water but because in being baptized, we are turning to God and asking him to cleanse our hearts from sin." (1 Peter 3:21). If our hearts really have been transformed, then our actions will reveal that change over time…. There is no better way to announce that change immediately than to let others see us take this symbolic action."[612]

- Fourth, baptism is a person's public declaration of his or her personal commitment. One should let others see the choice he or she has made as it

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[608] Ardyth Johnson, "Sacraments at Fox River Congregational Church," February, 2020 (comments for consideration by FRCC Task Force on Growing a Disciple-Making Church).
[609] Chris Hodges, *What's Next*?, 15 (2019).
[610] *Id.* at 15-17.
[611] *Id.* at 16.
[612] *Id.*

impacts the rest of his or her life. There is nothing in Scripture suggesting that baptism be private.[613]

(5) Infant Baptism

The early Congregationalists saw no conflict in baptizing infants or children. Since baptism involves what God does for us and to us, it does not require the assent of the person being baptized. Thus, the fact that an infant is not in a position to provide assent does not undermine the notion of infant baptism.[614]

Today, Congregationalists observe the practice of infant baptism in which

- the Christian family dedicates itself to the nurture of the child,
- the members of the Church accept responsibility to provide Christian nurture for the child, and
- God's presence is made known.[615]

Fox River Congregational Church encourages but does not require baptism for church membership and recognizes baptism from other denominations. We also observe the practice of infant baptism. The act of baptism, whether for adults, youth or infants, symbolizes that all rise with Christ in new life.[616]

Baptisms do not occur every week in worship services. However, when they do occur, they should be viewed, handled and treated in a manner reflecting its value and that it is a fundamental part of the worship service. The understanding of and commitments to what occurs should play an important role in one's growth as a follower of Christ. This applies not only to those being baptized, but also to each member of the congregation who also commit to and with the ones being baptized and to God as well. So, it is important that the understanding of what the

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[613] *Id.* at 16-17.

[614] Although adults were generally baptized, there is suggestion in Mark 10:13 that infants were also baptized. The argument rests on the term "hinder", which may have been a part to the technical terminology of baptism. Jesus tells his disciples not to "hinder" the children from coming to him. *Harper's Bible Dictionary* 93 (1985). The baptism of infants became a more routine practice within the church as the doctrine of original sin became more widely accepted. *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* 74 (ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan, 1993).

[615] Henry David Gray, "What It Means to be a Member of a Congregational Church," (pamphlet republished by National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, 1993).

[616] St. Paul explains that when the person being baptized disappears beneath the water and then re-appears, he or she has undergone a symbolic death, burial and resurrection." "Or, don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too, may live a new life." – (Romans 6:3-4) Other New Testament Biblical references regarding baptism: Matthew 28:18,19, Acts 2:38, 19:5, Acts 8:37, Mark 1:4-11and I Peter 18-22 is regarded as a Baptismal hymn and it is rich in imagery, reflection, and devotion giving thanks to God for baptism in Jesus name.

sacrament of baptism is about in the context of our church and why baptism is best done publicly be repeatedly and well communicated to our Congregation.

3. An Approach to Transforming Worship

While the essence of Christianity flows from discovering who Christ is, what he teaches, how he lived, and the meaning of his resurrection and ascension, Christianity is more than just a belief system. Christianity is a way of life. Being a Christian not only involves lovingly accepting him as Lord and Savior, but also involves interacting with him. Christianity is a concrete encounter with our living God. We are to get to know him not just through learning about him but by encountering and engaging him.

Worship affords a time and place where we can encounter our living God who is present when we gather in his name. However, worship is more than simply an encounter. As considered in the earlier discussion of the spiritual discipline of worship, in worship we are invited to come back into a restored relationship with the one who created us. God invites us to enter into an active personal relationship with him. It is up to us to respond. In short, through this lens, *the purpose of worship is to encounter God and respond to his invitation to a personal relationship by expressing our love for God through worshiping him with reverence, awe, submission that glorifies God with lofty praise, honor, thanksgiving and joy.*

Through this lens, we conclude that the basic elements of worship include of the following.

- Encounter God
  - Awareness of God's/Christ presence,
  - Hear God speaking – (e.g., through reading & proclamation of the Word and remembrance through the Table),
  - Discernment of God's nature,
  - Discernment of God's promise/gift (e.g., forgiveness, eternal life, holy spirit, personal relationship), and
  - Discernment of God's call
- Respond corporately and individually for what God has done and his promises, i.e., respond to God's invitation to come to him in a loving personal relationship
  - Praise
  - Thanksgiving
  - Confession
  - Giving/Offering
  - Joy
  - Submission/commitment to obey God's call – (accepting God's gift of grace, God's call to service, etc.)

- Send Forth – (challenge for the week ahead)

4. An Additional Perspective to Worship

Professor of Theology Robert E. Webber taught theology at Wheaton College. During the latter half of his life, he took a special interest in Christian worship practices writing more than 40 books on the topic of worship. He also served as editor of *The Complete Library of Christian Worship* (1995), an eight-volume series created to serve as a comprehensive reference for professors, students, pastors, and worship leaders. The series draws on several thousand texts and publications and covers topics like Old and New Testament worship and contemporary applications for music and the arts. He founded an Institute for Worship Studies. His book *Worship is a Verb: Eight Principles for Transforming Worship*[617] was selected for reading and discussion for the Wisconsin Congregational Leadership and Lay Ministry Training program (2010-2013).

Weber expresses the fundamental purpose of worship in somewhat different manner than that described above. Although concurring that worship should not be viewed as centering on one's own personal wants or needs. he urges the need to rediscover the focus of worship. "The focus of worship is not human experience, not a lecture, not entertainment, but Jesus Christ – his life, death and resurrection."[618]

From this perspective, Webber sets forth eight principles for transforming worship:[619]

- worship celebrates Christ (the biblical basis worship),
- worship tells and acts out the Christ event (the historic order of worship),
- in worship God speaks and acts (divine action),
- worship is an act of communication (divine presence),
- in worship we respond to God and each other (human response),
- return worship to the people (every member participates),
- all creation joins in worship (vehicles of worship)
    - time as a vehicle of worship [the Christian year],
    - space as a vehicle or worship [architecture, environmental art],
    - sound as a vehicle of worship [music], and
    - the arts as vehicles of worship [drama, movement]
- worship as a way of life (all of life is worship).

Weber maintains that the

> practice of these principles will … open the doors and windows of the church and let the Holy Spirit come into the worship of the

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[617] Robert E. Webber, *Worship is a Verb: Eight Principles for Transforming Worship* (3rd printing 1999).
[618] *Id.* at 1.
[619] *Id.* at 15-20.

> church and enliven it with the presence and power of the supernatural[620]
>
> .

Although Webber expresses the principles of worship in somewhat different terms than that noted in Section 3. above, the two are not inconsistent with one another and are subject to possible integration with one another. Consequently, considering the application of Webber's 8 Principles of Worship organized around the worship order of (i) Preparation, (ii) the Word, (iii) the Table, and (iv) Dismissal provides considerable food for thought which could be quite valuable in enhancing the disciple-making effectiveness of our worship services. In particular, his emphasis on greater involvement, participation and interaction by members of the congregation both corporately and individually, offers an essential element in a meaningful and vibrant worship.

Weber's book, *Worship is a Verb,* is written in a manner to serve as a small group study guide. It offers general guidelines for both participants and leaders as well as specific guides for small group discussion at the end of each chapter. This affords opportunity for congregation involvement in a meaningful way which is critical not only from the input which can be gained, but also as a means of educating and bringing members aboard. Such a process is not suggested in lieu of consideration of the basic purpose of worship and questions posed on approving worship considered above, but rather as a possible integration of the two perspectives.

D. MULTIPLE STYLES OF WORSHIP SERVICES

The disciple-making stage of worship might simply consist of a single worship service, similar worship services held at different times, and/or differing types of worship services. A person might participate in one or more such worship services. However, it is essential that he or she regularly and meaningfully participates in some worship service in his or her pursuit of intimacy with God. To foster this result for a wide range of people possessing different spirituality styles, a church might consider multiple style worship services as a significant part of the disciple-making process.

1. Order Versus Spontaneity

There are many ways to conduct worship services. Many prefer a well-ordered structured service. Structured services have a long history, In the Old Testament, worship in the Tabernacle involved some who proclaimed the God's message, others offered praises and thanks to God, and still others sang and played instruments.

> Serving in the Temple, was highly structured, but this did not hinder the Spirit of God. Rather, it provided an orderly context for worship.[621]

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[620] *Id.* at 16.

[621] *The One Year Study Bible: Arranged in 365 Daily Readings* (NLT) 736 (2011) (study note) (2nd Edition, Tyndale House Publishers).

However, sometimes the planning and structuring of worship services are unspiritual activities which may hinder spontaneity in worship. "One style of worship is not necessarily better than another. The quality of worship emerges from the heart and its focus."[622]

> Neither spontaneity nor structure guarantees that God's spirit is present.... Jesus told us. "True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth." (John 4:23) *Our worship should be continually open to where God leads and always informed by the truth God has given us.* [623] (Emphasis supplied.)

Our style or styles of worship, as in all things, should be informed by the promptings of the Holy Spirit rather than by personal preferences.

2. Alternative Styles of Worship

PART THREE, Section I.K.1. discusses pursuing intimacy with God through different types of spirituality. People hear God and grow spiritually in different ways, i.e. different spiritual pathways, learning styles and personalities. One approach does not fit all. The type a person is impacts his or her receptivity to various aspects of worship, e.g., sermons, the manner of prayer, type of music, liturgy, creative use of different art forms, etc. Experiencing God's transforming power occurs most likely in the spiritual environment in which he or she is most comfortable. This is also true for congregations as a whole.

A worship service with no music and long pauses for silence well suits "being people." A service which embraces contemporary liturgy, informality and heartfelt singing fits "feeling" people. A more formal service with an intellectual approach to sermons relates well to the 'thinking" style people. "Feeling" style services tend to go well for seekers.[624]

What are the spirituality types among the members of our congregation here at FRCC? Does one style of spirituality predominate or is more than one style significantly reflected in our church? Answering these questions could dramatically impact the way we should do worship, its transformational impact, and the way small groups are conducted.

Listening to and hearing God is a condition precedent to progress along one's path toward spiritual formation as one becomes a Fully Devoted Follower of Christ. The pace of such progress depends upon ascertaining and practicing the type of spirituality which best enables us to hear God. To design our worship services in a manner to best foster the spiritual growth of our members, we need to ascertain the spirituality style of our congregation. If more than one style is significantly reflected in our congregation, we might need to consider multiple worship services reflecting the different styles. Not only would this enhance the disciple-making process for our members, it also enhances the likelihood of attracting more people who are currently outside our faith community.

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[622] Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* 45 (2005).
[623] *The One Year Study Bible: Arranged in 365 Daily Readings* (NLT) 736 (2011)) (study note) (2nd Edition, Tyndale House Publishers).
[624] John Ackerman, *Listening to* God 55-56 (2001).

Regardless of the style of the worship service, each church member should be accepting of the manner others respond to encountering God and God's invitation into a personal relationship. Often the sense of closeness with God is accompanied with physical expressions during worship (such as clapping, bowing down, lifting hands in praise, dancing). Two of the most frequent commands throughout Psalms are to praise God with lifted hands and to shout. These are all biblical expressions of worship. However, commonly in churches whose congregations are primarily white, these are not intuitive modes of worship.[625]

Quite commonly, Western Christians attribute such expressions as nothing more than emotionalism. Such view led to an overemphasis on the cerebral dimension of the Christian faith. Worship in the effective disciple-making high-impact church engages the cognitive, emotional, volition and spiritual elements.[626] Whatever way a person experiences his or her encounter God, all should welcome and enjoy that the experience is occurring. This may call for pastors and worship leaders to communicate the people in their congregation to feel free to use their bodies and voices in a manner that reflects their experiencing God and the majesty of the one there are worshiping.

3. Seeker Services

Commencing in the late 1970s through at least the mid-1990s, most of church discussion on church growth through evangelism focused on "seekers." Church strategies centered on reaching seekers, being a seeker driven church, and being seeker sensitive in what is done. In the 1990's there was a substantial movement for separate "seeker services." These were designed to attract seekers through music, drama, video productions, and culturally driven messages relevant to the lives of people. Items and rituals (e.g., crosses, communion, baptisms) were removed so seekers would not feel threatened. Creating an environment of anonymity was offered so people would not feel uncomfortable. Some biblical edification might be offered, but efforts were lacking to challenge persons to participate in interacting with God. Believers and seekers would have their separate services.

Over time, churches holding seeker services, perhaps better termed evangelistic events rather than worship services, found that while seekers were attracted to these events and often continued to come, there was less than hoped for movement from such events to worship services for believers. Furthermore, there was some reverse movement of believers from regular worship to the seeker services thereby removing them from a more spiritual growth-oriented environment. This raises the question, do worship services and evangelism go together?

However, as some churches started to introduce basic worship elements into seeker services such as praise, prayers, and songs more in keeping with the Christian message, there was more about worship which was found to attract more unbelievers. Worship is becoming more recognized as the key to effective evangelism. God designed worship to witness. It can do

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[625] J. D. Greear, "14 Things Every Pastor Wishes His Worship Leader Knew," OutreachMagazine.com, September 5, 2017.

[626] Linus J. Morris, *The High Impact Church: A Fresh Approach to Reaching the Unchurched* 127 (1993).

so when churches let it happen. There is no doubt that God desires to fulfill the spiritual hunger of unbelievers who enter a church's worship doors.[627]

> Nowhere does Scripture say that seekers do not belong in worship. Nowhere does it say that seekers cannot be moved by observing God's interaction with believers. On the contrary, worship and evangelism are conspicuously linked throughout the Old and New Testaments.[628]

God meets people where they are. Believers gather in church to encounter God. Believers need to model heartfelt worship to both the less mature believers and the unbelievers

> Just how does evangelism take place in a service that is "fully worship?" It happens in two ways: first, as unbelievers hear the truth about God (through worship, songs, prayers, communion, baptism, scripture, testimonies, drama, and so on); and second – and more importantly – as they observe the real relationship between worshipers and God.[629]

Furthermore, using the term "seeker" is increasingly irrelevant and even dangerously misleading. Originally the term generally referred to the unchurched who were turned off by church but were open to both spirituality and religion. For example, baby boomers wanted church for their kids, but sought freedom from the religious and denominational moorings of their youth. They weren't necessarily rejecting religion, but wanted freedom to explore other traditions. For example, numerous Catholics explored nondenominational evangelical mega-churches. These were truly "seekers" open to exploring the religious faith for their lives although rejecting the religion of their upbringing (often Catholicism), not religion itself.

However,

> the current challenge to Christianity does not come from other religions but from a rejection of all forms of organized religion. These people are not thinking about religion and rejecting it; they're not thinking about it at all.[630]

A Baylor University religion survey reports that 44% percent of respondents spend no time seeking "eternal wisdom" and 46% never wonder whether they will go to heaven. So, in matters relating to God, religion or even atheism, millions of people shrug their shoulders and say "So what?"[631] This is not seeking and these people are not "seekers.

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[627] Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism; Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* 78-79 (1995).
[628] *Id.* at 81.
[629] *Id.* at 88.
[630] James Emery White "3 New Outreach Realities that Many Churches Still Don't Get," OutreachMagazine.com, September 7, 2017.
[631] *Id.*.

More are coming to use the term "explorers" to define their evangelism target. Although this is better than "seeker," the crucial point is that people are starting in a different place than even 15 years ago.

> To be sure, the overarching idea behind all things "seeker" is still valid: We should have both a strong sensitivity toward the unchurched who have been invited to attend, as well as an objective to make the "front door" of the church as open to them as possible. This is not new; it goes back to Paul's advice to the Corinthian church in the New Testament (1 Cor. 14).
>
> But what that means today is different than what it meant even five years ago, and again, it is a strategy that must continually be evaluated. The value is to be oriented toward the unchurched—so yes, explorer-sensitive—but the method for doing that is in constant flux.
>
> The point is that assuming people are seeking and creating services for those in active search mode is not the most culturally targeted approach to outreach. Services should be more sensitive to those who are biblically illiterate and skeptical, possibly exploring and open, than those in active search mode.[632]

In short, efforts for effective evangelism are moving away from separate seeker services lacking a worship centered focus. Although separate seeker services have been in vogue in the recent past, given the changing nature of seekers, past models for seeker services may no longer be the most effective approach to reach seekers. When asked "How can a service be both a worship service and a place for seekers to experience Jesus?" Rick Warren responded "we believe you can have both without compromising either. *…God – not man – is the focus and center of our worship.*"[633] The style of worship is secondary to the basic purpose of worship – to glorify God.[634]

Worship and evangelism can, should and must travel together. Worship evangelism is the focus of the next section.

E. WORSHIP EVANGELISM

In her highly recommended book *Worship Evangelism; Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God,* Sally Morgenthaler sounds a call for Christians everywhere to examine the nature and scope of worship including its role in winning unbelievers to Christ.[635] In his

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[632] *Id.*

[633] Rick Warren, "The Evangelistic Power of Worship as a Witness," October 8, 2015 (pastors.com).

[634] Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church; 10 Traits of a Vital Ministry* 44 (1999).

[635] Sally Morgenthaler, *Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God: Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* (1995). C. Peter Wagner (Fuller Theological Seminary), in endorsing Mogrenthaler's book, said nothing is

endorsement of Morgenthaler"s book, Robert E. Weber, whose profile and approach to worship is discussed in Section C.4. above, expresses that "evangelism does not have to be severed from worship as though there were no relationship between the two."[636]

Morgenthaler sets forth strategies for worship which witnesses how to achieve worship which is both authentic and culturally relevant. Her book proceeds to do so in three parts:

(i) tells what worship is and how it attracts non-Christians to Christ,

(ii) tears down walls that keep unbelievers from meeting God in church worship, and

(iii) shows how to make worship evangelism happen – in any culture.

Morgenthaler moves away from the separate seeker services structured to be culturally attractive to the boomers and generation x-ers. Instead, worship services should focus on believers and unbelievers together in a manner to meaningfully center on and encounter Christ.

Much of what Morgenthaler expresses is consistent with the above discussion on the purposes and the approaches to worship. She offers much food for thought. The following summary discussion essentially draws from her book. This book in its entirety may be well worth consideration and discussion with church leaders, various church bodies (e.g., teams, committees, short term and relational small groups) and other interested persons

1. Worship in the Search for the Real Thing: Retrieving Biblical Worship[637]

a. Time to Get Real

Too often churches today are failing to generate worshippers. Instead, they are producing spectators, religious onlookers, having little or no authentic encounter with God. They lack a sense of God's presence and the supernatural relationship which peoples' innermost spirits crave.[638] For these churches, if they want to be effective disciple-making churches, it is time to get real.

People make time for what they consider important. Real worship needs to be more than finely honed sermons, relevant messages, stunning soloists, captivating drama, videos, etc. When people fail to sense the presence of God, they are likely to remain stagnant in their spiritual growth, and/or move on to search elsewhere for meaningful experiences, or simply to drift away.

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more important in the church than understanding changes in Christian worship and that. Morgenthaler offers the best guidebook leading toward this understanding. *Id.* on back cover.

[636] *Id.* on back cover.

[637] This section draws primarily on Sally Morgenthaler, *Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God: Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* (1995).

[638] Sally Morgenthaler, *Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God: Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* 17 (1995).

Good productions and performances can be found in many venues other than churches. So, why feel a need to come to a church if it doesn't meet expectations of encountering God in some form. Worship services need to enable our supernatural God to show up and interact with persons in the pews.

b. Longing for God

(1) Worshipping God Instead of Ourselves

There is much to be learned from King David. Although he sinned terribly, his repentance was deep and lasting. He was passionate in his trust in and worship of God. God found David to be a man after his own heart. (Acts 13:22). Thus, David offers us a role to follow in our worship.

David offered humble obedience and a passionate desire to give God every bit of glory. His spiritual power was rooted in his relationship with God. Unfortunately, the source of David's power, a passionate worship relationship with God, too often is foreign in contemporary churches. The tendency is to settle for God at a comfortable distance. There is more comfort on focusing on ourselves in worship than on God. As a consequence, trying to bring in those outside the faith is inviting people to come into a stunted relationship. Such may result in acceptable piety, but doesn't reflect a longing for God nor embrace radical worship of God for which God calls.[639]

(2) Making Worship Number One

There are four qualities of David's worship which stand out. (i) David's worship was a life that honored God and was fully given to God and his purposes. For our worship to be like David's, worship will be a way of life, a willing and daily offering what we have and do is for the Lord. (ii) David's worship was uncompromising, total commitment and devotion. (iii) David's worship was witness. When God's people are like David, the world takes notice. His praise of God was unapologetically public. He believed that God draws people to him through authentic worship experience. Authentic worship is the most important principle of worship evangelism. (iv) Worship was the top priority in David's life[640].

"Throughout both Old and New Testaments, worship is clearly the most important thing God's people can do."[641] For example, Mark 12:30 expresses the Greatest Commandment, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" Jesus taught that God wants our worship above all else. The purpose of evangelism is not to simply add numbers to a church's rooster, but rather the primary purpose is to glorify God which is achieved by gathering more and engendering better worshipers. The biblical purpose of evangelism is not solely to save souls, but rather to glorify God. In the early church, evangelism often took place within the context of a worship service experience. Evangelism occurs when Christians exhibit a genuine, infectious love relationship with God

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[639] *Id.* at 36.
[640] *Id.* at 37-38.
[641] *Id.* at 38.

when they worship God wholeheartedly. In a worship service, explorers/seekers are little interested in watching members of a congregation simply go through the motions. Rather, they become interested when they see evidence of God at work in our hearts![642]

> It is a contradiction to say that we know the Lord well and yet we don't worship him. How can we see the Lord as He truly is and not praise Him? How can we declare to the world that Jesus Christ is the Savior and Redeemer of mankind and not give Him our undivided honor? Clearly, *it is only as true worshipers that we are able to effectively spread "the fragrance of the knowledge of him.* (2 Corinthians 2:14)[643]

Although evangelism is a central function of the church, worship drives evangelism rather than evangelism driving worship.[644] "When God and worship of God are first in the life of a church, growth will follow."[645] When considering how to become more effective in evangelism efforts, authentic worship should be at the top of the agenda of each individual and all churches.

(3) Defining Worship: What Is Authentic Worship?

The English word worship literally means "to attribute worth to." However, when one adds the terms used for worship in other languages, a more comprehensive meaning of worship emerges. In addition to ascribing worth to God, Gerrit Gustafson says worship is

> the act and attitude of wholeheartedly giving ourselves to God.... Worship is simply the expression of our love for God, which Jesus said should involve all of our heart, mind and physical strength (Mark 12:30)."

In the same vein, Rick Warren defines worship as "expressing our love to God for who he is, what he is, and what he is doing."[646] From a bit different perspective, Robert Webber says, "Worship celebrates God's saving deed in Jesus Christ."[647] These definitions together correspond with the two worship qualifications Jesus gave;

> true worshipers will worship the Father *in the Spirit and in truth*, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks." – (John 4:23) (emphasis supplied)

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[642] *Id.* at 38-40.
[643] *Id.* at 40.
[644] *Id.* at 41.
[645] *Id.*
[646] Rick Warren, "The Evangelistic Power of Worship as a Witness," October 8, 2015 (pastors.com).
[647] Robert Webbers quoted in Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism; Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* 47 (1995).

When we whole heartedly give ourselves to God, we worship God with the right heart, the right spirit. When we worship in the context of the saving deed of Christ on our behalf, we worship in truth. It is because of the work of Christ on our behalf that we offer ourselves to God.

> Thus, Christian worship… is an intentional response of praise, thanksgiving and adoration to *The* God, the One revealed in the Word, made known and accessible to us in Jesus Christ, and witnessed in our hearts through the Holy Spirit….[648]

(4) Relationship, Response and Interaction

Spirit and truth, the foundational blocks of authentic worship experiences, are found in the context of a relationship with God. Worship in spirit and truth occurs in the interaction between God and his people. All relationships depend on mutual responses.[649]

> Worship is a two-way communication between believers and God, a dialogue of response involving both action and speech.…God speaks through the Word, we are convicted and repent. God extends mercy through Jesus Christ; we respond with adoration. In other words, real worship provides opportunities for God and God's people to express their love for each other. …In real worship, we carry on an exchange of love with the "God who is present, the God who speaks to us in the now, who has done and is doing marvelous things. … [Real worship] is this supernatural exchange – this interaction between the God of Scripture and God's people…. [650]

Great musical performances, thought provoking drama, touching and inspiring testimonies, relevant messages, and apologetics about God can be excellent tools which God can use to touch a person's mind and heart. However, their operation does not hinge on any type of people's response. They fail to require listener or observer to give anything back to God. Presentations do not involve listeners or observers in any expression of worship such as praise, adoration reverence, gratitude, repentance confession or commitment.[651] However, as expressed by Robert Webber,

> [real worship calls for the involvement of our mind, body and soul." Worship demands nothing less than the complete, conscious, and deliberate participation of the worshipper. Corporate worship is characterized by deliberate response. [652]

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[648] Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism; Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* 47 (1995).
[649] *Id.*
[650] *Id.* at 48.
[651] *Id.*
[652] As quoted by Morgenthaler *id.* at 49.

c. Yesterday's Gone

(1) Changing Mind Set[653]

The cultural context has changed over the years and the centuries. Most importantly, it is now commonly perceived that there are three distinct, although not mutually exclusive, eras of different views as to how one perceives and communicates truth: (1) the Pre-Modern Era, (2) the Modern Era and (3) the Post-Modern Era.

Pre-Modernism reflected the mindset of processing the perception of truth through the filter of the concept of God. Well into the 1900s, people generally expressed belief in God and, at least occasionally, went to church. Christianity was accepted as the norm. By the 1900s the modernism era emerged as a major cultural mindset. These more recent generations, such as the baby boomers, tended to fall away from both the church and the Christian view. Instead, the trend embraced a more Modernism perspective in which science and reason rules. Truth is no longer perceived as absolute. God has receded from the center of perceptions. However, in the late 1900s there evolved Post-Modernism, another dramatic change. The concepts of family, marriage and our cultural moral compass changed. Community has broken down. Generation X grew up as a *non*-Christian generation. Thus, the church no longer was seen as a resource for answers and support.

Paralleling these developments, questions were raised as to where has science, reason and so called progress gotten us. We have had two world wars, the Korean, Viet Nam and Middle East wars. Totalitarianism abounds. The world is replete with problems and misery. The Age of Reason has not provided meaning or answers. Something is missing. The Post-Moderns are seeking to connect with something, but don't know what. Consequently, they have emerged with a curious and exploring mindset.

(2) Quest for Spirituality[654]

In this changing culture, where does evangelism fit in the context of authentic worship services.

Although there have come to be a significant number of atheists, more people still have some belief or sense of spiritual forces which affect the world. There has been an accelerating need within our culture to connect with some kind of spiritual reality. However, contemporary spirituality and biblical spirituality are not synonymous.

There has arisen a vast difference between how Americans view religion and how they view spirituality. Spirituality has become an individualized pursuit involving the inner state of being. In more recent times, those looking for God, increasingly are doing so in a personalized way. They want to be directly in touch and experience their higher power. They have come to

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[653] Drawn from Fox River Congregational Church Outreach Events Task Force Report,, "Strategic Framework for Outreach Events," pp.2-4, May 19, 2007.

[654] This Section draws primarily on Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism; Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* 56-70 (1995).

have little expectation that doing this will occur in church. Churches are viewed as being concerned more with organizational and money issues, than with connecting with God.

There are numerous options, in addition to some sort of Christian perspective, at the spiritual smorgasbord (e.g., Eastern mysticism, natural science, the occult and God is love (Christianity without the cross or resurrection). "The New Age world view holds that God is an impersonal force, or a field of energy, [and that w]e create our own truth, our own reality."[655] This movement promises quick fix spirituality, global harmony and self-empowerment stemming from the divine within without the bothersome demands one's moral accountability. What a deal.

Nevertheless, despite the magnitude of cultural, scientific and economic accomplishments, there exists widespread loneliness, isolation, lack of friendship and lack of intimacy. Broken relationships, boredom, sense of emptiness and depression are all too prevalent. People are searching. There still remain many who are looking for a church where they can encounter God and where their lives can be changed. There is less interest in cerebral arguments and theological systems. They are more interested in encountering the supernatural.

Churches miss the mark with millions of seekers by simply teaching about God instead of offering them an experience with God. In today's culture, fewer people are looking for information about God. They are looking for an experience with God. They are looking for transformation.[656] "It's a shame when people come to church looking for God and only find us."[657]The churches that will flourish in the 21st century will talk about and offer authentic supernatural experiences.[658] The role of the church is to create a worship environment and give people permission and encouragement to interact with God.

However, in doing so, it is essential to offer a biblical worldview. One cannot worship God in an exciting and passionate way if he or she doesn't know anything about him. The more we know about God, the more we ought to be moved to worship and praise him in response. The value of the worship experience clearly depends upon the value of the one we are worshiping. To reach others, as well members of our congregation, the church needs to "convey the parameters of the revealed mind, character and works of God." Although the Bible is not an end in itself, it is a means to bring people to an intimate and satisfying relationship with God. "An intimate relationship with God, rather than "brain stuffing," is the goal of genuine worship. *Vibrant churches offer both reasons for faith and an experience of faith.*

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[655] Russell Chandler as quoted in Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism; Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* 61 (1995).
[656] Carry Nieuwhof, "Why Charismatic Churches Are Growing (and Attraction Churches are Past Peak)," November 18, 2018, outreachmagazine.com.
[657] *Id.*
[658] Leith Anderson as quoted in *id.* at 66.

2. Essentials of Worship Evangelism[659]

To attract those outside the faith to worship services, as well as keeping believers coming back, a church needs to be a place where something happens. What is the significant happening? There needs to evidence of a dynamic relationship with God.

A dynamic relationship with a person (e.g., spouse, best college buddy, etc.) depends: on four basic elements: *nearness*, *knowledge, vulnerability* and *interaction.* Nearness is the time spent time in the other person's presence. Knowledge is getting to know who the other person is. Vulnerability occurs when we let ourselves become known and risk criticism and rejection. Interaction occurs when we engage in ongoing dialogue of both words, using a language both understand, and deeds. The presence of these four elements over time engenders a fulfilling and significant relationship. A dynamic, satisfying relationship with God embodies the same principles. They also constitute the foundational basis for real, authentic worship for oneself.

a. Worship Essential #1: Nearness – Sense of God's Presence

The first essential element of worship is a sense of God's supernatural presence. Jesus said "For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them." (Matthew 18:20) Here God promises to manifest his presence when people gather together in worship.

Too often people to do not sense God's presence in a worship service. "Worship without a sense of God's manifest presence is like having a conversation with oneself. It is boring."[660] It has been said that "We're so used to not having and sensing God's presence that we don't miss it."[661]

Where does the responsibility lay for the failure to experience God in a worship service? Is it the worshiper's or is it God's. Scripture manifests that where two or more gather, God is there waiting for us. Nevertheless, a majority of worshippers fail to enter into his presence. God's self-revelation is not automatic. Not only is he waiting to reveal himself, but he is also waiting for us to draw near. (James 4:8). As phrased by C. S. Lewis, "It is in the process of being worshiped that God communicates His presence to men."[662] In authentic worship of God, certain elements are indispensable, i.e., the Word, praise and worship leading which ministers to the heart of God.

(1) God's Presence and the Word – Drawing near to God requires truth. "The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth." (Psalm 145:18)

> Truth, or the Word, is always prerequisite for an experience of God's presence. It is the primary avenue through which God chooses to be revealed – not just the Word that is read or preached,

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[659] Drawn from primarily Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism; Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* 96-123 (1995).
[660] *Id.* at 99.
[661] R. C. Sproul as quoted in *id.* at 99.
[662] C. S. Lewis as quoted in *id.* at 100-101.

> but that which is infused into our songs, prayers, communion, celebrations, baptisms, testimonies and presentations.[663]

Even though Scripture is typically incorporated into sermons and readings in worship services, yet too often God feels absent to people. "The reason is, God chooses to be revealed, not through any perfunctory dispensing of the Word, but through a living and active Word, that indwells and takes root in our hearts (Colossians 3:16)."[664] Honoring God with our lips, but not our heart is rote religion.

(2) God's Presence and Praise – The second element in authentic worship through which God reveals himself is our heartfelt praise. Here, praise is exalting God for who he is and what he has done. This occurs through praise, adoration, thanksgiving, etc. When we exalt God in s heartfelt way, he becomes manifest among us.

(3) Worship Leading Ministering in the Heart of God – Too often worship leaders fail to infuse their worship services with the indwelling of the Word and lack sincere and heartfelt praise. Worship leaders must be true worshipers themselves.

These elements of nearness engender the sense and reality of God's presence.

b. Worship Essential #2: Knowledge – Worship Centered on Christ

The second essential for real worship is knowing whom we worship. One cannot have a relationship with God if he or she does not know who God is. There is no interaction with an amorphous, impersonal entity. But rather, we worship the God revealed in the Bible as eternal, unchanging, holy, righteous, wrathful, just, sovereign, jealous, merciful and loving. The God whose character is revealed by the Word must be an integral part of worship for worship to be authentic. It is through Jesus that we can know God and is the only way we have access to God. Worship needs to center on him. Shifting focus away from Jesus moves one off center.

Both the content of the Gospel and worshipers' responses are critical for worship not only to have relational impact for believers, but also to have an evangelism impact. The message of the week needs to incorporate the message of Christ's unconditional love and sacrifice. Every worship service should meaningfully include, in some way, the living, dying, rising of Jesus, the forgiveness of sin resulting from the work of Christ and the overall and eternal results coming from the Christ event. Yes, worship should focus on specific areas of our Christian lives, "but if services are going to both edify and evangelize, they need to keep Jesus Christ central."[665] To reach the unbelievers, we need to give them Christ. "Real worship exalts the God made known to us in Jesus Christ. And it does so consistently and unashamedly."[666]

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[663] Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism; Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* 101 (1995).
[664] *Id.*
[665] *Id.* at 107.
[666] *Id.* at 109.

c. Worship Essential #3: Vulnerability – Opening Up to God

In today's' world, people are reluctant to open themselves to others. Few enter into the uncharted territory of relational honesty. Even family and friends are kept at a comfortable distance. Yet, people also have an inner craving to be known, a vulnerability and authenticity when it comes to God. Open the book of our lives and know that God loves us despite the contents in our book. Authentic worship enables growing into knowing God at the most intimate, vulnerable level.

Those outside the faith are not looking for perfection in Christians, just honesty. When we acknowledge our shortcomings, conceding that we are sinners, this is honesty to those outside the faith. Worship calls for openness, authenticity and vulnerability. The Gospel is for those who fail to measure up. There are few places in our society for people to express inadequacy and need. Churches need to be a clear place of refuge where guilt and hurt can be expressed to God in an environment of loving acceptance. A witnessing church makes room to the brokenness of all of us. Thus,

> Confession and repentance are not out dated, ritualistic, negative acts. They are two of the most scriptural, life giving things we can do in a worship service. ...True joy is the result of having been vulnerable with a great, holy, and awesome God and having been loved in spite of who we are.[667]

Thus, a worship service should incorporate a time for confession in each of two forms. First, there is a public prayer of confession in which all members of the congregation participate in unison. Second, there follows a period of time for individual personal silent confession. This might be introduced by a church leader saying "In this time of silent confession we reflect upon our personal sins and bring them before God."[668]

d. Worship Essential #4: Participation in a Relationship with God and Others

All too common in church worship services, attendees (whether members or not) tend to be observers rather than participants. At least, in significant part, this can be attributed to the structure and conduct of the service.

> People cannot interact with God and with others if they are not given anything to do. ...[W]e need 'vehicles' or forms of expression for all the marvelous verbs of worship: praise, adoration, thanksgiving, contrition, commitment, petition, intercession, and so on. ...The more people participate, the more likely a part of them will open up to God.[669]

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[667] *Id.* at 115.
[668] Used by United Church of Christ, Eagle River, Wisconsin.
[669] Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism; Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* 117-18 (1995).

To increase worship interactions, addressing questions such as the following might be fruitful.

- How might we encourage people to externalize what they feel internally?
- Can the active worship space be redistributed so that worship becomes more of a "whole room" rather than a platform activity?
- What combination of the arts should be attempted which will involve as many senses as possible?
- What kind of interactive 'twist" can incorporated into a standard worship activity (scripture reading, prayer, etc.).

(1) Expand Interactive Options

The most common activities in a worship service are sermons, prayers, scripture readings, singing, and celebrating the Lord's Table, and baptism. Scripture readings normally occur from the platform. Baptisms are not a common worship feature. And, the Lord's Table typically is only celebrated periodically. This is a short list of areas for interaction opportunities.

Examples for expanding interaction opportunities include the following. Altar offerings might encourage people to write down specific behavior areas where they want God to help them change or areas they want to commit to God. Afford a time when attendees can share biblical passages that ministered to them in difficult situations or aided them in experiencing a new closeness with God. Present short audio or video clips recording attendees' responses to answered prayers. Such clips can be placed as a precursor to a period of thanks giving time or incorporated between praise and worship songs.

And, importantly, baptism is a response to faith in Christ. It is an expression of one's acceptance of the gospel. Water baptism mirrors the spiritual baptism of the Holy Spirit which occurs when a person trusts Christ. Also, the word "fellowship" (koinonia) means communion which is a sign that we share in the life of Christ. The celebration of communion remembers Christ's broken body and shed blood for our sins and salvation. Including baptisms and communions on a regular and frequent basis not only emphasizes their spiritual significance but also enhances personal involvement and interaction of people in the worship gathering. Such contributes to the spiritual vitality of the church.[670]

(2) Horizontal Worship: Interacting with Others

Not often explored in corporate worship is horizontal interaction, i.e., ministering to the hearts and needs of others as well as to God. Although the bulk of worship should focus on God, worship should also link worship with intercessory prayer, which among other things, attracts people outside the faith by demonstrating that those already in the church are each cared for by the body.

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[670] Linus J. Morris, *The High Impact Church: A Fresh Approach to Reaching the Unchurched* 76 (1993).

One interactive approach successfully used is allotting 15 minutes for praying in small groups as a key part of the worship service. The congregation is asked to form prayer circles. The pastor walks off the platform into the midst of the congregation and announces "We want you to know His love and power to you and through you." Each person is encouraged to share prayer requests concerning their hurts, problems, or desires. Then people are requested to pray. Reach out to and touch all so no one is left out. People are informed they can be silent in requests and/or in praying.[671]

> Worship that is interactive, both vertically and horizontally, is biblical worship. It is worship that impacts people at profound levels. Interaction worship not only provides pathways to contact with a holy and loving God, but avenues of nurturing, uplifting relationships with those who are called in God's name.[672]

For worship to witness to the unbelievers, to make differences in people's lives, fill worship services with interactive opportunities. "Move people quickly from anonymity to a sense of belonging."[673] People will feel closer to God and to other people

3. Rethinking Cultural Relevance

To be culturally relevant does not mean abandoning the past. Nor does it mean becoming hostage to our current culture. A church can become so "culturally relevant" that it no longer has much meaningful to say to the culture within which it functions.

Yes, we need to know where people are in order to effectively engage them where they are. Study unbelievers' life style and become informed as to their reading, viewing and listening habits. Although we need to know where they are, that does not mean we should succumb to leaving them there. Reaching out and witnessing to others calls for daring to do so in the context of real worship. This is what Paul did in debating the Athenians where he offered the Gospel of Christ – a message counter to their culture – and applied it to their lives. (See Acts 17:16-31.) Adopt an approach which offers a bridge by acknowledging the culture of those outside the faith. Use culture's best stuff, but avoid its trash. Incorporate culture's style of music, phraseology, pattern of celebration, etc. Start with the familiar and move to the unfamiliar. But importantly, move beyond. Be a bridge taking people somewhere. Churches need to create more and better worshippers. Transcend the culture with the truth of Gospel. In worship services cultural relevance is important. But, it not nearly as crucial as the four essential elements of worship considered above (i.e., sense of God's presence, worship centered on Christ, vulnerability (opening up to God), and participation in a relationship with God and others).

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[671] Elmer Towns as quoted in Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism; Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* 122 (1995). .

[672] Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism; Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* 123 (1995).

[673] Carey Nieuwhof, "Why Charismatic Churches Are Growing (and Attractional Churches Are Past Peak)," Outreach Magazine, November 28, 2018.

4. Worship Evangelism Applied

Our discussion now turns to more specific application of worship evangelism. A major portion of the discussion is based upon interviews of four leaders of highly successful churches.[674]

a. General Principles for Creating Worship Service Evangelism

One cannot truly worship something he or she does not know or believe in. However, unbelievers can observe believers in genuine worship and sense the joy being felt. They can see believers valuing and responding to God's Word. They can hear how the Bible provides answers for life's questions and problems. They can discern worship encouraging, strengthening, and changing believers. They can sense when God supernaturally moves people in an authentic worship service. People come to and grow in Christ when they feel God's presence and understand his message. *God's presence must be sensed in the worship service.* People grow toward and come to Christ when they feel God's presence and understand the message. Worship without the sense of God's presence yields few positive disciple-making, including evangelistic, results. In contrast, a

> clear message coupled with genuine worship will not only attract unbelievers, it will open their hearts to the power of the Gospel… and they will walk away changed. *Clear presentation of God's message and God's presence in worship services are the foundational conditions for worship to be an effective witness.*[675] (Emphasis supplied.)

In extensive interviews of four passionate, committed and successful church leaders, whose churches share neither geographical locations nor denominational affiliation, the discussion of specific areas of worship practice, revealed considerable diversity of opinion and sometimes disagreement. However, all voiced considerable unanimity on the major issues re Post-Modern era unbelievers' need for involvement, authenticity, relevance, excellence and innovation. All four were adamant that one issue stands above the others. When unbelievers divert from their own world long enough to give a church a chance,

> *they want the church to be the church.* …In a public, corporate setting, that means worship, not simply a program. It means being able to get directly, actively and supernaturally involved with God instead of settling for a vicarious experience."[676]

The cynicism of the digital explosion and has left people hungering for a transcendent touch. People are looking for true community, deeper experiences and authentic transcendence. Growing churches are increasingly focusing on creating experiences which engage more than just the head during a worship service, but also engage the heart and foster relationships. People

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[674] *See* Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism; Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* 178-209 (1995)..
[675] Rick Warren, "The Evangelistic Power of Worship as a Witness," October 8, 2015 (pastors.com).
[676] Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism; Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* 207 (1995).

come looking for something bigger than themselves. They come looking for God. The cultural shifts of the last decade have left people (especially younger people) longing for the transcendent. Effective future churches will offer experiences that feel transcendent – a sense that you had to be there to experience what happened. There are many among those outside the faith who come to church who are looking less for information and more for transformation.[677]

Although there is no one clear way to achieve high impact evangelistic worship, several general principles emerged as important elements in doing so.

- The number-one goal is to lead … [unbelievers] into God's presence, experiencing love and healing power.
- Create players, not spectators by offering many opportunities for … [unbelievers] to *respond* and *interact* with God….
- Avoid being boring by something doing different or unpredictable each week
- Be personal, be relational, be a community. Let them hear testimonies from real people, people just like themselves. Feature real people and real events in worship service messages. Plan safe, *optional* interaction with real people during the service. Worship service.
- Be relevant. Understand their world. Package Christ in the best their culture has to offer. Get visual – utilize video, multimedia, drama) but don't let those elements replace personal involvement.
- Mix up the music. Use a wide variety of musical styles as well as a few repackaged traditional hymns.
- Go deep into scripture. Get personal, and apply it directly to their lives. Don't be afraid to give them a hefty dose of biblical teaching and doctrine. Balance types of message series by alternating how-to series with those that are exegetical, or cover biblical themes.
- Stress the positive message of grace. Avoid emphasizing rules and motivating people through the sense of guilt. Unchurched people commonly hold a stereotype view of the church as dull, negative and filled with critical and condemning people. However, people are acceptable to God through faith, not because of their merit. The church should communicate the positive message of grace

[677] Carey Nieuwhof, "Why Charismatic Churches Are Growing (and Attractional Churches Are Past Peak)," OutreachMagazine.com, November 28, 2018.

which ministers to both believers and the unbelievers. Good preaching communicates the positive message of grace.[678]

- Those outside the faith commonly believe if they attend a church, they will be criticized or condemned. When church leaders are vulnerable, transparent and emphasize God's love, acceptance and forgiveness and where members are friendly, caring and loving, positive replace negative impressions.[679]

- Create in the worship message and environment the sense and belief in hope and expectancy. Christianity calls for accepting people where they are in their spiritual walk, while at the same time offers hope and growth through God's power. It is not enough that this be taught and preached, it must be lived by Christians in dealing with other.[680]

- Respect … [people's] time. Eliminate excess and be aware of their need for brief attention breaks. However, if … [unbelievers] are afforded plenty of opportunities for involvement and response, their attention span becomes significantly greater. Avoid the temptation to be "clock-driven," If God is doing something important, don't interrupt it or cut it off just so you can 'keep on schedule.[681]

- Be clear so that persons with no Christian background understand everything that occurs and is said during the service.[682] As Paul expressed, "But in a church meeting I would rather speak five understandable words to help others than ten thousand words in an unknown language." (1 Corinthians 14:10 – NLV) God is more accessible when we avoid speaking Christianese.[683] Furthermore, the younger generation prefer and are more likely to listen to a conversational style of preaching.[684] Never forget that there may be people in the audience who may have little clue as to what is being talked about (including regular attendees as well as newcomers and those outside the faith.[685]

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[678] Linus J. Morris, *The High Impact Church: A Fresh Approach to Reaching the Unchurched* 208-09 (1993).
[679] *Id.* at 210.
[680] *Id.* at 210-11.
[681] Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism; Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* 209 (1995).
[682] Rick Warren, "Building Evangelistic Services: Insights on worship and Evangelism," November 19, 2002 (purposedriven.com/articles).
[683] Christy Heitger-Ewing, "A Church for All Ages: Life Christ Church Green Bay," OutreachMagazine.com, September 19, 2015.
[684] Thom S. Rainer, *Who Stole My Pulpit* 6 (2016).
[685] Phil Cooke, "The Importance of Explaining Common Terms in Sermons," OutreachMagazine.com, November 7, 2019. Explain everything to assure that the audience understands exactly what is being said, Go through the presentation in advance and define terms, ask questions and provide explanations where needed (e. g, what is

- Create worship services to which church members want to invite and bring their unbeliever family, friends, colleague, etc.[686]

- Create an environment of friendliness before and after the worship service. The unchurched are attracted to friendly churches. While many churches consider themselves friendly, often they are more friendly toward those people who already belong than to newcomers. Members should be trained to search out and engage newcomers. Some outgoing members should be assigned the responsibility to be on the lookout for newcomers, should introduce themselves and should make sure that newcomers meet other people. When newcomers are welcomed from the pulpit and followed up by members, they are likely to feel that they have found a friendly church.[687]

These general operational principles for authentic worship in the context of worship evangelism are not offered as a comprehensive or sacred list. However, they offer a jump start for a church to develop its own creative worship strategies. It is essential to put enough time and effort to create relevant weekend experiences for both those who are unchurched and de-churched.[688]

However, whatever road taken, strive for excellence. Doing so is an essential ingredient for reaching secular people, especially for those people who function in a world striving for excellence. A church never gets a second chance to make a first impression. If first impressions are not good, newcomers are unlikely to return.

b. Expect Unchurched to Attend[689]

It is a natural tendency to structure and prepare worship services and other ministries based upon those persons whom we expect to attend. When unchurched people are not expected, there is a tendency and likelihood of using insider language which is confusing for a first-time and potential repeat guests. Anticipate that unchurched people will be there and make sure to translate "Christianese" in a manner they can understand and relate to.

Granted, expecting unchurched people to show up at each of our services, events and ministries and preparing accordingly is not always easy. This requires investment of more time

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communion and why does it matter, why is the Bible authoritative, why does the Bible consist of different books, etc.). *Id*.

[686] Rick Warren, "Building Evangelistic Services," Insights on Worship and Evangelism," November 19, 2002 (purposedriven.com/articles). "The Importance of Explaining Common Terms in Sermons, OutreachMagazine.com, November 7, 2019

[687] Linus J. Morris, *The High Impact Church: A Fresh Approach to Reaching the Unchurched* 208 (1993).

[688] Nada Kareem Nittle, "Back to the Basics: Eastside Christian Church," OutreachMagazine.com, September 26, 2017.

[689] This section draws primarily upon Rick Richardson, "Evangelism in Leadership: As Easy as 5 Simple Steps," OutreachMagazine.com, September 5, 2017.

and energy. However, doing so provides a welcoming environment for visitors and powerfully demonstrates the love of God and his people who go out of their way to communicate in understandable ways. And, importantly, this can significantly contribute to motivating church members and other attendees to invite others whom they know to attend.

Preparing with the expectation that unchurched will attend does not argue that worship should be focused on people who don't know God. However, this does strongly suggest that services ought to be as welcoming and understandable as feasible for unchurched guests. Keep in mind that worship service is the most likely environment in which unchurched visitors initially will connect with a church's congregation.

c. Worship Music for Saints and Seekers

(1) What Is Christian Music?

Music is an integral part of our American culture.

> A song can often touch people in ways that a sermon can't. Music can bypass intellectual barriers and take the message straight to the heart. It is a potent tool for evangelism[690] [as well as bringing believers into closer connection with God].

Music is a major communicator of values to the younger generation. It is a force which should not be ignored or underestimated in efforts to reach the unchurched.[691] However, there are many traditionalists who maintain that the only real Christian music are traditional hymns accompanied by an organ or perhaps a piano. However, in making the selection of music, it is important to recognize that no particular style of music is sacred.

What determines whether or not music is sacred are the words, i.e., the message. Music is only the arrangement of notes. There is no such thing as Christian music. Rather there are Christian lyrics.[692]

Scripture refers to the style of music that matched the instruments of that day. Scripture is replete with references to different styles of music. For example, "Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy." (Psalms 47:1) "Sing to the Lord a new song…" (Psalms 98:1a) "Praise him with the sound of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with timbrel and dancing, praise him with the strings and pipe, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals." (Psalms 150:3-6) Scripture makes no mention of organs or pianos which did not exist until centuries later. Clearly, God has no personal preferences when it comes to musical styles. Preferences are part of the human condition.[693] In short, there is no specific Christian music. What makes music Christian music are the lyrics and the message, not the musical style.

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[690] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message* 279 (1995).
[691] *Id.* at 280.
[692] *Id.* at 281.
[693] David J. Classen, "Contemporary Worship: A New Song for a New Style of Worship," Congregationalist, p.10, October/November 2002,

(2) Selection of Music

A fundamental purpose of Christian music, whether traditional or otherwise, it to provide music which facilitates authentic worship. This is achieved by using styles of music reflecting those attending, both believing church members and those persons outside the faith whom the church is trying to reach. It needs to be recognized that there are people in the community whom a church is trying to outreach to, who may never fully grasp the meaning and depth of some of the great hymns of faith, but can relate to praise and worship music.[694] Churches seeking to reach the unbelievers and believers in growing as disciples of Christ need to use the style or styles of music which in worship integrates faith into their lives. To best accomplish this purpose, a worship song needs two basic elements. First, it needs to be catchy, possess a repetitive rhythm and/or melodic pattern. And second, most importantly it must offer a meaningful spiritual message to be embraced by the worshipers.[695] Traditional hymns are also fair game too. By updating the language to modern English and/or by making the rhythm pattern more upbeat, new life can be given to great old hymns in a manner that opens doors to new spiritual awareness and growth.[696]

Based upon the experience of church leaders who have planned and facilitated hundreds of worship services, two elements emerge most clearly. First,

> First, aside from the Spirit of God, music is the most potent element in a worship service. It has an incredible, matchless capacity to open the human heart to God, accessing the soul more quickly, deeply, and permanently than any other art form or human speech (yes, that includes the message!).
>
> ...Second, there is a resource void when it comes to culturally relevant worship music. ...[T]he church needs to start learning... [the explorers] song if it is ever going to reach him.[697]

What is needed is cross-cultural worship music which is music in various popular styles attractive to both explorers and believers

Cross-cultural worship music comes in numerous forms such as soft rock, hip-hop, unplugged, rhythm and blues, reggae, jazz, etc. However, regardless of the style, a culturally well-crafted worship song must possess four critical characteristics. This is termed the PASS test: **P**ersonal, **A**ttractive, **S**traightforward and **S**ubstantive.

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[694] Lee Edwards and Phil Lavallee, "Praise and Worship Music: Reaching the Heart of God," Congregationalist, p.11, Winter 2007.
[695] Steve Rhinesmith, "Joy Service," The Congregationalist," p.9 (October/November 2002).
[696] *Id.*
[697] Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism; Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* 211-12 (1995). "Well-done spiritual music is a vital way to connect withy young families." Jennifer Kabbany, "Embracing Millennials: Embrace Church," OutreachMagazine.com, January 12, 2014.

- **P**ersonal – they relate in some way to people's everyday lives and involve their whole being, including their emotions.
- **A**ttractive – they hold people's attention.
- **S**traightforward – both Seeker and Saintly Believer can understand and latch onto them quickly.
- **S**ubstantive – they have a thoroughly biblical message that is faithful to the whole counsel of Scripture.[698]

Those worship songs which PASS the test are great songs for worship. However, there are songs that don't meet each element which are not necessarily bad. However, these should not be the core of a church's worship music repertoire. These "in-betweeners" may need verbal lead-ins to be effective.[699] Use of choirs (formal) and worship music teams with a music leader teams subject to certain cautions might also be considered.[700]

Cross cultural Christian music does exist. Fortunately, there are various sources of contemporary cross-cultural Christian music.[701] For example, Maranatha music reaches out to churches by delivering well known songs of faith in arrangements church members and other attendees can easily sing. It seeks to provide arrangements of easily singable classic songs, modern worship songs and hymns which congregations respond to. It creates recordings, lead sheets, CDs, and DVDs to assist worship leaders minister to their congregations.[702] Other sources of worship music should also be explored.[703]

Church effort and time spent to become proficient in current musical styles as a part of its worship services communicates a powerful message to seekers and explorers. "We care so much about you that we have decided to speak your language."[704]

Songs lose their testimonial power if those singing are not thinking about what they are singing. On the other hand, songs can be a powerful witness to unbelievers if they are singing songs they feel deeply about. Many gospel songs of the 20th Century tend to glorify the Christian experience. Today, in contrast, the most effective worship songs are love songs *sung directly to* God rather than songs about God. The strength of many contemporary worship songs is that they are God centered rather than man centered.[705] However, songs also need to be integrated with theme or message of a particular service. At times, the more traditional hymns may better serve this purpose.

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[698] Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism; Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* 214 (1995). A fuller description of each element is provided at 214-217. Much of the balance of chapter deals with getting technical in selecting a list of and rating cross-cultural songs (discussing benefits and drawbacks of specific songs). *Id.* at 220 *et seq.*

[699] *Id.* at 217.

[700] *See id.* at 235-238.

[701] A Cross-Cultural Music Resource Bank, which provides a substantial list of some of these companies and their products including reviews and recommendations, appears in Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism; Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* 287 *et seq.* (1995)..

[702] Maranathamusic.com.

[703] *E.g.*, ccli.com.

[704] Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism; Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* 238 (1995).

[705] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message* 289 (1995).

Ultimately,

> … God has blessed us with all kinds of music…. God loves the praises of his people and whatever music you use to accomplish this… Praise the Lord.[706]

5. Conclusion

Not that long ago, many churches and their leaders thought seekers were looking for more services/events that were performance driven, perhaps entertainment, and only barely some talk about God. But the opposite is proving to be true. They are looking for "a very personal God in a safe, honest environment."[707] Although non-Christian oriented explorers are curious about spiritual things, they and may be willing to give a Christian church a try.

> The bottom line is, people are hungry for spiritual things. Ultimately, even the world wants the church to be the church and to own up to who we really are. Everything else—they can get that anywhere. They can pay thirty bucks to go see Letterman or whatever. But what people want today is God. They want to feel God, to know God…. There is no substitute for the presence of God…. There's none![708]

There are five rudders (principles) to help maneuver through the difficult waters of worship change steering toward the passionate glorification of God, personal transformation and effective manifestation of the Gospel to both believers and unbelievers.[709]

- *Worship First, Evangelize Second* – Minister to God and then let God open the door to minister to people. Glorify God and a personal relationship with him are the primary purposes of worship.

- *Never Sacrifice Authenticity for Relevance* – The primary question is not how to attract those outside the faith to the church. but rather, ask how can we be authentic in all that we do? Unbelievers are not dumb. They can discern between orchestrated piety and the real thing.

- *Add Before You Subtract* – For those churches located more toward the traditional end of the worship style spectrum, consider orienting worship services more toward worship evangelism or adding a worship evangelism service to the current worship service. Providing alternative (but authentic)

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[706] Lee Edwards and Phil Lavallee, "Praise and Worship Music: Reaching the Heart of God, p.11, Congregationalist, Winter 2007.

[707] Mark Pickerill, (pastor) as quoted in Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism; Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* 241 (1995).

[708] Raphael Green,(pastor) as quoted in *id.* 241.

[709] Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism; Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* 283-84 (1995).

worship services which offer people a choice mitigates the departure of those who are very uncomfortable with significant movement away from the current mode.

- *Commit to a Relevance Based on Your Community's Cultural Present and Its Meaningful Past* – Develop a new repertoire of worship traditions (such as rituals, symbols, metaphors, etc.) incorporating both the past and the present.

- *Customize Your Own Worship Method* – Consider borrowing and experimenting with ideas gleaned from other worship evangelizing churches. However, be creative within the context that worship evangelism ultimately flows from the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In essence,

> *Worship is a powerful witness to unbelievers if God's presence is felt and if the message is understandable.* … In genuine worship God's presence is felt, God's pardon is offered, God's purposes are revealed, and God's power is displayed. …[W]hen unbelievers watch believers relate to God in an intelligent, sincere manner, it creates a desire in them to know God too."[710]

F. Preaching the Word

1. Need for Preaching

Preaching is a staple of church worship services. The question might be raised, is preaching needed?

Fundamental purposes of worship are to glorify God and to respond to his invitation to enter into a more intimate personal relationship with him and be his friend. However, one is not likely to exalt God if he or she lacks understanding as to who God is and what he promises. Furthermore, it is impossible to be one's friend without knowing him. Revealing himself through the Bible is the primary means through which God makes himself known to us. Through God inspired scripture God reveals who he is, what he is about and what he calls upon us to do.

We have considered earlier the need to spend time with God's Word. This can be done in various ways. One important way of hearing and understanding God's Word is through inspired and learned preaching from the pulpit. Furthermore, the impact of proclaiming God's Word in a worship service is enhanced since we are gathered collectively in the presence of God as we hear his Word.

As expressed in the core values of our church,

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[710] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message* 241-42 (1995).

> *Since our life of worship depends upon the frequent revelation of God's Word, we seek to find, understand and do the Word of God, especially as that Word is revealed in the Bible and through the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. Thus, preaching and hearing the Word of God is central to our faith. Whatever its style, preaching is more than simply lecturing or informing (education). Preaching is to make the case for God, declare the good news, and win the verdict. It is to challenge and inspire us to make God's agenda our agenda.*[711]

So yes, meaningful preaching is needed. It is an important element in helping people grow toward a more Christ-like life.

2. Practical Preaching

While the following comments are raised here in the context of practical preaching in worship, they are also relevant in teaching in other church contexts (e.g., classes, seminars, small groups, evangelism, etc.)

There is a saying often repeated by Christians, "Preach the gospel. Use words if necessary." This places emphasis on the idea that Christians should live in a manner pointing to the person and work of Jesus. Actions are said to speak louder than words. However, the sense that words should only be used when necessary can subtly denigrate the value and importance which the prophets, Jesus and Paul put on preaching. Yes, we want our actions to match our words to the extent possible. But the gospel is a message. It is news about an event and a person. The gospel is history, a declaration of people and things which actually happened. Since the gospel is the saving work of Jesus, it is not something our actions or behavior do. However, it is something we can reflect. While we can live out its implications, to make the gospel known, the gospel must be communicated through words. Preaching the gospel is a central task of the church.[712]

> A godly life should serve as a witness for the message we proclaim. But without words, what can our actions point to but ourselves? A godly life cannot communicate the incarnation, Jesus' substitution for sinners, or the hope of redemption by grace alone through faith alone. We can't be good news, but we can herald it, sing it, speak it, and preach it to all who listen. …[V]erbal communication of the gospel is the only means by which people are brought into a right relationship with God.[713]

In Romans 10:13-14, Paul makes this same point saying

> Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how

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[711] Fox River Congregational Church Statement of Core Value.
[712] Ed Stetzer, "Preach the Gospel and Since It Is Necessary, Use Words," OutreachMagazine.com, August 5, 2015.
[713] *Id.*

> can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

To be effective, however, preaching must be practical. Our Congregationalist forefathers, the Pilgrims (a.k.a. Separating Puritans) and Puritans were emphatic on practical preaching. Puritan preaching was plain in style. It was a popular activity appealing to a broad segment of society founded on the truth that sermons must convey God's truth to every listener in a manner to be practical and to stimulate further thought. The simple prose style was a means to enhance clarity. Preach plainly and perspicuously so that the simplest man may understand what is being taught. Puritans disliked heaping verse upon top of verse, numerous quotations and citations, Latin and Greek words, various forms of ostentation, etc. Doing so distracts from the content of the message. Puritan preachers sought to reach the whole range of society. The plain style of preaching was founded on the premise that the ultimate purpose of preaching was not ascetic excellence, but rather spiritual edification. Clear content of the sermon is more important than its form.[714]

Whatever the subject (e.g., communion, presence of the Holy Spirit, the altar call, the Bible, etc.), don't assume that everyone in the audience knows and/or understands what it means. Typically, there is wide range of people in the congregation. If one really wants to make an impact, review the sermon to look for anything that might be new or unclear. Then take time to explain it. Explaining everything is necessary to make sure that the audience understands exactly what is being said. Consider what questions might be asked. E.g., why is the Bible considered authoritative? Why does communion matter? Why is bread and wine offered? Does God still heal today? What is the importance of baptism? The potential questions are endless, yet most pastors too commonly fail to address them. "Never forget that there are people out there who have little clue about what is being talked. Furthermore, it won't hurt the more experienced in the congregation to hear it again."[715]

To create and grow disciples, we must use words. However, using words to proclaim/preach the centrality of gospel is not enough. We must also move from the idea to its effective execution.

Jesus wasn't satisfied to simply proclaim the truth. He wanted those hearing him to *act* on what they heard. He taught for a response, for life transformation, not simply to dispense information. Practical teaching, which motivates people to act, is a primary means God uses to grow our faith. Apply scripture to everyday life. Teaching God's Word shouldn't simply be about knowing stuff, it is should be about doing stuff. To grow congregants' faith, preach and teach for life transformation which not only glorifies God, it also leads into a more intimate personal relationship with God. Both believers and unbelievers are interested in and attracted to communicators who conclude with what to do next. People are interested in what works.[716]

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[714] Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* 104-06 (1986).
[715] Phil Cooke, "The Importance of Explaining Common Terms in Sermons," OureaaachMagazine.com, November 14, 2019.
[716] Andy Stanley, *Deep and Wide* 112-14 (2012).

Preaching or teaching the truth unaccompanied by what difference it will make will be perceived as irrelevant by most persons in the church, student ministry, home and/or Bible study. Propounding the truth, accompanied by next steps, grows faith. Doing so is a faith catalyst. Thus, create topical sermons or message series rather than simply teaching *seriatim* through the books of the Bible. Every message and every series of messages for every age group should conclude with a call for action. In developing a message ask

- what you want the audience to know,
- what you want them to do, and
- what can be done to create next steps.[717]

3. Double Barrel Preaching

a. Dual Audience, Single Agenda

"[T]he healthy church gathers regularly as the local expression of the body of Christ to worship God in ways that engage the heart, mind, soul, and strength of the people."[718] The operative word here is *engage*. Unless worship opportunities engage people in a manner to bring them to connection with God, there is little point. This requires offering worship services that draw people in rather than turn them off from connecting with God.

A basic question in preaching to a diverse audience is how to engage both believers and nonbelievers in the same message? That is, how does one preach to Christians and those outside the faith and keep both groups engaged and coming back? As Andy Stanley emphasizes, if one is to create a church which unchurched people love to attend, they need to either like or at least become engaged in the weekend message. It is important to engage people who disagree with the premise and possibly the application of what is being taught.[719]

Two of the most common complaints the unchurched voice about worship services are boring and/or irrelevant" sermons. When preaching to believers who accept the authority of the Bible, exposition of the Bible leads to spiritual growth toward Christ. Unbelievers, however, are not motivated by the Bible. In trying to reach them, instead of preaching from the Bible verse by verse, start on common ground which consists of our common hurts, needs and interests. By starting with a topic that interests the unchurched and then showing what the Bible says about it, their attention can gained and interest in the Bible can be generated. That is, begin with an interest, hurt or need that is common to both believers and unbelievers. Then then move to what the Bible says about it using passages which speak to the people. Preaching to felt needs is a theologically sound approach to introducing people to God.[720]

As noted above, Jesus wasn't satisfied to simply proclaim what was true. He wanted his audience to *act* on what they heard. Addressing people's needs engages and grows both believers and unbelievers. To initiate and grow faith development, preach and teach for life change.

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[717] *Id.* at 114-17.
[718] Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church; 10 Traits of a Vital Ministry* 20 (1999).
[719] Andy Stanley, *Deep & Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend* 229 (2012).
[720] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message 294-95* (1995).

Believers, doubters and unbelievers are attracted to communicators who conclude with what to do next.

Topical preaching is a sound approach for believers who possess interests, hurts and needs common with their nonbeliever counterparts. In the process, the Bible is taught. There appears to be no scriptural suggestion that God cares whether the Bible is taught topic by topic or book by book. For greater emphasis on verse-by-verse or book by book exposition of Bible, Bible study though small groups, classes, seminars and/or, individual study should be made available.

Of course, in the process never compromise biblical truth or standards. Communicate biblical truths without compromise. Avoid substituting uplifting stories and positive platitudes for the humbling truth of the gospel. Be faithful and courageous in preaching and teaching the gospel message. It doesn't require a modern message to reach modern people. The gospel message is unchanging. It applies to all people. Yes, it may require addressing a modern culture in a manner to which the culture will listen. However, the message must not be diluted. There is no success when losing the message in the process.[721] Paul condemns those who modify or soften the gospel when preaching or teaching. "[S]o now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!" (Galatians 1:9)

It is essential to recognize that engaging those outside the faith does not require watering down, omitting or treading lightly with the message.

> The message is not always comfortable. In fact, sometimes God's truth is very uncomfortable! Still we must teach "the whole counsel of God." Being sensitive to seekers in attendance does not limit what you say but it will affect *how* you say it.
>
> We must make both the worship and the message understandable.[722]

Scripture light sermons fail to engage mature Christians. Furthermore, thinking non-believers are unlikely to be impressed or inspired to come-back by scripture light sermons.[723]

> The unchurched are not asking for a watered-down message. The unchurched expect to hear the Bible when they come to church. They just want to hear how it relates to their lives. They can handle a clear, biblical message when it is delivered in terms they understand and in a tone that shows you respect and care about them. They are looking for solutions, not a scolding.[724]

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[721] Mark Mittelberg, *Building a Contagious Church: Revolutionizing the Way We View and Do Evangelism* 340-45 (2001).
[722] Rick Warren, "The Evangelistic Power of Worship as a Witness," October 8, 2015 (pastors.com).
[723] Andy Stanley, *Deep & Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend* 230 (2012).
[724] Rick Warren, "The Evangelistic Power of Worship as a Witness," October 8, 2015 (pastors.com).

Thus, the key to engaging the those outside the faith rests more with the approach and presentation rather than relying on scriptural light sermon content.

Preachers must counter the perception that sermons are boring. Use personal illustrations which identify with the audience. Use humor aimed at oneself. Word pictures make ideas interesting and entertaining. Include an outline of the sermon printed in the church bulletin which better enables people to track the message. Since most unchurched are unfamiliar with the Bible, print scriptural references to avoid embarrassment and lost time.[725]

Whether part of the sermon or integrated elsewhere in the worship service (and/or other church occasions), whenever feasible and appropriate, incorporate the power of personal stories. Vibrant churches understand the importance of ongoing emphasis on the theme of life transformation. Stories of how people came to faith within their church or community provide potential for significant impact. In addition, on a regular basis, offer individuals the opportunity for public sharing, i.e., giving testimony to what God had done in their lives. The telling of stories reflects the model of Christ who was the greatest storyteller of all.[726]

The questions to be asked are

(i) whether the approach to preaching leads those outside the faith attending results in their returning and better yet come back with a friend, and

(ii) if not, whether and how should the preaching approach changed.[727]

To attract and reach visitors, guests and believers, sensitive life transforming preaching is essential.

b. Aids to Effective Preaching to Unbelievers and Believers

Rick Warren has offered several suggestions, including the following, to aid in more effectively preaching to those outside the faith and perhaps to believers as well.[728]

- Read scripture from a *newer translation* which often offer more easily understandable language. Use pew Bibles and simply announce the page number so people are not scrambling to find the selection and causing embarrassment to the unchurched who lack understanding on how to find selections in Scripture. Also select scripture readings with the unchurched in mind.

- Provide an *outline of message with scriptures written out*. This affords several benefits. The unchurched don't own Bibles. It avoids embarrassment in finding text. More material can be covered in less time by avoiding the time of many persons thumbing through pages. Verses can be read aloud together by everyone. Multiple

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[725] Linus J. Morris, *The High Impact Church: A Fresh Approach to Reaching the Unchurched* 233-34 (1993).
[726] Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church; 10 Traits of a Vital Ministry* 21 (1999).
[727] Andy Stanley, *Deep & Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend* 233 (2012).
[728] *See* Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message 296-306* (1995).

translations can be compared. The listeners can underline and take notes which helps people remember the message. Verses can be taped to the refrigerator for later review. Provides a basis for small group discussion.

- Offer *message titles* which appeal to the unchurched.

- *Preach in series* which uses the power of momentum with each message building on the previous one creating a sense of anticipation. Especially announce a series on the day when a large number of visitors are expected, e. g., Easter. This may serve as a hook for people to return.

- *Preach Challenge and Commitment*. Avoid messages which leave people where they are. Challenge them to do something. The biggest challenge is commitment to Christ. Too many pastors go fishing without ever reeling in the line. Those outside the faith should be offered multiple ways and opportunities to commit to Christ, e.g., altar call, private meeting with the pastor, back of welcome card, etc. Respect those who chose not to do so, but offer the opportunity for those who want it.

The Puritan approach to sermons also offer means to enhance the effectiveness of sermons today. Puritan sermons not only placed demands on the intellect, their emphasis on rational understanding of the truth was balanced by appeal to the heart and the will. Puritan sermons were *affective,* i.e., aimed to affect the listener. Sermons were meant to be actively listened to. This was active involvement, not spectator sport. For Puritans, listening to a sermon was an active exercise requiring paying full attention. Several Puritan practices demonstrate how active was the person in the pew.

- Note-taking was a standard practice in Puritan worship services.

- Following the sermon, the listener would engage in further meditation on the sermon. One sermon well digested is more valuable than several sermons without subsequent meditation. Such meditation is aided by memory which is facilitated by preacher provided outlines of the sermon. The major impact of a sermon should occur outside the church after the service is over.

- Repeating and discussing the sermon with the family at home further impacts the effect of the worship service.

The Puritan theory of preaching went along with its ideal of a religiously educated laity. The sermon was expected to stimulate a range of daily activities at a personal and family level. The purpose of preaching was judged by not what occurred in the church, but rather by its effect outside the church.[729]

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[729] Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* 102-04 (1986).

c. Goal

Supplementing the basic purposes of worship (glorifying and encountering God), the goal for weekend worship services is presenting scriptures in a manner which is so compelling and helpful that all in the audience were glad they attended and leave wanting to return the following weekend. Present the message in a manner resulting in people walking away intrigued by a person teaching from the Bible in a manner that was helpful causing skeptics to doubt their disbelief and believers to believe more deeply.[730]

Furthermore, when people are convinced the preacher/teacher wants something FOR them instead of wanting something FROM them, they are less likely to be offended and turned off when they are challenged.[731]

Although prime purpose of a worship service is to worship God, the unchurched often are evangelized by powerful and dynamic worship and expository preaching which gives rise to the sense of the powerful presence of God in the worship service. This has been referred to as "worship evangelism." Create a worship service that is both understandable to those outside the faith and meaningful to believers. Speak on themes that include ministering to unbelievers. Although, as considered in PART FIVE Section IX. C. below, personal relationship evangelism serves as the primary evangelism vehicle, churches are often quite effective in reaping the harvest during worship services. Be ready to reap the fruit which evangelism efforts bear.

G. CHANGING WORSHIP SERVICES: TRADITION AND CHANGE

As a church considers what if anything to do with respect to changing the normal conduct of its worship services, rumblings, if not outright resistance, should be expected. Church traditions, which members like and are comfortable with, are often difficult to dislodge.

Jesus found this to be true in his encounters with Pharisees and teachers of the law in his day. He and his disciples were attacked for violating the traditions of the day such as working on the Sabbath, failing to perform ceremonial hand washings before meals, etc. Jesus replied to their criticisms saying that Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you people who pretend to be good. These people honor me by what they say. But, their hearts are far away from me. They teach only human rules. They have a fine way of setting aside God's commands in order to follow their own teachings. They have let go of the commands of God and hold on to human traditions." (Mark 7:1-8)

However, as Pastor Lonnie has said,

> Of course, not everything having to do with tradition is bad. Traditions give us identity – they tell us who we are. They highlight our roots and tell us where we came from. They externalize our mindset and demonstrate what we believe. They set boundaries for our lifestyle. ...[But tradition] becomes a

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[730] Andy Stanley, *Deep & Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend* 234 (2012).
[731] *Id.* at 235.

> problem when outward action becomes a substitute for inward affection.[732]

Nowhere in the Bible does it specifically say how a worship service should be conducted. Nevertheless, efforts to change are likely to be opposed because some dislike change. Disagreement as to preferences is okay. But it must be recognized that while such view may reflect tradition, it is not scriptural law. The same can be said with respect to the style of preaching, the music which is sung or played, and physical or spontaneous vocal voice of praise.[733]

For example, many complain that contemporary praise music is light weight. It shouldn't be used in a worship service. However, often the lyrics of such praise music are psalms and right out to the Bible. In contrast, it might be noted that that the hymn "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God, although written by Martin Luther, was sung to a tune of popular drinking song in the bars of Germany.

The point here is that while the church has some wonderful traditions which should be retained, it is important to recognize the difference between tradition and that which needs to be done "to be a witness and inspiration for Jesus Christ to the world."[734]

H. FOSTERING WORSHIP AS A SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

1. Responsibilities of a Disciple-Making Church with Respect to Worship

To reiterate earlier comments, most, if not all, of our church members understand that worship is a core element of living life as a Christian. Yet, how many of us view worship as glorifying God and as a primary means of responding to God's invitation to enter into an intimate personal relationship with him by which he transforms us. How do we answer such questions as what is the purpose of worship? How are we to respond to God in worship? What are we to get out of worship? The extent to each of us ignores or is unable to answer such questions impacts our commitment to regular participation in worship services, our attitude toward worship, and ultimately the degree of our spiritual growth, or lack thereof, in our personal relationship with God.

Without coming to grips with these questions, simply attending worship services may do little for one's spiritual growth. Rote mouthing of words of a certain creed or prayer, performing particular religious acts and/or simply attending worship services on a regular basis may indicate nothing more than church membership.

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[732] Lonnie Richardson, "Adventures in Grace: The Danger of Tradition," March 12, 2017 (sermon).

[733] For example, in most white churches, praising with lifted hands or spontaneous shouts are not intuitive or well received modes of worship. However, two of the most frequent commands in scripture, especially throughout Psalms, are "praise with lifted hands" and "shout." J.D. Greear, "14 Things Every Pastor Wishes His Worship Leader Knew, OutreachMagazine.com, September 5, 2017.

[734] Lonnie Richardson, "Adventures in Grace: The Danger of Tradition," March 12, 2017 (sermon).

Critical to progressing on one's path in following Christ is understanding and practicing the spiritual discipline of worship (see discussion PART THREE, Section I.C. above). One needs to be aware of the fundamental purposes of worship including *glorifying God,* and entering into and deepening one's *personal relationship with him.* God invites believers into a personal relationship through worship which involves a response of genuine engagement in worship through reverence, awe, submission, praise and thanksgiving. As disciple-making church, we cannot be too diligent in communicating to and imbuing in the members of the congregation an understanding of the purposes and hows of worship.

Furthermore, as disciple-making church, we cannot be too diligent in providing worship services that "encourages the experience of the holy and brings participants into a sense of God's presence and power."[735] Authentic worship offers opportunities for reverence, awe, submission, praise, honor, thanksgiving, reflection and celebration and provides the environment for connecting with God in an intimate personal relationship leading to life transformation. Worship of this nature is essential for disciple formation which nurtures positive personal change and motivates people to disciplined learning, sharing and mission throughout the ensuing week.

> Just as worship begins in holy expectancy, it ends in holy obedience. If worship does not propel us into greater obedience, it has not been worship. To stand before the Holy One of eternity is to change. … To worship is to change.[736]

Worship is to lead to life transformation to a more Christ-like life in our growth as a follower of Christ.

People must recognize that worship is not a spectator sport. Worship services are not something for us to simply observe and/or critique the performers. We need to be actively engaged as participants rather than passively observe. We need to understand the purposes of worship, what is going on during worship and how we are to respond to God's invitation to enter into a personal/transforming relationship with him. We need to internalize the worship service; make it personally our own rather than simply spectate.

Furthermore, we need to understand that worship will not become an instrumental factor in spiritual formation until we break ourselves of the habit of interpreting worship and the events in God's story as centering on ourselves. We need to think of ourselves as participants, as a supporting cast, as servants who focus on the drama's main character, i.e., on the God whom we are to love and serve.

A responsibility of a disciple-making church is to *communicate a clear understanding* of the spiritual discipline of worship and *offer worship opportunities* fostering and enabling people to embrace genuine worship as part of their daily lives.[737] The disciple-making stage of worship comes early and continues throughout one's life. As a church, we need to clearly communicate (i) an understanding of the purposes of worship, (ii) what highly meaningful worship is not, (iii)

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[735] Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church; 10 Traits of a Vital Ministry* 51-52 (1999).
[736] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* 173 (rev. ed. 1988).
[737] Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church; 10 Traits of a Vital Ministry* 51-52 (1999).

the hows of worship, and (iv) recognition that spiritual discipline of worship is not a spectator sport, something for us to simply observe and/or critique the performers. We need to be actively engaged as participants rather than passively observe. We need to understand the purposes of worship, what is going on during worship and how we are to respond to God's invitation to enter into a personal/transforming relationship with him. We need to internalize the worship service; make it personally our own rather than simply spectate. Meaningful worship requires understanding, commitment and disciplined practice. Fostering the spiritual discipline of meaningful worship is an essential element of an effective disciple-making church.

Thus, it is a critical responsibility of a disciple-making church to foster congregational understanding and to offer experiences leading members to embrace genuine worship in growing toward a more Christ-like lives.

2. Delivering the Message

It is incumbent on church members to learn, understand and practice what worship is truly about. Thus, it is the responsibility of a disciple-making church to create an environment for transforming worship experiences. And, it is also the church's responsibility to offer opportunities which motivate, support and better enable people to more meaningfully experience worship.

There are various ways to communicate the *whys* and *hows* of meaningful worship services, i.e., worship services that transform (usually incrementally) over time). The discussion above (in PART THREE, Section II.C.) on worship as an encounter with, invitation from, and our responses to God might serve as a basis for the content of such effort. In addition, we should explore the availability of different programs, books, etc., for alternative or supplementary expositions on meaningful transformational worship experiences.

The purposes and the hows of meaningful worship as a transformational experience can be offered in one or combination of formats including the following.

- A sermon or *sermon series* on this subject should be presented periodically to the congregation as a whole. A sermon on this subject, upon which much of the earlier above discussion of worship is based, was presented here at FRCC several years ago.[738] For those who have heard the message before, periodic repeats of a sermon or sermons on this subject offer important refreshers on this fundamental element of spiritual formation.

- A *retreat* on the purposes and hows of meaningful worship affords another mechanism, albeit less likely to reach as many people as a sermon series. However, a retreat offers the opportunity for small discussion groups.

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[738] Jon S. Hanson, "Why Are We Here?," January. 11, 2004 (sermon).

- Presenting the purposes and hows of worship in a *short term small group* offers the twin advantages of presenting a foundational spiritual growth subject matter coupled with participation in a small group. This provides a clear step in progressing along one's path in discipleship and serves as a link to the next step of participating in an on-going relational small group.

- Another possibility is to explore the purposes and hows of meaningful worship as a transformational experience as an additional segment in an Exploring Church Membership Class. Not only would this contribute to more meaningful worship experiences, it provides an excellent forum to encourage newcomers to regularly participate in worship services. Such a call to worship encourages movement in the discipling process from the conversion stage to the worship stage of disciple-making.

  However, to the contrary, it has been maintained that the prime focus of the newcomers' class is what it means to become a member of our church including our mission and covenant which, in turn, includes committing to worship. Delving more deeply into the purposes and the hows of worship may be more appropriate for a subsequent phase in the disciple-making process, e.g., a short term small group. Encouraging newcomer class members to participate in such a group offers some exciting possibilities.[739]

I. SUMMARY

Central in Christ's church is loving worship of God. Worship can be defined as the loving attitude and acts of reverence for God. "In worship we continually attempt to open ourselves to God so that we might be obedient to God's will and walk in God's ways."[740] In worship we exalt God with lofty, praise, honor, thanksgiving, prayer and expressions of love and joy. How do we love God with all our heart? By worshiping Him! "Worship ... must be at the heart of the church's life."[741]

In short, offering transforming worship experiences is a fundamental role of a disciple-making church. To do so, we need to be cognizant of those elements extraneous to the fundamental purposes of worship which creep into our worship service routine. All that we do should be evaluated in terms of what worship is supposed to be about and how best to achieve those objectives. In doing so, we should ascertain the spiritual style or styles which best enable members of our congregation to grow spiritually and then create and conduct our worship services in such style(s). Multiple services may be needed for both this reason and other factors relative to attracting people to participate. And finally, to foster the practice of spiritual discipline of worship, we should communicate to our members the purposes and the hows of meaningful worship as a transformational experience in one or combination of venues such as a sermon or

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[739] Fox River Congregational Church, Minutes of the Task Force on Disciple-Making, December 10, 2008, p.3.
[740] John Westerhoff, III, *Living the Faith Community, The Church that Make a Difference* 51 (1985).
[741] *Id.* at 53.

sermon series, a retreat, short term small group and/or an Exploring Church Membership Class. Being a disciple-making church demands that we offer worship services which are pleasing to God, draw people in, and move people along their spiritual growth path.

III. BASICS OF FAITH

The conversion and worship stages of disciple-making commence the process of connecting with God in a personal relationship. Once people have committed to Christ, the question the church needs to address becomes "*What will help them mature in Christ?*"[742]

A. SCRIPTURE: FOUNDATION OF FAITH

A major stepping stone is absorbing the basics of the faith which rest upon the Word of God. From the beginnings of the church, the importance of learning and understanding God's Word has been manifest.

> All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Jesus commissioned the apostles to lead and teach the church after his ascension. The people "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching…." (Acts 2:42) Spiritual guidance by these faithful apostles served as the basis for the ensuing Christian faith and practice.

> The apostles devoted themselves to the ministry of the Word…. *Devotion to biblical preaching and teaching is likewise essential for the vitality of the church today.*[743] (Emphasis supplied.)

Today, we also are called to devote ourselves to the apostles' teaching through the pages of s Scripture. One growing as a follower of Christ needs to seriously know and submit to the authority of Scripture.

As considered earlier in the discussion of spiritual disciplines, God invites us to be his friend. However, it is impossible to be one's friend without knowing him. For there to be a personal relationship between God and his people, there needs to be two-way communication. Through Scripture God reveals who he is, what he is about and what he calls upon us to do, and his message of love and redemption to us in the form of words that constitute a living and transforming force in our lives.

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[742] Linus J. Morris, *The High Impact Church: A Fresh Approach to Reaching the Unchurched* 174 (1993).
[743] *Id.* at 75.

"[W]hen we pray, we speak to God; and when we read the Bible, God speaks to us."[744]

"[I]t is through the Bible that we come to know God,"[745] to enter into a personal relationship with him, and to be friends with him. That is, to pursue an intimate relationship with God, we need to practice the spiritual discipline of spending time coming to grips with his Word in order to understand and experience him. This process begins with learning the basics of faith.

B. PROGRAM CONTENT FOR TEACHING BASICS OF FAITH

One program of particular note for teaching the basics of faith is Alpha. Alpha is a 10 session course which contributes to advancement in several the stages of disciple-making. It provides an excellent overview of the basics of Christianity. In addition, it's outreach focus contributes to the attracting those outside the faith thereby contributing not only to the conversion stage, but also offering opportunity for those church members involved in putting on Alpha to grow in sharing Christ. Furthermore, Alpha functions as a short term small group which contributes to the assimilation stage of disciple-making.

Alpha is not the only program in providing an introduction to the basics of Christianity. Alister McGrath, in his book,[746] utilizes the Apostles' Creed to introduce essential truths about God, the person and the work of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Premised on the fact that the basics of the Christian faith have remained the same for centuries and that such have been summarized in well recognized, acknowledged and accepted documents known as creeds, McGrath sets for the basics of faith using the Apostles Creed. Six chapters, including questions for group discussion, render this book as an excellent source for small group discussion as well as for individual study.

Reverend Lonnie Richardson has raised the concept of a class on Basic Christianity 101. This would be pastor lead. It would be open to all interested persons; believers and unbelievers, current and potential church members, and persons who are already part of the faith. Among other things, it would offer the opportunity for a "free for all" – ask anything and everything one wants to know from the pastor. This class might be conducted in conjunction with Exploring Church Membership Classes (considered in Section V. below).

However, a caveat should be considered. If we commingle church members, unchurched believers, and/or newcomer doubters/unbelievers in the same class or small group, questions and comments from those who are believers may either dominate the discussion and/or raise its level to be unmeaningful to the doubters and unbelievers. This is likely to intimidate them and turn them off. Thus, if we do commingle believers and doubters/unbelievers, we need to be sensitive as to when there is a need for separate breakout sessions for the doubters/unbelievers themselves.

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[744] Aelfric, an early translator of the Bible around 1000 AD as quoted by William Barclay, *Introducing the Bible* 102 (25th ed., 1992).

[745] 2017 National Association of Congregational Christian Churches Annual Meeting and Conference, "Dreaming, Talking, Acting," Congregationalist, p.12, September 2017.

[746] Alister McGrath, *"I Believe:" Exploring the Apostles' Creed* (1997).

The content of the basics of faith stage of disciple-making (as well as deepening faith later on), importantly should include communication of a clear understanding that spending time with God's Word should not be approached casually. *The purpose of spending time with God's Word is to uncover truths that can transform our lives.* It is God revealing himself to us. Spending time with God's Word is a foundational spiritual discipline. It is crucial to our spiritual growth toward a more Christ-like life. Developing an intimate relationship with God results from (i) understanding the purpose(s) of spending time with God's Word (ii) learning and practicing the requisite skills to do so, and (iii) adopting a committed attitude. These are essential elements for meaningful disciple-making experiences.

C. RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CHURCH

It is incumbent on the church to offer opportunities for the not yet converted to explore the rudimentary basics of the Christian faith in helping them to make a decision for Christ. Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume that the degree of knowledge of the basic underlying concepts of Christianity varies considerably across the range of the already members of our congregation. Thus, if the church is to be an effective disciple-making church, it needs to offer learning experiences not only in rudimentary basics of faith for the yet to be converted, but also basic Christianity for newcomers and on-going members wanting to be refreshed on the basics. And, more advanced faith building experiences need to be offered to those who have or are ready to advance beyond the basics of faith stage of disciple-making.

In teaching Scripture, whether at the rudimentary, basic or more advanced level, it is important to recognize that Jesus wasn't satisfied to simply proclaim what was true. He wanted his audience to *act* on what he taught. He taught for a response, for life change, not simply to dispense information. To grow as disciples, Jesus calls for his followers to go beyond simply intellectual agreement or learning. Scripture is not just something to be read and studied. Jesus seeks people who are doers not simply hearers of the word. (See James 1:22) P*ractical teaching,* whether by sermons, small groups, classes or otherwise, *which moves people to action is a primary means God uses to grow our faith.* Apply Scripture to everyday life. Teaching the Word should not simply be about knowing stuff, it is should be about doing stuff. To grow congregants' faith, preach and teach for life transformation. We come to basics of faith disciple-making stage not to amass information, but to uncover truths that can lead to the transforming of our lives.[747]

Various approaches, either separately or in tandem with one another, might be employed to teach the basics of faith. The possibilities include a sermon series, a program for persons exploring church membership, short term and/or relational small group programs, and/or a class room lecture type experience (coupled with a small group component). Whatever the format, proceeding to, within and beyond the basics of faith stage of disciple-making is a foundational element for one to grow toward connecting with God.

However, whatever approaches are utilized to teach the basics of faith, recognize that mature people are unlikely to make life-transforming decisions spontaneously. They need to

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[747] Ed Stetzer, "4 Strategies for Better Discipleship," OutreachMagazine.com, March 13, 2013.

reach an understanding of the basics of faith,[748] especially through learning and understanding Scripture, and the implications for their lives. Allow time for and respect the process and the Holy Spirit to work.

The nature of the approach to communicate the basics of faith can vary depending upon the nature and age of the audience being addressed. However, at some point after conclusion of a basics of the faith program, newcomers tend to get lost in the life of the church. Thus, here again, it is important to get them involved in small groups which can serve not only as a grounding in the basics of faith but also as catalyst in moving people along in their spiritual path. "A new born Christian's spiritual life-style is shaped in the first few months of his or her new life. Nurture is essential at this stage."[749] Even for those persons who believe themselves to be reasonably well versed in the essential principles of Christianity, the basics of faith stage of disciple-making may often have significant appeal as a refresher experience.

IV. PERSONAL SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Christ calls us to follow him, i.e., to become and grow as his disciples. A critical role of the church is to clearly communicate to those who accept Christ as Lord and Savior a fundamental understanding of God's call for us to grow toward a more Christ-like life in our thoughts, feelings and actions. Further, an awareness and understanding needs to be inculcated into every church member that spiritual growth toward a Christ-like life involves connecting in four loving relationships (1) intimately with God, (2) in fellowship with other believers, (3) with both believers and non-believers through serving their needs, and (4) with those outside the faith by witnessing for Christ, sharing the gospel, leading them to Christ and involvement in the Christian community. It is in the pursuit of these relationships that we open ourselves up to God and place ourselves in situations where God is most likely to transform us into the image of Christ thereby becoming people that God intends for us to become. Pursuing and growing in these relationships requires understanding and practicing spiritual disciplines – (several of which are discussed in PART THREE above). This is what disciple-making is all about, what each of those purporting to be a follower of Christ needs to understand and commit to.

It also needs to be understood that practice of personal spiritual disciplines is not simply a onetime occurrence or a collection of on and off periodic occurrences. But rather, the practice of spiritual disciplines evolves over time and continues in some form or forms as part of a life long journey of following Christ.

> Discipleship is the process of... [people becoming] more like Christ in their thoughts, feelings and actions. This process begins when a person is converted and continues throughout the rest of his life.[750]

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[748]Some of the basic faith topics to be considered as content include the loving character of God, the assurance of salvation, the person of Jesus, the role of the Holy Spirit, the authority of the Bible and the importance of the church in people's lives

[749] Linus J. Morris, *The High Impact Church: A Fresh Approach to Reaching the Unchurched* 175 (1993).

[750] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message & Vision* 106 (1995)

A. GROWING THROUGH SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

After a person accepts Christ, the Great Commission commands us to teach him or her to observe what Christ has taught. This embraces teaching and mentoring people in the foundations of the Christian faith, encouraging them, and praying for them so that they may follow Christ more fully.[751] It is the church's responsibility to educate God's people. The objective is for people to grow toward becoming more like Christ in their thoughts, feelings and actions.[752]

It is not uncommon in a church for only a relatively small percentage of the church goers to intentionally, frequently and consistently engage in learning and practicing the spiritual disciplines which are essential for transformation toward living amore Christ-like life. In contrast, many church goers, in actions or words, seem to accept that spiritual growth is virtually automatic once one has accepted Christ as Lord and Savior (conversion), periodically attends worship services, and perhaps becomes a church member. However,

> Spiritual growth does not just happen once you are saved, even if you attend services regularly. Churches are filled with people who have attended services for their entire lives, yet are still spiritual babies. An assimilated member is not the same as mature member.[753]

At least, in part, the widespread failure in significant spiritual growth can be laid at the feet of many churches. Research suggests that for too long churches have promoted sloppy and ineffective efforts for their people to experience God.

> Many churches have no organized plan for following up on new believers and no comprehensive strategy for developing members to maturity. They leave it all to chance, assuming that Christians will automatically grow to maturity if they attend church services. They think all they need to do is encourage people to show up at meetings and the job will get done.[754]

This failure lies in the lack of emphasis on understanding of and practicing spiritual disciplines which provide the substantive content areas for disciple-making experiences.

As considered earlier, the exercise of spiritual disciplines places a person in a situation where God is more likely to cause transformation. It is through the promptings of the Holy Spirit that one is guided through the practice of spiritual disciplines (e.g., worship, prayer, scripture, fellowship, serving, reaching out to those outside the faith, etc.) into the presence of God.

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[751] C. Peter Wagner (editor), *The New Apostolic Churches* 144 (1998).
[752] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message* 106 (1995).
[753] *Id.* at 332.
[754] *Id.*

Experiencing the presence of God is of the utmost importance to the entire church family. Not all churches focus on the value of deeply depending on God's empowering presence. It is crucial for believers to commence a day with a prayer and reflection. The Lord wants to commune and share his love with us. When church members come to deeply appreciate this truth, both their and the church's health and vitality significantly improve.

Experiencing the power presence of God is something all should desire and seek. This raises the question how can a church help its people experience the presence of God.

> The healthy church actively seeks the Holy Spirit's direction and empowerment for its daily life and ministry.[755]

How can the church help its congregation develop reliance on the Holy Spirit rather than depending upon one's own strength and ability? The process can start with preaching and teaching about the Holy Spirit drawing from the various books of the New Testament. A focus on the fruits of the Spirit moves people (kids as well as adults) to thinking about seeking these positive characteristics (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control). The presence of the Holy Spirit needs to be expressed constantly in a variety of situations throughout the various stages of discipleship starting with teaching and preaching.[756] The church should foster persons' understanding, interest in, excitement about and commitment to the practice to engage in spiritual disciplines leading to growth in oneself as a disciple of Christ.

Engaging in personal spiritual disciplines introduces a sense of intimacy and accountability in our faith walks. They tune in our hearts to the heart of God and accentuate personal accountability to God. A person's spiritual discipline life directly correlates to growing in his or her faith. When God speaks to us personally either through his Word or by answering a specific prayer, our faith is strengthened. This is why spiritual disciplines serve as faith catalysts.[757]

A church determined to be an effective disciple-making church looks for ways to coax, bribe or bait everyone from kindergarten up to engage in some spiritual discipline(s).[758]

Spiritual growth, growing toward a more Christ-like life, is within the reach of every believer if he or she develops the habits necessary for spiritual growth. This is accomplished by learning spiritual exercises and then being disciplined enough to do them. However, spiritual growth does not just happen. It requires understanding, commitment and effort. "Becoming like Christ is the results of the commitments we make."[759] An initial basis for understanding a range of spiritual disciplines is offered in PART III. above.

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[755] Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church; 10 Traits of a Vital Ministry* 27 (1999).
[756] *Id.* at 27-29. For a brief discussion of these characteristics see *id.* at 32-35..
[757] Andy Stanley, *Deep and Wide* 117 (2012).
[758] *Id.* at 121. For suggestions, see *id.* at 121-123.
[759] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message* 333 (1995).

Understanding and practicing spiritual disciplines in the pursuit of the four critical relationships grow a person toward more Christ-like life through (1) connecting with God in a loving and intimate personal relationship, (2) connecting with other believers through sharing life together, (3) connecting with others, whether believers or not, by serving their needs and (4) connecting with those outside the faith through evangelism. To reiterate the earlier discussion, the major spiritual disciplines include the following.

(i) *Connecting with God through pursuing a loving and intimate personal relationship with him*

- habit of prayer
- habit of spending time with God's Word (Bible study)
- habit of regular, meaningful and transforming worship
- habit of silence, solitude and listening
- habit of meditation
- habit of reflection
- habit of practicing the presence of God
- habit of fasting
- habit of obeying and discerning God's will
- habit of "Follow Me" wear
- habit of practicing intimacy with God through one's own uniqueness

(ii) *Connecting with Christian believers through, love, caring and sharing life together*

- habit of active participation in Christian fellowship
- habit of an active and regular participation in a small group, both short term and especially relational small groups

(iii) *Connecting with Christian believers and non-believers through serving their physical, emotional and spiritual needs*

- habit of serving the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of others
- habit of discerning and developing one's gift for serving others
- habit of stewardship: the cheerful giving of one's time, talent and treasure (tithing and offerings) to support advancing the mission purposes of the church

(iv) *Connecting with those outside the faith through lovingly witnessing the good news of Christ and bringing them into congregational life*

- habit of reaching out to people
- habit of witnessing for Christ
- habit of sharing the good news of the Gospel
- habit of encouraging others toward accepting Christ as Lord and Savior,

- habit of encouraging others toward participating in Christian fellowship with other believers of in our church
- habit of encouraging others toward maturing in Christian faith within our Christian community

Growing in these spiritual disciplines reflects marks of discipleship as one progresses in following Christ by becoming more him-like in thoughts, feelings and action.

Thus, it is incumbent upon each person purporting and seeking to follow Christ to choose and actively grow in these four fundamental areas through the practice of one or more spiritual disciplines associated with each. In doing so, it is important to recognize that the pursuit of these four relationships interrelate, interact and reinforce one another. Pursuit of one, contributes to the pursuit of the others. Thus, one discipline need not, nor should not, be done in isolation to the exclusion the others.

The practice of spiritual disciplines is not just for the few. They are something within the reach of virtually all. In this context, it is worth repeating what has been previously said.

> Unfortunately, many Christians feel that spiritual maturity is so far out of their reach, they don't even try to attain it. They have this mystical, idealized image of what a mature Christian looks like. Maturity, they believe, is only for "super saints." Some Christian biographies have been partly responsible for this by glossing over the humanity of godly people and implying if you don't pray ten hours a day, move to a jungle, and plan to die as a martyr you may as well forget aspiring to maturity. This is quite discouraging to the average believer, who feels he must be content with being a "second-class" Christian.
>
> *The truth is this: Spiritual growth is very practical. Any believer can grow to maturity if he or she will develop habits necessary for spiritual growth.* We need to take the mystery out of spiritual growth by breaking the components do into practical, everyday habit. ....
>
> Anyone can become physically fit if he or she will regularly do certain exercises and practice good health habits Likewise spiritual fitness is simply a matter of learning certain *spiritual* exercises and being disciplined to do them until they become habits. Character is shaped by the habits.[760]

The goal for each person is to understand, embrace and commit to following Christ by becoming more like him in thoughts, feelings and actions. The secret of following Christ is simple, actually. "It is the intelligent, informed, unyielding resolve to live as Jesus lived in all

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[760] *Id.* at 334.

aspects of his life...."[761] This is achieved through the understanding, learning and practice spiritual disciplines taught and reflected in Christ's life. Spiritual "[d]isciplines such as spending time with God in prayer, studying the Bible, and learning how to listen for God's voice are all part of growing in our relationship with Christ."[762] It is through a faith journey in which spiritual disciplines are regularly practiced that leads one into the presence of God. It is the responsibility of the church to regularly teach and promote the practice of spiritual disciplines, perhaps with initial emphasis on the classic disciplines of prayer, spending time with God's Word, and worship.

B. OBSTACLES TO THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES JOURNEY[763]

Various obstacles can arise to progressing on a journey of spiritual disciplines.

1. Lack of Prayer and Meditation

Spiritual growth through spiritual disciplines requires that the individual possesses a strong desire to strengthen his or her relationship with God. An obvious and common manner this is achieved is by the spiritual disciplines of prayer and meditating on God's Word. However, Christians in today's culture either from the outset possess little interest in the practice of these disciplines or, even if they had some interest, are eventually distracted from continuing these essential activities. Absence of regular prayer and meditation constitute a fundamental obstacle to growing toward a Christ-like through a spiritual discipline journey.

2. Over Reliance on Worship

When a church culture perceives worship as the primary avenue for spiritual growth, it risks having to struggle in guiding individuals to engage in other spiritual disciplines. The testimony of at least most great Christian spiritual leaders is that life-empowering spiritual transformation derives from personal' endeavor for spiritual growth. Worship, by itself lacks the degree of transformational impact on an individual who desires experience God to the fullest. Most commonly, church members view worship as their primary resource for spiritual growth and only marginally participate in other spiritual disciplines. As, long as worship remains the primary perceived reason the church exists, it is more difficult to move people toward engaging in other spiritual disciplines as essential means toward spiritual growth.[764]

3. Complacency[765]

Another obstacle to growing through spiritual disciplines is spiritual complacency. Many are satisfied to have accepted Christ as Lord and Savior being assured that God's grace and salvation have been given to us through our faith in Christ. This message of

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[761] Dallas Willard, The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives 10 (1991).
[762] Upper Room (Daily Devotional), January 5, 2016.
[763] This discussion draws primarily from Stuart R. Merkel, *A Strategy for Employing Individual and Communal Spiritual Disciplines for Spiritual Growth at Gurnee Community Church* 45-50 November 2008.
[764] *Id.*
[765] This section draws primarily on *id.* at 47-49.

assurance, often emphasized, may affirm a sense of satisfaction with having acknowledged faith in Christ. Faith in Christ is enough for salvation and participation in a faith community suffices in fulfilling their spiritual needs.

Further, contributing to this spiritual complacency are widespread cultural distractions involving lots of activity and personal desires. A consumerism culture bombards everyone with the notion that when one is more successful in various endeavors and accumulates more wealth and possessions, life will be much more fulfilling. The drive toward climbing the career ladder, consumerism, sex, etc. is more interesting and satisfying than growing in discipleship through the exercise of spiritual disciplines. Spiritual complacency prevails. In this culture, when people have the culturally ingrained message that everything in life revolves around oneself and his or her wants and secular desires, to be an effective disciple-making church, churches need to become more effective in pointing greater attention and priority towards God.

4. Lack of Role Models[766]

The fourth obstacle in growing disciples is the all too common is the lack of role models who demonstrate the benefits of the participation and commitment to spiritual discipline exercises. However, experience has shown that when these spiritual role models have become visible to the Church, there has been significant movement by others to engage spiritual disciplines. Jesus, the Apostles, then the desert fathers of the fourth century through to the Benedictine movement, and later the meetings of John Wesley offered role models of spiritual disciplines which caught the eyes of believers and followers of Christ. A clear obstacle towards spiritual growth through spiritual disciplines is the lack of discipleship mentors who demonstrate the impact of following Christ through a spiritually disciplined faith journey. Identifying and training persons who can model spiritual disciplines could significantly contribute to greater involvement by others in the church leading to spiritual growth through spiritual disciplines. Furthermore, addressing the exercise of spiritual disciplines in the context of small groups can be particularly effective in bringing people to and supporting them in the practice of spiritual disciplines.

Understanding, recognizing and implementing means to overcome obstacles to church members engaging in spiritual disciplines (whether lack of prayer and meditation, over reliance on worship, complacency, lack of role models and/or other) are vital in elements in growing a disciple-making church.

C. RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CHURCH TO FOSTER MEMBER ENGAGEMENT IN SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

It takes a community to form a disciple. Community provides the resources and relationships needed for disciple formation. We do better in a community which helps us than attempting to follow Christ and practice spiritual disciplines alone. For among other reasons, in community others encourage us and hold us accountable for our intentions. More specifically, it is the community which offers the experiences of deepening, equipping and ministering that

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[766] *I* This section draws primarily on *id.* at 49.

form disciples. It is the community which creates expectations and motivates commitment. It is essential for a church to offer experiences which encourage, equip and support people in developing and ingraining spiritual disciplines which lead to the strengthening and transformation of character as an integral part of their lives. Through community, people can be equipped with the habits needed for spiritual growth, i.e., spiritual disciplines. As Pastor Richardson has emphasized, *"[t]his in not optional. We must do it."*[767] (Emphasis supplied.)

An effective disciple-making church accepts the responsibility of fostering the understanding and commitment of its people to regularly engage in the practice of spiritual disciplines which, by setting aside space for God, can lead to life transformation toward a more Christ-like life and a growing intimate relationship with God. In trying to do so, a church might ponder questions such as those noted here. If and at what age are people taught the importance of private personal participation in spiritual disciplines? How often is this value taught whether by sermon, class or small groups, and when was this last done? How can the weekend be used to reinforce this value on a regular basis? To what extent are devotional and Bible resources made readily available? Considering these and other questions can lead to enhancing the spiritual life of those participating in the life of the church.[768]

A prime responsibility of the church is to *communicate* understanding, *create expectations* and *foster motivations* for persons' commitment to progressing in their Walk with Christ toward being more Christ-like in their thoughts, feelings and actions through the practice of spiritual disciplines.

Furthermore, to better equip members of our church (and others) to grow in their spiritual maturity, it is incumbent that the church, collectively as a body of Christ believers, to enhance existing and develop new means to assist persons in establishing habits that promote spiritual growth through "getting connected" in the four fundamental areas of spiritual disciplines. To be an effective disciple-making church, we need establish *marks of discipleship* and *offer disciple-making experiences* which encourage and better enable people to grow towards a more Christ-like life through the learning and practicing of spiritual disciplines.

The twin disciplines of prayer and spending time with God's Word are practices that should dominate a believer's devotional experience. However, reality is that, despite the affirmation that the Bible is the trustworthy revelation of God's truth, a substantial percentage of Christians are relatively ignorant of its content and hold convictions and values contrary to its teachings. Bible illiteracy prevails over biblically informed.[769] We might reasonably assume, the degree of Bible literacy and its application to Christian living varies considerably throughout our congregation. The lack of widespread participation in Bible oriented programs and the lack of a significant number of Bible study small groups suggest that spending time with God's Word may not be very widespread in our congregation. Although our church has made significant strides in fostering growth in persons Walk with Christ, it needs to continually pursue on-going improvement in our efforts to encourage, equip and support member involvement in the spiritual discipline of daily devotional and Bible study practices.

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[767] Fox River Congregational Church, Minutes of Task Force on Disciple-Making, October 29, 2008, p.2.

[768] Andy Stanley, *Deep & Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend* 123 (2012).

[769] Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship Making Disciples A Few At A Time* 33-34 (2003).

The purposes and the hows of spiritual disciplines as a transformational experience can be offered in one or combination of formats. Alternative means, either singularly or in combination with one another, can be used to create disciple-making experiences. These include sermons, retreats, short term small and relational small group offerings, classes etc.

Finally, it should be emphasized that the disciple-making stage of practicing a personal spiritual discipline(s) (including, e.g., prayer, spending time with God's Word, worship) to connect with God in a loving intimate relationship is not a one time or one place exercise. It is an-on-going stage of discipleship which interrelates with other stages such as participation in small groups, growing in serving others, and growing in sharing Christ. "Spiritual growth is a process that takes time."[770] Practicing spiritual continues through one's lifelong Walk with Christ.

Too often people remain unconvinced of the need for greater personal effort and commitment to spiritual growth in addition to what they are already doing. There is little sense of urgency for spiritual transformation and reaching out to people outside the faith. A role of the church is to imbue people with the urgency of the gospel. Why? People are dying without claiming God's offer of life with him here in this world today and with him eternally after death. Both our and other people's lives today are eternally are at stake. To the extent that our church fails to imbue members of the congregation with an understanding of, commitment to and personal involvement in the various aspects of discipleship (not only in a church context, but also in day-to-day Christian living), as a church we are failing to achieve our fundamental purpose of making disciples. Furthermore, if we don't have people in the pews possessing a greater understanding of what being a Fully Devoted Follower of Christ is all about and being excited about growing in Christ, we are not only failing in our efforts to make and grow disciples, we also are unlikely to be successful in outreaching to other people. Growth comes from members in the pews being inspired, excited and eager to invite others to join with us.[771]

Admittedly, many people have limited discretionary time with jobs, kids and other activities. This is time for which a church competes when seeking to grow disciples. However, the fact that people are actively involved in various areas offers little excuse not do something or short change what they do (i.e., spiritual disciplines) in growing toward a more Christ-like life. People make time for what they consider to be most important to them. The role of the church is to convince them to take steps to explore life's great questions and then begin (or invigorate) progress in their journey with Christ. It is important for each person to engage in spiritual disciplines meaningful to them which can involve lots of fun and fellowship along the way. In short, it is important for church members to explore and meaningfully participate in the selection and practice of spiritual disciplines. A disciple-making church should not buy into the excuse that a person doesn't have enough time.

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[770] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message* 335 (1995).

[771] The problem appears to be especially pervasive with respect to the younger adult members of our congregation. As a group, these members have been particularly absent in the various discipleship and evangelism experiences which the church has offered although there is stirring among some younger members toward increased outreach efforts. If this group is not invigorated in their Walk with Christ, the energy, abilities and devotion needed for enduring success in achieving the mission purposes of our church will be seriously impaired.

D. SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES AND DIFFERING INDIVIDUALS

As discussed earlier, no two people are exactly alike. God created each of us differently and he grows us in different ways. "Our individual uniqueness means we will all experience God's presence and learn to relate to him in different ways."[772] To most effectively experience interactions with God, leading to spiritual transformation toward a more Christ-like life through the practice of spiritual disciplines, one needs to discern the way he or she is constructed.

In following Christ, there are essentials such as prayer, attention to scripture, worship, participation in authentic community, serving others and outreach. However, one does not have to engage in them in exactly the same manner as others do. To grow most effectively in the context of one's own uniqueness, one needs to understand his or her (i) *spiritual pathway*, (ii) *learning style,* and (iii) *personality traits*.

As described and discussed in considerable detail in PART THREE Section I.K., these are clusters of characteristics which are important in discerning how one can best experience God's leading one to transforming spiritual growth To experience regular interactions with God on one's own frequency leading to transformational spiritual growth, one should consider the way he or she is constructed and apply them in one's selection and practice of spiritual disciplines.

All too often a missed element in our efforts to grow toward a more Christ-like life is failure to become aware of our personal attributes noted above and consciously using these attributes in our selection of, learning about and practicing spiritual disciplines. Discerning and applying one's personal characteristics is not only the responsibility of the person seeking to follow Christ, it is also the responsibility of the church to encourage, equip and support its people in doing so.

In recent years, assessing personality styles has become more common. There are a variety of personality assessments available today to help individuals determine their strengths, weaknesses, passions, and skill set. These our church should explore, along with the earlier discussion noted above, and then implement a self-discovery program for use through whatever is determined to be the most appropriate format.

E. STRATEGY TO GROW THE PRACTICE OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Practicing spiritual disciplines in the context of a community or church environment is not a foreign concept in the history of Christianity. The driving force of the monastic movement was the seeking of union with God. Two hundred years later, St. Benedict saw that mutual support of fellow monks was necessary in one's journey towards a union with God. John Wesley observed that, while religious revivals were highly successful, they offered nothing for people to carry them to deeper spiritual depths after the revivals were concluded. Wesley then created meetings in which people gathered in small clusters to examine their lives and be supported by one another in reaching greater spiritual depths. These meetings became the instrument by which

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[772] John Ortberg, *God Is Closer Than You Think* 110 (2005).

preaching and doctrine were brought into spiritual renewal. More recent times have evidenced a renewed passion for promoting personal spiritual practices within the context of a church.[773]

To grow in its effectiveness as a disciple-making church, a church needs to communicate a clear understanding, the fundamental importance, and the benefits of the practice of spiritual disciplines in a person's spiritual growth toward a more Christ-like life. A path needs to be offered for both individuals and groups to directly experience God through the practice such disciplines. The efforts of Richard Foster and of Willow Creek Community Church reflect an increased passion for promoting personal spiritual practices within the context of a church environment. The church needs to create a transforming environment in which practicing spiritual disciplines, both individually and/or in groups, are encouraged and available. The question is how?

Based upon both historical movements and more recent ministries, deeper spiritual growth through practicing spiritual disciplines stems from a church environment offering several elements. The more a church does to create a favorable environment, the more likely its members will become involved and spiritually grow. Reverend Stuart Merkel explores these elements in some detail.[774] Here we will touch upon them only briefly.

(i) Provide a dynamic *Spiritual Formation Resource Center* offering sufficient space set aside for the promotion and practice of spiritual disciplines for both individuals and groups. Rent space if not available in the church facility. Wherever the location, the center should offer a safe, friendly and helpful opportunity for those seeking a deeper experience of God. Take care about the ambience of the physical setting, the visual images, and verbal communications expressing passion for and drawing attention to the value of spiritual disciplines. Make readily available to individuals resources, tools and methods for practicing spiritual disciplines. Also make available mentors or leaders to encourage and support the practice of disciplines as well as fellowship opportunities with others on the same journey. And, provide source of witnesses (personal and through literature) whose lives have been transformed due to the practice of a personal spiritual discipline(s).

Supplementing the role of the Resource Center, whenever the pastor or other church leaders have the opportunity in worship services, other church events, etc., they should draw attention to the value of practicing spiritual disciplines and the opportunities the church offers. And, very importantly, opportunity to offer testimony about of spiritual experiences resulting from the exercise of spiritual disciplines should routinely be given at worship services, other occasions, and through various forms of communication.

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[773] Stuart R. Merkel, *A Strategy for Employing Individual and Communal Spiritual Disciplines for Spiritual Growth at Gurnee Community Church,* 108-110, November 2008.

[774] *Id.* at 110-133.

(ii) Put into place a *spiritual leadership team offering persons, on an individual basis, guidance on deepening spiritual growth through practicing spiritual disciplines.* All believers should be given opportunity to be in a trusting relationship leading to deeper spiritual growth. Finding and equipping a community of spiritual directors is needed to develop spiritual growth of members throughout the church. Perhaps the best qualified to assume this guidance role are those lay persons who are simply further down the path on their own spiritual growth journeys.

(iii) *Create pathways for individuals to experience spiritual discipline activity.* The most effective means are small groups which provide encouragement and accountability for those wanting to explore and experience spiritual growth through practicing spiritual disciplines. Such groups might be classified as Discipline Initiative Groups (DIGs) which are created to provide opportunities for people to walk the spiritual disciplines journey together for a specified period. Each group is organized around one specific discipline. Each participant agrees to practice the discipline daily and meet together weekly for the agreed upon time (e.g., 12 weeks). Participants are instructed in routine or various ways to practice the discipline and are encouraged to also practice daily reading the Word and praying. It is essential to first offer foundational level DIGs on Bible reading, prayer and worship. For those who have made these classical disciplines part of their daily routine, building on these foundational disciplines, DIG opportunities should be offered for other personal spiritual disciplines.

Life transformation usually occurs when people get space from the everyday demands of life so as to better make room for God. This requires intentional, substantial and persistent effort in the learning and practicing spiritual disciplines which open us to God and places us where God is most likely to transform us. An essential role of our church is to encourage, better enable and support people in learning and practicing spiritual disciplines by teaching and offering opportunities to do so.

The more our church can create an environment for the learning and practicing spiritual disciplines, the more likely they will experience growth toward growing toward a more Christ-like life and a closer connection with God.

V. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP IN A COVENANT COMMUNITY: GETTING TO KNOW OUR CHURCH

A. ESSENTIALITY OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

A reality is that too often people have an inadequate sense of the church as a disciples-making community. They perceive church as an option, not a requirement for living as a Christian. Such view reflects an inadequate understanding of the role the church plays in God's redemptive plan.

Scripture paints the church as an essential chosen organism in which Jesus dwells. Paul states in his message to the church at Corinth "You are the body of Christ [corporately] and

individually members of it." (1 Corinthians 12:27) The church is the body of Christ in which he continues his incarnation by dwelling in his people. The church is nothing less than Christ's replacement on earth. Thus, the church is not an optional afterthought for those who name Christ as Lord. Instead, a person's involvement in a local church is central to God's plan for salvation.[775] A believer's role involves doing his or her assigned part in building Christ's church through the spiritual gifts he or she has been given.

Christian life is inherently communal. Unfortunately, today's churches all too commonly permit the secular ideal of individualism and self-personal fulfillment to undermine close community which is essential to making of disciples. The lack of commitment to a covenantal community impairs the development of the followers of Christ.

Furthermore, after the initial rush of excitement and enthusiasm, which occurs when one first comes to accept Christ, such tends to wane if the person does not become connected with a local church. The likelihood of progressing in one's spiritual growth greatly diminishes when a person journeys alone. Developing a church connection is essential. God not only invites persons to belong to him, he also invites them to become a part of his church family, i.e., the local church. This applies not only to new believers, but also to others who seek a new church affiliation for whatever reason.

All persons are welcome to attend church events here at FRCC. Some persons actively participate in some of our ministries and activities while getting to know the church, even before they become actual members of the church. However, prior to becoming a member, at best, only limited progress in one's growth towards a more Christ-like life is likely.

> *Any* organ that is detached from the body will not only miss what it was created to be, it also will shrivel and die quickly. The same is true for Christians who are not committed to any specific congregation.[776]

Thus, it is vitally important for people to move toward church membership after having accepted Christ as Lord and Savior.

When our church gathers a group of newcomers who have become attendees, the next important task is to bring them into the congregation as members. That is, part of the task of assimilating people into our church is the process of moving people from an awareness of our church, to attendance at our church, to becoming active members in our church.

Too many churches treat new believers (and other newcomers) like orphans. There is little or no follow-up. Offering a clear next step for new believers is essential. This involves those experiences of getting to know the church which provide a path to becoming members of the church. Experiences relating to assimilation into church, considered in Section VI. below, may a apply to those not yet church members as well as newcomers and longer term members

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[775] Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship Making Disciples A Few At A Time* 31-32 (2003).
[776] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message* 310 (1995).

of the church. This section here focuses specifically on the essentiality of becoming a church member.

B. IMPORTANCE OF EXPLORING CHURCH MEMBERSHIP CLASS

Many people hop from one church to another shopping for what they best can get out of each. There is a lack of identity with a specific church, a lack of accountability and a lack of commitment. They have yet to learn that Christian life offers more than just *believing and getting*, it also involves *belonging, challenge, and commitment*.[777]

Incorporating new people into a particular church fellowship is not automatic. Unless a church has a systematic process to assimilate and keep people, there will most likely be as many people going out the back door as come in the front door. New believers are unlikely to know what they need to do in order to grow their faith and serve Christ. It is the church's responsibility to take the initiative.

Studies demonstrate that the manner in which people join a church greatly impacts the manner in which they function after they become members. The membership orientation process needs to set the tone and expectation level for all that follows. This can determine newcomer growth as followers of Christ and effectiveness as church members for years to come. The most important class in a church is the Exploring Church Membership Class. The prime time to obtain commitment from members is when they join the church. If little is required for people to join, little should be expected from them later on.[778]

Enabling people persons to get to know our church by providing an opportunity to explore membership through an Exploring Church Membership class is fundamental in moving people from an awareness of our church, to attendance at our church, to becoming actively committed members in our church. It is critical to provide potential new members clear understanding of what growing as a follower of Christ is and what church membership involves. Churches without new membership classes create minimal or no expectations. Those churches with new member classes have a higher retention rate than those which do not.[779]

People joining a church come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. They hold varying expectations including preconceived notions as to how a church should operate. The Exploring Church Membership Class affords a prime opportunity to teach *what our church is about*, the stages of disciple-making to be pursued and *what are the expectations for those who become members*. Failure to do so is likely to deter a person's future growth in following Christ. Furthermore, in the absence of such a class, over time there will emerge disagreements and lack of shared understanding as to the church's basic mission, covenant, principles of Congregationalism, organizational structure, etc.

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[777] *Id.* at 310-11.
[778] *Id.* at 315.
[779] Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples* 158-60 (2006).

Offering information, creating expectations and giving rise to commitment can be achieved by forms other than a class, e.g., time spent with the pastor, participation in an appropriate small group, retreats, etc. However, the approach commonly used and the primary focus here is the Exploring Church Membership class.

The Exploring Church Membership class should be a top church priority, a regularly scheduled event. "Church members and guests alike should hear clearly the importance of the class in the life of the church."[780]

A prime reason why church membership classes do not work well is the absence of one or more of three key elements; (i) *information* about the church, (ii) *expectations* for members of the church, and (iii) a clear *assimilation process* as soon as the class concludes. The absence of any one of these elements has proven to significantly weaken the effectiveness of the class.[781]

However, participation in the Exploring Membership Class does not assume nor is predicated on the attendee having already made a decision to become a member. All are welcome to explore what being a member is all about and to participate in various church activities, without having to commit in advance to joining the church. Consequently, we use terminology other than a "membership class" so as to avoid intimidating and deterring participation by those who are not yet quite sure whether they want to join a church. Such persons are more likely to participate in a class styled other than a membership class so that they don't feel they are committing at the outset to church membership before they are ready. Using less committing terminology enhances the likelihood of people acquiring additional experience which might ultimately lead them to church membership. Thus, here we use the terminology Exploring Church Membership Class rather than Membership Class.

C. PARTICIPANTS IN EXPLORING CHURCH MEMBERSHIP CLASS

In addition to those exploring the possibility of becoming members of our church, who else might or should participate in the Exploring Church Membership Class?

Clearly the person or persons leading the class must be involved. It is strongly suggested that the senior pastor should teach at least a portion, if not all, of the class sessions Prospective members should be able to see his vision for the church, feel his love for its members and hear his or her personal commitment to their care, spiritual nurture and guidance.[782]

Periodic attendance, perhaps one or two sessions, by a representative of various teams and/or other church leaders should be considered. Their primary role would be to establish connections with the potential new members as part of the assimilation process. In addition, it might be appropriate to call on them to contribute when the discussion involves their particular area of activity.

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[780] Thom Rainer, "6 Reasons Your New Member Class Isn't Working," OutreachMagazine.com, January 20, 2019.
[781] *Id.*
[782] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message* 316 (1995).

D. CONTENT OF EXPLORING CHURCH MEMBERSHIP CLASS

In determining the content of the Exploring Church Membership Class, recognize that a well-designed program does not require a long class. The strength of an Exploring Membership Class is determined by whether its content further leads people toward and ultimately committing to meaningful church membership

Too many church membership classes cover the wrong material. They focus on immersion into doctrine, Bible study and spiritual growth. While these subjects are fundamental, they are better covered later as the person continues further progressing through the stages of discipleship. However, for those potential new members, including those not having yet accepted Christ, seeking exposure to the basics of faith, other classes, small group programs and activities would be open to them. The content of an exploring membership class best covers the following areas which focus on better enabling potential new members getting to know the church.

- History of Our Church
- What Is Our Church About: Mission, Vision and Core Values
- A Congregational Church
- Covenant
- Expectations and Responsibilities of Church Membership
- Requirements for Church Membership
- Value of Being a Member of Our Church
- Church Organizational Structure and Affiliations

Putting forth these content areas is not intended to foreclose consideration of additional possibilities.

The listing of eight content areas is not intended to suggest a need for eight separate class sessions. The subject matter of some topics can be combined. An alternative to holding several separate sessions is offering a one day retreat. Several session classes have to potential of losing people. Furthermore, avoid information overload. New or prospective members will retain only a relatively modest amount of information. Focus on the highlights. Provide and/or point participants to resources for future consumption.[783]

1. History of Our Church

Those exploring possible membership in our church most likely are aware that FRCC is a relatively recent church plant. In getting to know our church, they are naturally curious about where the church came from, where it fits in the context of denominational status, and how it has progressed to where we are today. This is a positive exciting story to tell which can be enthusiastically presented. Doing so sets the stage for exciting things to happen.

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[783] Thom Rainer, "6 Reasons Your New Member Class Isn't Working," OutreachMagazine.com, January 20, 2019.

2 What Is Our Church About: Mission, Vision and Core Values

Newcomers visiting and those considering joining a church want to know what this particular community of faith believes and practices. A church interested in attracting and retaining new people needs to be upfront and clear what it is about. Similarly, current members need to be repeatedly refreshed and recommitted. In a Congregational church, this requires bringing to the fore the church's mission, vision and core values.

A clear mission statement is a foundational necessity for a disciple-making church. To be an effective disciple-making church, we must establish, express and embrace the purpose(s) to which God calls us both as individuals and as a church. The Mission Statement reflects a common commitment as to what the church is about. Striving to achieve our mission is why we exist, both individually and collectively as a church. This must be communicated to and understood by newcomers exploring whether to become members of our church. The Exploring Church Membership Class should create the expectation that persons joining our church will contribute to the church's efforts in carrying out its mission.

3. A Congregational Church

FRCC is a Congregational church. Although Congregationalism is not a foundational element in a person's spiritual formation, it is firmly rooted in the Bible. And, it is the way we "do church." It supports and reinforces FRCC in its core mission of effective disciple-making. Thus, being aware of and, at least in an introductory way, understanding the history, tradition, essential principles and current relevance of the Congregational Way constitutes an important element in getting to know our church.

The nature of Congregationalism possesses attractive elements to today's non-church goers. Understanding the basic principles of Congregationalism provides an additional element in evangelistic efforts as well as motivating those in the Exploring Membership Class to commit to church membership.

Our church has adopted its understanding of the essential principles of Congregationalism.[784] Its Preamble states

> Every church must determine in some manner the way it goes about "doing church." Each church is a bit different and each Congregational church may hold somewhat different views as to what constitutes the Congregational Way. As a Congregational church and as a congregation which has reflected upon the Congregational Way, our way of "doing church" is reflected in the following Statement of the Essential Principles of Congregationalism. These principles are commonly understood, shared, accepted and adopted by our Congregation as a whole. They provide a common and shared expression as to our

[784] Fox River Congregational Church, "The Congregational Way: Essential Principles of Congregationalism" (adopted June 22, 2003) (attached as Appendix B).

> understanding of the Congregational Way by which we seek to carry out our mission and reach our vision - that is, the way we "do church."

All church members, whether newcomers or otherwise, should understand the nature of how our church "does" church. Thus, this is an important element in the content of our Exploring Church Membership Class.

Unfortunately, as our church has grown, a significant number of current church members lack an awareness and/or basic understanding of Congregationalism. This defect needs to be remedied to better current members getting to know our church. Currently, we have no follow-up program for current members, other than using the basics contained in the above noted statement for the prospective members' class. However, a few possibilities might be considered to serve as the basis for such program.

- The National Association of Congregational Christian Churches awarded *The Congregational Way of Life: What: It Means To Live And Worship as a Congregationalist* (1972) by Arthur Rouner, Jr. as a prize winning manuscript. This book contains a study guide.

- There is a substantial body of information on Congregationalism, both the history and the Essential Principles of the Congregationalism, which are included in the FRCCC *Vision: Building for the Future of Our Church.* These could be updated to reflect newer sources. Such could be developed into a short series program on Congregationalism to serve as either an alternative or supplement to other sources.

- The National Association of Christian Congregational Churches (NACCC) also put out *The Art and Practice of the Congregational Way: A Church Guide* (2014) by Reverend D. Elizabeth Mauro. This relatively short booklet is particularly suitable for an individual to read. However, it lacks a discussion guide to assist a leader in a small group context. The booklet also contains a list of resources helpful to churches in their practice of Congregationalism.

- Congregationalism 101 (Steven Peay) consists of a one hour presentation on the history, personalities and covenantal nature of Congregationalism as well as emphasizing the themes of local autonomy and responsibilities in the larger fellowship of Congregational Churches.

The availability of other programs and written sources suitable for small group discussion might also be explored to provide content for the Exploring Church Membership Class.

4. Covenant

As a Congregational church and as expressed in our core values,

> We are committed to the Congregational Way both in general and as to each of the Essential Elements of Congregationalism as adopted by our Congregation.
>
> Our Pilgrim/Puritan forebears sought to be a "City on the Hill" model as how to do church. As modern day heirs to this heritage, we are committed to serving as a role model and challenge for other churches as to "doing church" in the Congregational Way to the glory of God.[785]

However, to do so both new as well as current members of the congregation need a good grasp on what Congregationalism is all about and practice its teachings.

Congregational churches are founded on the concept of covenant. As a Congregational church, we are a body of believers gathered on the basis of a covenant. The concept of covenant signifies a relationship based on commitment, which includes both promises and obligations possessing the qualities of reliability and durability. A covenant is a formal agreement between two parties with each assuming some obligation. The covenants between God and people are covenants of divine favor or grace. When we covenant, it is a sacred promise with God and each other. And, owning our Covenant here at FRCC embraces acceptance of Christ as Lord and Savior.

The Covenant is a solemn/sacred agreement, a binding promise, by the new member establishing a relationship with God and with one another in our faith community. In our covenant, we promise to one another to remember God's promises to us and our promise to serve God. Owning/committing to the covenant is fundamental to becoming fully a part of our faith community. Becoming a member is not just about the new member owning his or her commitments. When performing the ritual in the context of a worship service, the current members commit to the newcomer as well.

The Exploring Christianity Class needs create the understanding and expectation in those persons seeking to join the church that they are committing to personally embarking on a life time transforming journey striving to grow toward a more Christ-like life and what this involves. They should be challenged to do so. It is an exciting adventure. Invite them to join other members on our disciple-making journey together. By owning the Covenant and becoming a member of our church, one makes sacred commitments to both God and to one another. Failing to establish expectations or creating only low-level expectations lead to low level results. In contrast, challenge can be exciting, motivational, and beneficial.

Such expectations (considered in Section 5 immediately below), at first, might seem overwhelming. However, this can be alleviated by making clear that spiritual growth is a step by

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[785] Fox River Congregational Church Statement of Core Values.

step process over time. One cannot do everything first. Furthermore, different people start from a different places and travel at a different pace. It is expected that spiritual growth will take time and that some will move at a different pace than others. What is important is committing to commence one's Walk with Christ. The recommended Covenant expresses one's personal commitment to growing toward a more Christ-like life. Growth takes time, step by step. The Mission and the Covenant establish the foundational expectations toward which the person owning the covenant commits to grow. To grow in these expectations, the Stages of Discipleship offer the process and guide.

Owning (committing to) our church Covenant is the final step in becoming a member of FRCC. It is a personal commitment. It is the responsibility of the church to clearly communicate that owning our church Covenant embraces the understanding of and committing to participating in the disciple-making process.

The question might be raised, why isn't simply owning the mission of the church enough. This would commit the person to support the church's efforts in making-disciple, but does not commit the person individually to do so. It is critical that the individual church member commit personally to growing toward a more Christ-like life.

Not every person, new or current member, will want to get on board, but that's okay. Our goal as a church is not simply to maintain or increase membership. But rather, our purpose is grow disciples. Giving people more time in deciding to join us and/or letting them go with our good wishes and prayer is a valid option.

> When the goal is growth in responsible discipleship, letting people leave is a valid option. What is not an option is to compromise the beliefs and values of the congregation in the futile attempt to keep everyone happy.[786]

Instead engage in teaching, conversations and/or other discussion which may lead to future understanding and acceptance.

Focusing on the church's mission and the individual's personal commitment, as evidenced by owning the covenant, must remain center stage. In doing so, the purpose of the church needs to be repeated and repeated again (by preaching, teaching, discussion, banners, inclusion in church bulletins, newsletters, website etc.) for reinforcement of not only newcomers, but also for current members. Permeate the culture of the church with what the church is about and what Christ is calling each of us to do. Every new and on-going member of the church should be able to verbalize, at least in essence, the mission purpose and covenant of our church. In Exploring Church Membership Class, worship services, announcements, church events, short term and relational small groups, team meetings and other church activities, continually reiterate and emphasize that FRCC is a disciple-making church, the covenant owned by each member, and what these call for us to do.

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[786] Michael W. Foss, *Power Surge: Six Marks of Discipleship for a Changing Church* 122 (2000).

5. Expectations and Responsibilities of Church Membership

Assimilation rates in American churches have been quite poor over the past 25 years. Even when people are coming in the front door, many others are leaving through the back door. Retention rates are poor. Either people don't stay for very long or, if they do, they are relatively inactive.[787] Churches are finding it difficult to motivate members to serve, pray, share their faith, attend worship services, etc. Why?

A common pattern has emerged in many of the more effective disciple-making churches. These churches reflect higher attendance rates of members and lower dropout rates. The basic theme underlying these results is that establishing higher expectations result in more positive behavioral patterns.[788] The prime reason for lack of member involvement in church life and the accompanying slow if any significant personal spiritual growth is that persons were allowed to become members of the church with little no expectations placed upon them and no commitments were obtained from them. The essence of church membership is the willingness to commit to those things that the church is about. Thus, communicating expectations and ultimately obtaining commitment are crucial objectives when getting people to know our church.

FRCC Mission and Covenant establish the general foundational expectations for members. When a person joins our church, a Congregational church, he or she owns the covenant which commits him or her to a relationship of mutual obligations. The question becomes whether, deriving from the Mission and Covenant, more specific expectations need to be established and communicated to those exploring church membership as well as to all current members. For the covenant relationship to be a meaningful, it should give rise to expectations with respect to consistent and sincere participation in such areas as worship services, active involvement in church activities, fellowship, continuing efforts to grow in one's faith (e. g., prayer life, attention to Scripture, and worship), serving others, supporting and nurturing others both inside and outside of church, participation in small groups, etc. Establishing expectations for church membership would encourage both newcomers and current members to better grow in their Christian walk.[789] Failure to establish expectations does not give rise to realistic anticipation of being a highly effective disciple-making church.

To attract and grow more disciples, raise expectations. Thus, the question becomes what specific expectations, supplementing the commitments made in owning the Covenant, should be established, communicated and committed to. Thom Rainer[790] sets forth a common pattern of expectations in those churches that are more effective in disciple-making. These include the following.[791]

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[787] Thom Rainer, "4 Keys to Closing the Back Door," OutreachMagazine.com, July 16, 2015.

[788] *Id.*

[789] Jon S. Hanson, *A Think Piece—"Congregational Way" as a Basis for the Vision of the Future of the First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa* IV-44 (1995).

[790] A writer, researcher, speaker, and current president and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources, an entity of the Southern Baptist Convention.

[791] This discussion draws substantially upon Thom Rainer, "6 Characteristics of Disciple-Making Churches," OutreachMagazine.com, December 6, 2015; "4 keys to Closing the Back Door," OutreachMagazine.com, July 16,

a. Mandatory Point of Entry Class

Many effective disciple-making churches have discovered that church membership should be conditioned on participation a mandatory point of entry class. Such class not only provides factual information about the church but more importantly communicates expectations among potential new members not only with respect to the church but also with respect to themselves. Members are expected to become involved and stay involved. In the context of FRCC, such entry class is referred to as an Exploring Church Membership Class. However, as noted earlier, the content of such class may also be offered in an alternative format.

b. Relational Connections: Involvement in a Small Group

We are relational creatures. Local congregations are no exceptions. People are more likely to stay connected to the church if they have developed meaningful friendships and relationships with others in the church. People stay connected more to other people than they do to an organization. Especially, as discussed elsewhere in this resource book, a concerted on-going effort must be made to get prospective and current members involved in small groups. Although the form and location of the small groups can vary, the key is to get people connected to others on a regular basis.

> When people move to a group, they stick. They stay. They have a support network, a community of fellow Christ followers. They continue in the life of the church. They are still being transformed.[792]

Small groups play a vital role in a person growing toward a Christ-like life in thoughts, feelings and actions. Those participating in small groups are more likely to remain in the church and spiritually grow as they develop meaningful friendships with others in the church.

However, significant movement to small groups will not just happen on its own.

> Discipleship of new believers does not just happen. It must be intentional. There must be a heartbeat and a plan to make it happen.[793]

Vibrant churches often use some form of small group for unassimilated new believers. They either match them with an existing group of believers or create a new group.

The Exploring Church Membership Class (or other form of orientation and instruction) needs to clearly communicate to prospective members the fundamental importance of

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2015 and Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process of Making Disciples* 2006.153-54

[792] Thom S. Rainer & Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process of Making Disciples* 154 (2006).

[793] *Id.* at 157.

participation in a small group, the expectation that they will do so, and assist them in becoming involved with a small group.

c. Worship Services

Worshipping God is a pillar of a Christian life. Christ attended the synagogue regularly. He provides the model. Attending worship is an important manifestation of our dependence upon God.[794] Members are expected to attend a corporate worship service regularly. This is the time and opportunity for the people to gather for the preaching of the Word and to worship God together.

d. Spending Time with God's Word

Church members are expected to regularly *spend time with God's Word.* This may take the form of daily devotional time and/or Bible study. Research has shown that the spiritual discipline of personal Bible study provides the clearest indicator that a person is growing spiritually. To be an effective disciple-making church, a church should exhort, encourage, create expectation, provide resources and offer experiences for the members to be involved at least in frequent, Bible study.

One approach is to offer an ongoing class allowing persons to enter at any point. Historically such classes have been referred to as adult Sunday School classes. As emphasized elsewhere in this document, for FRCC, emphasis needs to be is placed on utilization of a small group format (whether short term or relational small group) on spending time with God's Word. Regardless of the format used, the point is to get members connected to a common group of people for regular spending time with God's Word in addition to their personal devotional, study and prayer time with Scripture. This is another expectation to be communicated to all members of the church as well as doing so in the Exploring Church Membership Class.

e. Ministry Activity

Effective disciple-making churches are intentional about assimilating persons into the life of the church. Prospective and current members are encouraged and are expected to be involved in the ministry of the church. The expectation is that members are to engage in activities that cause them to look beyond themselves whether it be some form of serving, evangelism efforts, enhancing Christian relationships and/or the exercise of spiritual disciplines in a manner beneficial to others. This might involve specific tasks and/or membership on church teams. It should be made clear to prospective members, that all members are welcome to volunteer and to serve on one of the several church teams, Members involved in ministry feel connected to the church as well as developing personal relationships with other church members.

f. Other Expectations

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The above discussion of expectations for members does not exhaust the list of responsibilities. Regardless of variations in phrasing, various expectations common among

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[794] Lonnie Richardson, "Managing the Faith: Spiritual Life Priorities," January 4, 2004 (sermon).

Congregational churches include a sincere Christian faith, participation in worship services and church meetings, regular prayer, participation in the life and work of the church according to talents God has given to us, seeking and following the guidance of God in the affairs of daily life including business life, caring for the poor, struggling, lonely, weak and sick, promoting the spirit of harmony within the Church, maintaining strict watch over one's personal character, seeking to bring the love of Christ and the joy of fellowship to others, etc.[795] These too should be considered when establishing those responsibilities and expectations of church membership.

g. Objections to Creating High Creating Expectations

There of those who would object to forthrightly setting high expectations especially for prospective and new members. Wouldn't setting high expectations deter new members and perhaps lead to an exodus of current members.

> But research shows just the opposite. Higher expectations get more positive behavioral patterns. *People want to be a part of something that makes a difference If you expect little, you will get little. If you raise the bar of expectations, most members will respond positively.* And as more church members get involved in open groups, deeper studies, corporate worship, ministry, missions and daily Bible study, they will become more effective disciples for Christ. And thus, churches will grow stronger and become healthier.[796] (Emphasis supplied.)

People tend to live up to or down to expectations. If our expectations are low, we should not be surprised that we are partly responsible for members conducting themselves accordingly. Instead, raise and communicate specific expectations for church members which flow out of our foundational Mission and Covenant. Provide the opportunities and of means to meet them.[797] Higher expectations give rise to more positive behavioral patterns. To make more disciples, raise not only the expectations of the church, but more importantly raise the expectations of individual persons for themselves.

Furthermore, similar to the above discussion on committing to the expectations of the Covenant, hereto these more specific expectations might at first seem overwhelming. However, such concerns can be alleviated by making clear that spiritual growth is a step-by-step process. One is not expected to do everything immediately or at one time. Spiritual growth occurs over time at a different pace for different people. What is important is committing to the effort and getting started.

Set expectations. Challenge both current as well as and prospective members to commit to and work toward meeting them. Make clear the stages of discipleship. It is not expected that all needs to be done at once. But, know where to go and commit to the process.

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[795] Henry David Gray, "What It Means to Be a Member of a Congregational Church" (brochure).

[796] Thom Rainer, "6 Characteristics of Disciple-Making Churches," OutreachMagazine.com, December 6, 2015.

[797] Jon S. Hanson, *A Think Piece—"Congregational Way" as a Basis for the Vision of the Future of the First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa* IV-44 (1995).

6. Requirements of Church Membership

Becoming a meaningful member of a church involves more than simply saying "I want to join." Careful attention needs to be given to what the requirements ought to be for our church. Seven are offered here for consideration.

First, one must sincerely cross the bridge and accept Christ as Lord and Savior. This is the basis of a Christian church. This is what we are about. Diluting our church with non-believer members would undermine and likely ultimately destroy the church's willingness and ability carry out its mission. Thus, to become a member, one must *personally and genuinely profess Christ as Lord and Savior.*

Second, as considered above, FRCC is a Congregational Church which is founded on a covenant. A covenant is foundational to the Congregational Way. Thus, *owning/committing to our covenant* is a condition of church membership. By owning our Covenant, a person professes Christ as Lord and Savior. Consequently, even if he or she has not done so previously, owning the Covenant meets both the first and second condition for church membership.

Third, the earlier discussion focuses on the importance of a church establishing and highlighting a list of expectations for church members including but not limited to the foundational expectations in the Covenant. This raises the question as to whether there should be *additional questions calling for affirmative responses* as a requirement for joining the Church. To heighten the awareness, obligations and expectations of sincere personal commitment, either prior to or during owning the Covenant ritual before the Congregation, each prospective member individually should be asked a question or series of questions the responses to which affirm the person's understanding of the Covenant and the commitments which he or she is undertaking.[798]

Or, perhaps the following single question would suffice. "Do you understand and promise to embark upon and continue to proceed through the various Stages of Discipleship?" If one understands the stages and affirmatively commits to them, he or she has well positioned oneself on the path to growing toward a more Christ-like life. This could prove to be a most impactful and very valuable condition for church membership. Whether in response to a series of questions. or the question immediately quoted, reflecting understanding and commitment, an individual's affirmative response by a prospective new member should be a condition of membership.

Fourth, the commitments made should be solemnized by *signing the Covenant* by both the new member and the pastor. This needs to be done either prior to or during the new member ritual held in the presence of the congregation.

Fifth, *participation in a mandatory exploration church orientation process*, is a crucial disciple-making requirement for a church membership. It is anticipated that the primary format here at FRCC will be the Exploring Church Membership Class. However, an alternative format might be appropriate so long as participation is mandatory and it fulfills the requirements

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[798] For example, Do you intend to open yourselves to the Word of God through the study of the Bible and otherwise? Do you promise to regularly participate in the Church's worship services.?[798] Perhaps other specific questions arising from the mission, the Covenant or set of duties of Church membership might be employed.

applicable to the new membership class. Becoming a member is more than simply completing a card or walking down an aisle. When one owns the Covenant, he or she is making a serious commitment both to God and to other church members. One must have a basic understanding of what is involved and what the expectations are. The Exploring Membership Class should establish expectations among potentially new members not only with respect to the church but also with respect to themselves. Low expectations lead to poor results.

Sixth, toward the end of the class, prospective new members should be requested to write a confidential letter to him or herself describing where he or she wants to be in his or her Walk with Christ after a certain period of time (e. g., six months or a year after becoming a member of the church) possibly using a self-assessment spiritual growth survey as a reference point. This request can be posed at the time the pastor he asks each class member whether he or she wants to join the church. The letter would be kept at the church office and mailed to the individual at the end of the specified period. The content will not be seen by a person other than the letter writer. This may encourage renewed and/or increased commitment to a person in his or her Walk.

Seventh, as a condition of membership a prospective member participates in a new member ritual in the presence of the congregation.[799] Consideration should be given as to how the new membership ritual might be enhanced to more meaningfully convey, to both new members and the congregation as a whole, the import of what is being covenanted to, thereby enhancing commitment in their on-going Walk with Christ. It is important to avoid simply a rote group recitation of the Covenant by those who are about to become new members. There should some individual expression of their understanding and commitment. That is, in some manner, *each new member should own the Covenant individually.*

Also, during the new member ritual, prior to owning the covenant perhaps the prospective members should be asked to respond to the question "Do you understand and promise to embark upon and continue to proceed through the various Stages of Discipleship?" Raising such a question(s), would also be appropriate for existing members when they reaffirm the Covenant, not as a condition of continued membership, but rather as a reminder and encourager to reengage in one's own spiritual walk.

A contrary perspective should also be considered. FRCC's current new member ritual, before the congregation, simply requires each prospective new member to affirm the Covenant as their own. They do so by reciting the Covenant in conjunction with the congregation as a whole. This current ritual possesses a couple of advantages. First, it is simple and straightforward. Second, there maybe some individuals who might feel intimated by standing before a large number of people and individually having to respond to questions and recite the Covenant. Thus, consideration is needed about modifying our new member ritual to enhance impact on person's understanding and commitment in progressing in growing more Christ-like in thoughts, feelings and actions.

The discussion in this section of existing and possible additional requirements for church membership is not intended to exclude consideration of further appropriate requirements.

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[799] There might be extreme circumstances preventing a physical presence. In such situations, this requirement could be waived.

7. Value of Being a Member of Our Church[800]

In the past, people joined churches routinely. It was expected. Today, this is no longer true. Now, membership is a matter of commitment. Thus, to motivate people to join a church, the content of the Exploring Church Membership Class needs to address and demonstrate the value they will receive in return for the commitment they make. There are numerous benefits flowing from becoming a member of a church including the following posed by Rick Warren:

- Membership identifies a person as a genuine believer.
- Membership provides a spiritual family to support and encourage them in their Walk with Christ.
- Membership affords a place to discover and use their gifts in ministry.
- Membership affords spiritual protection of godly leaders.
- Membership provides the accountability which people need to grow.

Furthermore, a church provides benefits which cannot be found elsewhere.

- Worship helps focus on God and prepares one spiritually for the week ahead.
- Fellowship provides support and encouragement of other Christians in meeting life's problems.
- Discipleship fortifies one's faith by learning God's Word and applying biblical principles to one's life.
- Ministry offers opportunities to discover and develop one's talents in the serving of others.
- Evangelism aids in fulfilling one's mission of reaching friends and family for Christ.

Position and present the church as a family rather than as an institution. A church provides roots. Church is an extended family, a place where one belongs and is cared for. This is likely to strike a responsive chord in those longing for belonging.

Furthermore, focus on the exciting awareness that church is more than Sunday morning worship. It is connecting to God through living and growing with others through a variety of ministries. Spend some time engaged in a mutual listening and revealing Christ in our lives, beyond formal worship.

8. Church Organizational Structure and Affiliations

Understanding the organizational structure of our church is an important factor in becoming assimilated into the life of the church. Knowing where and what is happening better enables a person to match his or her interests, passions and abilities with church offered opportunities and experiences. Exploring Church Membership Class review of church structure, with emphasis on the various teams, serves to enhance a newcomer's desire to be connected into

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[800] This section draws primarily on Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message* 312-14 (1995).

the life of our church. At the end of this session, distribute a questionnaire on which class participants indicate the types of activities in which they are interested with respect to current and/or possible future church or other activities. This offers a basis for church follow-up efforts to assimilate people into the life of the church. The conclusion of the Exploring Membership Class must serve as the beginning of the assimilation process. "The church must have a clear process to make certain new members get connected, get involved and get committed."[801]

Either in the context of the discussion of FRCC being a Congregational church or here in the context of our church structure, reference to affiliation with the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches and the Wisconsin Congregational Association, and collaboration with churches of various denominations may also spur greater interest among both prospective and current members.

E. REASONS FOR INEFFECTIVE EXPLORING CHURCH MEMBERSHIP CLASS[802]

An effective new member class engenders front-end assimilation. It fosters people becoming involved in ministry and/or participation in small groups. Unfortunately, however, some classes are not effective. These are likely to embrace one or more defects which are subject to remedial adjustments.

- *The Class Is Not a Priority* – Exploring Church Membership Classes need to be a church priority. Church leadership, members and newcomers alike should hear clearly the importance of the class in the life of the church. Failure to do so tends to result in lack of committed regular participation by those exploring church membership.

- *Missing Content Ingredients* –Every new member class should include three key elements: (i) information about the church; (ii) expectations for members and (iii) a clear assimilation process as soon as the class concludes. Absence of one or more of these ingredients significantly weakens the effectiveness of the class.

- *Information Overload* – New or prospective members most likely will only retain a modest amount of information. Commonly, many church membership classes attempt to share information about the church instead of hitting highlights and leading class participants to sources of information for future consumption.

- *Class Lasts Too Long*. While this issue is certainly related to the number of hours a class lasts, it is more tied to the number of days a class continues. Classes that go beyond a single day to tend to lose people. A morning or day retreat holds promise of greater success.

- *Class Is Boring* – Class leaders needs to be good communicators. Different delivery approaches, such as adding video elements, help. Offer enough breaks.

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[801] Thom Rainer, "6 Reasons Your New Member Class Isn't Working," OutreachMagazine.com, January 20, 2019.

[802] This Section draws primarily on Thom Rainer, "6 Reasons Your New Member Class Isn't Working," January 20, 2019 OutreachMagazine.com.

- *Lack of Follow-Up Assimilation Process* – The conclusion of the new member class should. serve as the beginning (or perhaps continuation) of the assimilation process. Simply communicating information is not sufficient. The church must have a clear process to make certain new members get connected, get involved, and get committed.

> New member classes are vital to the health of a church [and to the spiritual growth of those becoming members of the church]. But these classes are only effective if the commitment, priority and effort of the church leadership is evident on an ongoing basis.[803]

F. MAKE NEW MEMBERS FEEL SPECIAL

Becoming a member does not necessarily make a person feel that he or she belongs. People deserve more than just a handshake after the service at which they join. Once people join they need to be welcomed and wanted. They need to be specially recognized, affirmed and celebrated by the congregation. They need to feel special. In a small church this might be done informally. But, as a church grows, create some initiation rituals that say you are one of us; perhaps a new members dinner, perhaps informal coffee times at the pastor's or other members' homes. Send cards on birthdays, their first anniversary as members and other special times.[804]

In short, there are several elements involved in newcomers getting to know and becoming members of our church. An Exploring Church Membership Class is necessary to communicate basic information about Fox River Congregational Church. The content of the class would do well to embrace the following areas;

- history of our church
- what is our church about: mission, vision and core values
- a congregational church
- covenant
- expectations and responsibilities of church membership
- requirements for church membership
- value of being a member of our church
- church organizational structure and affiliations.

Especially the Mission and Covenant need to be understood and committed to as a condition of membership. Expectation levels need to be established and understood for those embarking on the road to follow Christ. And, members need to understand the Congregational Way as the manner in which we "do" church.

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[803] *Id.*

[804] Warren at 320-24 Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message* 320- 24 (1995).

VI. ASSIMILATION INTO THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

A. NEED FOR ASSIMILATION

The disciple-making growth process is just beginning rather than ending or plateauing when one becomes a member of a church. Membership implies more than belonging. Rather, membership connotes deep connectedness and a responsibility towards the others.

> Assimilation is moving an uninvolved person to a place where he or she is an indispensable part of the church family…[805]

Assimilation is a crucial and on-going stage of disciple-making.

As newcomers are drawn to the church, through evangelism efforts or otherwise, it is essential to assimilate them into the life of the church as quickly as possible to deter their drifting away or falling into a non-involvement rut which sidetracks their spiritual growth development. And, importantly, assimilation into the life of the church enhances the likelihood of progressing on the path toward a more Christ-like life. A church cannot grow disciples of those persons who drift away from the church or those who remain in the rut of a non-spiritual growth path. Thus, to be an effective disciple-making church, there must be an intentional assimilation strategy which brings people to and continue in church membership, and fosters and deepens relationships.

Furthermore, although assimilation is normally thought of in the context of those persons growing toward becoming a member of a church and/or persons who have newly become members, the concept of assimilation also applies to current members who have yet to become active participants in the life of the church.

B. FOSTERING FRIENDSHIPS: -- SMALL GROUPS

Key to assimilation is the more friends a newcomer makes (which is also true for existing church members), the more likelihood that he or she will become involved. Although people try out a church for a variety of reasons, they stay primarily for one of two reasons – friendships and meaningful ministry involvement.[806]

It is an on-going challenge to connect and assimilate newcomers, as well as current members, into meaningful, transformational relationships in the church. So, what offers the most

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[805] Ed Stetzer, "8 Signs Someone Is Truly Involved in Your Church," OutreachMagazine.com. August 18, 2015.
[806] Linus J. Morris, *The High Impact Church: A Fresh Approach to Reaching the Unchurched* 172 (1993).

promise for successful assimilation? The question the church should ask is "*What will help newcomers become a part of this church.*"[807]

Most importantly, we need to recognize and act upon the fact that it is harder for people to develop relationships in a large group. As considered elsewhere in this document, participation in a small group is foundational in one's growing as a follower of Christ. Among other things, small groups engender finding and deepening friendships as well as involvement in other church ministry activities. A small group is the best place to build friendships and assimilate newcomers into the life of the church. Once a person becomes involved in a small group, he or she is likely pursue an on-going relationship with the church. Involvement in small groups is critical.

Small groups of varying types and focus are inherently involved in the assimilation process. Drawing newcomers into existing small group is one approach. Personal invitation by the group, perhaps due to a reference by someone involved in the overall church assimilation effort, is one approach.

Another approach is structuring the Exploring Christianity Membership Class in the form of a small group. At the conclusion of the class, the participants might evolve into a small group. This is something that should be encouraged toward the end of the class.

Invite newcomers to an introductory welcoming and information program as to the nature and specific small group opportunities available. Here newcomers would be encouraged and invited to participate in some small group, in a voluntary serving ministry, a ministry team meeting and/or other church events.

The recommended new Assimilation Team (see PART SIX, Section VIII,C.4. below) can create short term small groups for newcomers and invite newcomers to participate in experiencing a dry run/test drive of a small group experience. The group leader guides them through a series of get-to-know-you questions and provides them vision for becoming a member of a relational small group down the road. The test drive approach has been successfully employed in a successful large church (over 10,000 attendees) in which the repeated responses of persons participating has been that they initially believed that there was no way they would stick, but a year later they felt part of a family.[808]

Another approach to incorporating small groups into the newcomer assimilation process is to draw their attention to on-going short small groups whose programs might appeal to a newcomer.

The *Alpha* program offers a somewhat different approach to assimilation. *Alpha* is primarily a highly successful evangelism effort. Not only does *Alpha* teach an introduction to the Christian faith, through participation in the program people become comfortable with a specific local church even before they come to accept Christ. *Alpha* is friendship based. The program involves of several weekly interactive gatherings designed for people to freely explore the basics of Christian faith in a friendly, relaxed and non-threatening environment. Each weekly

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[807] *Id.* at 171.

[808] Andrea Bailey Willits, "Test Drive a Small Group," OutreachMagazine.com, April 3, 2012.

gathering includes a *free meal*, friendly relaxed conversation and a chance to get to know others. Then there is a *short talk* which looks at a different aspect of the Christian faith each week. This is followed by a time of *discussion in small groups*, where everyone is welcome to contribute their opinion and ask questions. Guests usually remain in the same small groups for the duration of the course so they can get to know each other, continue discussions and deepen friendships. The emphasis is upon exploration and discovery in a relaxed and informal environment. Guests can ask any questions and discuss opinions freely with others. Group leaders serve to facilitate the discussion rather than pronounce or teach. Guests are encouraged to explore and reach their own conclusions. In short, Alpha not only offers opportunity to develop friendships, it affords an opportunity to explore the basic as of faith, facilitates assimilation into the church and may serve a key role leading to person's conversion.

Short Term Small Groups can play an effective and critical role in assimilating newcomers (and others) into the life of the church and embarkation on further progress in one's own spiritual growth on his or her Walk with Christ. When a person tests the relationship experience in a short term small group, such is likely to serves as a bridge to moving onto a relational small group experience which is foundational in so many ways in growing more toward a Christ-like life.

C. OTHER ASSIMILATION STRATEGIES

Several other ideas for assimilation are sparked by a former FRCC Assimilation Task including some of the following.[809] Although the discussion here focuses primarily on assimilating new church members, the following suggestions offer possibilities, perhaps with some variations, to foster better assimilation of current members. They can be used to supplement and/or work in conjunction with the assimilation strategy focusing on small groups.

- *New Member Interest Survey* – To facilitate assimilating new members into the life of the church, there is a need to be conscious of the new members' areas of interest and desired levels of involvement. Use a questionnaire on which new members indicate the types of activities in which they are interested with respect to current church activities or other areas. Distribute the forms at the last session of the Exploring Church Membership Class session which deals with the organizational structure of the church. The appropriate team, the pastor, staff or other person would contact these individuals to discuss their responses and assist them in becoming involved in their area(s) of interest. Such follow-up not only would demonstrate the care of the church, it offers an opportunity to guide the new member into a meaningful group or ministry further assimilating a person into the church. And, the same process should be applied to all members of the church on a periodic basis.

- *New Member Celebration Dinner* – Hold a recognition and celebration dinner for new members and their spouses on the Sunday Evening of the day they become members or as soon thereafter as practicable. This function might best be held at the parsonage on a causal basis. Our pastor, professional staff and team leaders and

[809] Fox River Congregational Church, Minutes of Assimilation Task Force Meeting, October 12, 2004.

spouses would also participate. Such dinner will afford new members an opportunity to visit with Team Leaders about various opportunities to participate in church activities and will afford Team Leaders with opportunities to welcome and help assimilate new members into the life of the church. Furthermore, such dinner provides a more substantial sense of celebration and recognition for new members thereby enhancing the meaningfulness of the experience.

- *Social Functions* – In addition to the initial celebration dinner, offer other social functions, e.g., cookouts, dinners, etc. These can take various forms. Some might be held exclusively for new members. Bringing newcomers together might give rise to a newcomers' follow-up small group to their Exploring Church Membership Class experience which would foster the furthering of friendships and connections though a small group experience. Or, the social function could include on-going church members, thereby expanding their contacts and possible new friendships in the church. Or, participation in the function might include team members, small group participants, and/or other church leaders thereby better enabling new members to discern and connect to areas in which they would be interested in participating. This, in turn, leads to further assimilation into the body of the church.

- *Assigned Seating Fellowship Meals*[810] – Another form of social activity to foster fellowship is holding periodic fellowship meals at which seats are assigned. Assigning seats can serve several functions.

  -- It can bring together different generations in the church. When teenagers and younger adults, share a meal with older adults various experiences can be shared.

  -- It can bring together people who have worshiped together for years, but don't really know each other. They only causally engage one another, if at all, in the worship center, shake hands, or wave politely and then move on. Although they are part of a family of faith, they don't even know their family member's name.

  -- It can contribute to bringing together and assimilate long-term and younger members. This reduces the threat of the congregation dividing along the line of the "old vs. new" or "the "older vs. younger.

  -- It can bring together couples that can learn from the experience of each other.

  -- It can help draw people into small groups. In a seating plan, put those not participating in a small group with those members who love their own small group. A personal invitation from an excited small group member might be all it takes to get others to attend.

  In short, too many of us never get outside our own relationship bubble thereby missing the opportunity to really know others whom God has placed in

[810] Chuck Lawless, "Should Try Assigning Seats at a Fellowship Meal," February 11, 2019, OutreachMagazine.com.

our path. Consequently, we miss the blessing of knowing more of God's people, partaking in Christian fellowship, and the opportunity of growing in our Walk with Christ.

- *Home Based Small Groups* – Depending upon a group's interest, group gatherings can take the form of meals, coffee, pot luck, etc., whatever the group decides. Such groups would be formed on a geographic basis, thereby enhancing accessibility and continued interactions.

- *Mentors* – Provide a mentor to each new member to introduce him or her to other members of the church and assist them in becoming active participants in the congregation. The mentor would make sure new members are well informed about available small groups, special church events and on-going activities.

- *Follow-up Contacts* – In addition to the newcomer interest questionnaire distributed at the end of the Exploring Church Membership Class and follow-up thereto, follow-up contacts should also occur a few months after a new member joins. This would not only show church interest and care in the individual as a member of our church, but doing so also offers a ready opportunity for him or her to ask questions and express any concerns or issues they may have. This also provides the contact person opportunity to further encourage a now relatively new member to become further assimilated into the church.

  Such follow-up might be more effective if based upon an evaluation of the extent the newcomer reflects the characteristics of being assimilated. What does successful assimilation look like? Several characteristics have been suggested as evidencing that a new church member (perhaps even a current on-going member) has been assimilated into the life of the church. These include whether the person has made new friends, participated in one or more church ministry tasks, served on a ministry team, become involved in either a short term and/or relational small group, regularly attended worship services, enjoyed social contacts at after worship service coffee hour, participated in newcomer or other activities, etc.? After a period of time, perhaps one to three months, efforts should be made to informally glean information (such as that just noted) relevant to discerning whether a person has become truly involved/assimilated into the life of the church. If not, undertake appropriate steps to encourage greater involvement.

In shaping an effective assimilation strategy, the following guidelines might be considered in evaluating existing or developing new assimilation strategies for helping people find an appropriate group for them.[811]

- Design and use a strategy which most effectively fits the persons we are trying to assimilate

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[811] Bill Donahue, Preview Article from Rev! September/October 2009.

- Make the strategy clear. Do the persons know where to go to become involved in forming relationships?

- Make the strategy accessible. Is it easy for them to get there and what is a next step?

- Make the strategy personal. Who will guide the persons along the way?

Furthermore, whatever strategies are employed, strategies that work best involve authentic "face to face time" with people trying we are trying to connect.

The content of the assimilation experience may vary depending upon the person to be assimilated. However, with respect to all, developing friendly personal relationships is the crucial. Effective assimilation strategy sets the stage for continued movement through the other disciple-making stages.

VII. SMALL GROUPS

The early church was devoted to fellowship. The word "fellowship" (koinonia) means sharing together. Theses believers shared a relationship with God the Father, with Jesus the Son, and with the Holy Spirit. Stemming from their love of God, these new Christians drew together as a caring community of believers in fellowship with each other. This sharing was not only spiritual, it was also practical as they supported one another in their physical and supportive needs. Genuine fellowship or sharing is an essential element of a vital high impact church.[812]

Thus, involvement in the disciple-making stage of small groups must be pervasive and on-going throughout one's Walk with Christ. Participation in small groups might occur early as part of newcomers' conversion experiences or more likely in the context of the stages of discipleship-making, e.g., basics of faith, church membership and assimilation. Small group experiences should continue as part of development of personal spiritual disciplines, growing into serving and growing in sharing Christ stages of disciple-making. In short, meaningful participation in small groups serves as the foundation in various and numerous aspects of one's journey to a more Christ-like life in thoughts, feelings and actions.

As considered earlier in PART THREE, Section I. the first characteristic of growing as a disciple or follower of Christ is a person *seeking to connect with God by actively pursuing a loving and intimate relationship with him.* The second mark of discipleship, to be discussed here, is *connecting with other believers by sharing life with them.*

A. SHARING LIFE TOGETHER

God calls us to live in a loving community of faith. We are not only to love God; we are to love others. Participating in fellowship in a community of believers is an essential spiritual

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[812] Linus J. Morris, *The High Impact Church: A Fresh Approach to Reaching the Unchurched* 75 (1993).

discipline as one grows toward becoming a Fully Devoted Follower of Christ. Doing so is a mark of one's discipleship.

> The regular gathering of believes is necessary for Christians to grow and be spiritually nurtured….
>
> The term *koinonia* is used both to describe the intimate relation that we have with God through Christ and to describe the reciprocal relationship we have with one another as members of the Christian community….
>
> Building relationships, ministering to one another with spiritual gifts, meeting practical needs, and establishing caring, loving, healing fellowships are all part of being the people of God….
>
> The caring body of Christ is the opposite of the prevailing individualism and fragmentation of Western society. The church's cell [small] group structure encourages the kind of fellowship, community and caring that Christ intends for His Body.[813]

Failure to connect with other believers severely constrains, if not totally derails one's spiritual growth. One cannot significantly progress growing toward becoming more like Jesus without being in relationship with other people. It's all about love -- loving God and loving others.[814] God is love. Spiritual maturity is about learning to love like Jesus. A foundational element for people to mature in their faith is to regularly and meaningfully connect with other believers in loving relationships. Each of us needs to embrace being a meaningful part of a faith community, i.e., a church fellowship. We need each other for support, for wisdom, perspective, accountability, encouragement, help, and prayer.

God uses the church as his primary agent for growing disciples. Both large gatherings and small groups of Christians constitute important elements in nurturing and training disciples.

> The large gatherings provide celebration, teaching, inspiration and unity and have an impact on surrounding community. The small group, however, is the primary place where believers are nurtured, discipled, equipped and given opportunities to minister.[815]

Rick Warren said that

> It was a defining moment in the life of our church when we shut down our midweek service in order to focus completely on small

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[813] *Id.* at 126-27.
[814] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* 176 (2002).
[815] Linus J. Morris, *The High Impact Church: A Fresh Approach to Reaching the Unchurched* 128 (1993).

> groups. ...Our small groups are the heart and strength of our church family, and groups are a leadership factory.[816]

In short, we need support in our process of transformation. Participation in a small group serves as the crucial vehicle by which we can develop and deepen loving, caring and supporting relationships with others through sharing life together. As quoted earlier, "Regular and powerful companionship becomes a life-changing vehicle of God's grace."[817] Since Christian fellowship is a spiritual habit of utmost importance, we need to learn how to lovingly share life together and then do so.

The on-going small group stage of disciple-making involves two types of small groups. Ultimately, movement needs to be to an on-going relational small group (RSG). However, for some, immediately jumping into a longer term relational small group is too big of a plunge as a first step. Instead, taking the interim step of participating in a short term small group (STSG) of limited duration (e.g., 4 to 10 weekly sessions) may provide the path that initially better works for a person. STSGs will be discussed in Section C. below.

B. RELATIONAL SMALL GROUPS

1. Relational Small Groups: The Heart of Disciple-Making

Protestant churches too often fail to create an environment in which spiritual growth is both expected and nurtured. Such growth is best nurtured through spiritual friendships and mutual accountability centering on commitment to growing in a manner to reflect the marks of discipleship. An effective disciple-making church needs continually encourage individuals to become involved in spiritual friendships in which persons agree to hold each other accountable for conscientious practices of the marks of discipleship. Spiritual formation most likely occurs in the context of interpersonal, caring relationships with other committed disciples.[822] "Discipleship means commitment to a group."[823]

To reiterate earlier discussion, participation in relational small groups is foundational for spiritual growth. Christians are called to belong, not just to believe. Sharing life with other believers, in an environment of mutual acceptance, caring, sense of belonging, accountability, integrity, trust and love, is central to and an indispensable element of the Christian experience. Following Christ requires that we walk alongside others to encourage, equip and challenge one another in love to grow toward maturity in Christ. Most nurturing of a spiritual life and ministry occurs in committed on-going relational small groups. *Following Christ is not something that is simply taught. Following Christ needs to be lived. The relational element in Jesus' model must be at the heart of the disciple-making process.*

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[816] James Long, "The Outreach Interview: Rick Warren," Outreach Magazine, p.100 , January/February 2013.

[817] Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* 122 (2005).

[822] Michael W. Foss, *Power Surge: Six Marks of Discipleship for a Changing Church 102-03* (2000).

[823] Donald N Bastian, *Belonging (Free Methodist Church): Adventures in Church Membership* 136 (2002).

It is essential, as a disciple-making church, that we create or find an environment(s) in which it is possible for people to gather with others who encourage one another to keep progressing in one's growth toward a more Christ-like life. The "best place to … grow as disciples is within the intimacy and trust of a small group."[824] In a small group a person can find, develop and form relationships, discover one's gifts, meet each other's needs, encourage hope and build faith. Nurturing one another, building trust and faith, and mutual accountability lead toward spiritual transformation. In a small group one can discover faith, grow, and become committed to Christ and to his body the church. Small groups also give rise to practical opportunities to serve. "In the high-impact church, cell [small] groups fulfill the biblical mandate to evangelize and disciple all people."[825]

In short, active involvement in a relational small group is critical. It needs to be at the core of our disciple-making efforts. Relational, small groups have the power to help in the transformation of people's lives. They are the prime route to discipleship, i.e., growing toward the image of Christ.

We are called by God to grow toward a more Christ-like life through the learning and practice of spiritual disciplines. Since small relational groups are not only the prime but also the virtually indispensable means to effectively do so, as a disciple-making church, we need to concentrate primary efforts on offering spiritual formation experiences through relational small groups. Thus, a prime goal of our church should not simply be a church with a few relational small groups. But rather, a fundamental goal for our church should be to *become a church of relational small groups* with all church members participating in a relational small group of some sort. Envision a Christian fellowship in which all of our members grow together into the image of Christ through relational small groups supporting one another with love, caring, encouragement, trust, acceptance, affirmation, confession and accountability.

This requires not only moving people into such groups, but also making available various program and relational experiences leading to spiritual growth in the context of such groups. Organizing and moving people into relational small are considered in later discussion (See PART SIX, Section VI.B. below.) Here the focus is on program content for use by relational small groups.

2. Spiritual Discipline of Connecting with Other Believers: Participation in Relational Small Group

As considered in earlier discussion, one of the marks of spiritual growth is the spiritual discipline of regular participation in a community of believers. People mature in their faith through regular and meaningful connections with other believers by sharing life with them. We need each other for mutual encouragement, care and accountability. Deepening fellowship is the hallmark of relational small groups. This happens when believers spend time together, encourage one another, support each other each other, and serve one another's physical, emotional and spiritual needs. Such interactions are most likely and occur best in the context of small relational groups.

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[824] Linus J. Morris, *The High Impact Church: A Fresh Approach to Reaching the Unchurched* 153(1993).
[825] *Id.* at 154.

Thus, whatever the area of topical focus of particular relational small group, it is essential to create environments and offer experiences enabling people to connect and develop relationships with others. In turn, such Christian fellowship communities better enable people to experience spiritual growth – i.e., the continual pursuit of the four vital relationships – connecting with God, with other believers, with people through serving, and with those outside the faith through evangelism. The ultimate purpose of relational small groups is to move people toward a deeper relationship with God through transformation toward Christ's image.

However, just the fact that people come together in a small group format does not automatically create meaningful spiritual formation experiences. Developing "authentic, mutually beneficial relationships is often hard work...."[826] Group members need to learn how to do so and practice what they learn. That is, they need to learn and practice the spiritual discipline of regular and active participation in Christian fellowship small group. For most, this should not be deemed optional.

> ... without Christian community we simply cannot experience the fullness of life God intends for us, and we will limit our spiritual growth and miss out on important aspects of Spirit-led living.[827]

Among the ways for group members to come to grips with understanding and engaging in meaningful spiritual formation through relational small groups are the following.

a. Organizational Process: Group Attributes

As a part of the organizational process, prospective members (or actual members if the group has already been formed) of a relational small group should review the attributes of small group membership which are essential for effective small group interactions leading to transformation. These attributes include *mutual trust* developed through honesty, humility, courtesy, grace, confidentiality, reliability, love, caring and sense of belonging. (For further discussion of the characteristics underlying a relational small group being a transforming disciple-making experience, see PART SIX, Section VI.B.2. below.) Trust is further engendered by participants encouraging and affirming that which is special in another, walking with each other in difficult times, being reflective listeners so as to assist others in hearing God's Word, and confessing sins so that one may be healed. They also include the attitude of seeking to discern and apply God's word and mutual accountability. The process of organizing small groups offers a forum for group members to learn and understand the attributes necessary for a vibrant spiritual formation group experience.

Practicing these qualities encourage and better enable members of the group to move deeper and deeper into the waters of transformation toward a more Christ-like life in thoughts, feelings and actions.

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[826] Timothy C. Geoffrion, "Giving Up on Finding Christian Community," Alban Weekly, November 10, 2008.
[827] *Id.*

b. Conducting Relational Small Groups

Many have little or no experience in a Christian oriented relational small group fellowship. What is this all about? Others might be interested in leading a small group, but are reluctant to do so because they feel they don't know how.

The church should offer some type of experience(s) which better enables small group members and their leaders to create a spiritual growth environment. In doing so, it is important to be alert to avoiding the creation of small groups which disappoint those seeking life change. Community can be over promised leading to disappointment and cynicism. Just throwing small groups together is not enough. Care needs to be given in forming groups which are conducted in such manner so as to lead to transformation. Various resources should be sought and evaluated on the conduct of relational small groups.

Among resources for consideration are the following.

- *Regroup: Training Groups to Be Groups*[828] is a four-session program aimed at training groups to be sustainable and healthy. It offers a learning process in an environment where the group participants discover how to grow in faith while building authentic relationships and accomplishing the purpose(s) for which the group members gathered. Sessions cover (i) getting connected in the context of God's purpose for small groups, (ii) five habits of life changing groups, (iii) establishing ground rules, and (iv) determining the group's purpose. There are also coaching segments of listening, giving and receiving feedback, prayer, calling out the best in others, etc. In addition, this program covers the topics of dealing with confrontation, conflict resolution and helping those in crisis. This resource can be used to train both leaders and groups simultaneously during regular group time.

- *Discipleship Journal's 101 Best Small-Group Ideas*[829] offers a resource of practical ideas for immediate use by a small group in such areas as Bible study, prayer, fellowship, evangelism, serving, and missions as well as providing a section on training leaders of small groups,

- Ruth Haley Barton's book, *Life Together in Christ* offers an "interactive guide for small groups of spiritual companions who are ready to encounter Christ in a transforming way – right where they are on the road of real life.... Becoming a transforming community involves having real guidance in the attitudes, practices and behaviors that open us to the transforming presence of Christ in our midst."[830] This book is described as offering small groups a guide for discussions leading to genuine Christian discipleship.

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[828] Henry Cloud, Bill Donahue and John Townsend, *Regroup: Training Groups to Be Groups: Particpant's Guide* (2007) accompanying a 4 session DVD program.
[829] Navigators (1996) (compiled by Deena Davis).
[830] As described by IVP Book Club Digest, February 16, 2016, pp.2,3.

Other resources for content for relational small group should also be explored.[831]

3. Types and Foundational Purposes of Relational Small Groups

All relational small groups are not the same. Differing small groups are necessary to meet the needs and interests of the different members of our congregation. The learning and practice of spiritual disciplines through relational small groups can be practiced in many ways with each group taking on those attributes based on the participants' common interests and goals. It is up to each group to decide their purposes, duration, size, etc.

The purposes of relational small groups can widely vary from group to group. They can range from therapeutic to recreational, from social to instructional. Small groups exist for such common interests as parenting, strengthening families and marriage, fellowship, recreation, financial planning, Bible study, prayer, serving, evangelism/outreach efforts, mutual support, games, meals, hobbies, tasks, projects and fun.

Often small groups are criticized on the basis that nothing spiritual happens in our meetings. However, two elements of spiritual experience should be present whenever small groups gather – i.e., content and process. Content involves the explicit topic or issue to be discussed. Process encompasses how group members interact with one another and with God. A group's content is spiritual when dealing with religious or spiritual topics. The process is spiritual when members act in ways that are genuine, generous and gracious. It is spiritual when participants experience their interchanges as an opportunity for faith formation, for deepening their spiritual lives. When leading a group, the person is responsible for not only content but also for the process. Simply placing something spiritual on the agenda will not ensure faith formation. Attention also needs to focus to the spiritual character of the group process.[832]

In the absence of intentionality for spiritual growth, other churches' experiences reveal that small groups will degenerate into to being simply social groups without their participants growing to become more Christ-like. Even if 100% of church members belong to a small group, this does not necessarily equate to significant growing people toward a more Christ-like life.[833]

Small groups in a Christian community offer a variety of practices for those seeking to grow as followers of Christ. Thomas Hawkins, in his book *Cultivating Christian Community,* says that most such small groups can be classified into one of several broad categories.[834]

- *Accountable* small groups offer a means of mutual accountability. Learning to follow Christ requires commitment, a discipline which we can only sustain with the assistance of companions. Covenant small groups are based upon an agreed upon commitment as to how the members of the group will participate in one or

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[831] *E.g.,* Jeffrey Arnold, *Starting Small Groups that Matter: Building Communities that Matter* and *The Big Book on Small Groups*: (2012) (revised edition).
[832] Thomas R. Hawkins, *Cultivating Christian Community* at 86-89 (2001).
[833] Randy Frazee, *The Connecting Church: Beyond Small Groups to Community* 89 (2001).
[834] Thomas R. Hawkins, *Cultivating Christian Community* 20-23 (2001).

more spiritual disciplines such as public and private worship, prayer, spending time with God's Word, etc.

- *Support* small groups provide mutual aid and/or comfort to their members. These Christ centered groups experience healing and wholeness in a hospitable environment.

- *Learning* small groups seek to learn more about their faith, e.g., studying the Bible, social issues in light of scripture and tradition, etc. Learning groups are not simply about gathering facts and amassing information, but rather they are about spiritual development, discerning their gifts and using them to meet people's needs.

- *Serving* small groups tend to focus on using one's gifts in ministry.

- *Administrative* groups gather for purposes of administration, decision making and problem solving.

- *Evangelism* groups play a role in reaching out to those outside the faith to advance both the mission of the church and advance group participants in their own personal growth toward Christ's image.

In short,

> Small groups are the ongoing repositories for discipleship- making experiences. Small groups are a versatile platform in that they are not only information-based, but they are also ministry-based and mission-based. Small groups are quite remarkable spaces that facilitate genuine life change, and empower those being discipled to make more disciples.[835]

Although the purposes of a relational small group may range from good fun to the highly serious, *the ultimate purpose is to foster spiritual formation leading to growth in becoming more like Christ in the way people think, feel and act.* Thus, while the common interests bringing together the members of relational small groups can vary from group to group, one or more elements are foundational and need to be incorporated someway into group life. The essential focuses of relational small groups embrace the following "getting connected" general categories of spiritual disciplines:

- learning and practicing the spiritual disciplines directed at pursing a loving and intimate relationship with God (especially through worship, spending time with God's word, prayer, etc.),

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[835] Ed Stetzer, "On the Path to Discipleship," OutreachMagazine.com , December 1 2015.

- learning and practicing the spiritual discipline of meaningful participation in a relational small group with other believers sharing life together in love and caring,

- learning and practicing the spiritual discipline of connecting with both believers and nonbelievers through serving their physical, emotional and spiritual needs, and

- learning and practicing the spiritual discipline of reaching out to those outside the faith through witnessing the good news of Christ and bringing them into congregational life.

PART THREE above explores nature of these spiritual disciplines and what is involved. Growth in these areas lead to transformation into a more Christ-like person as one walks the path to becoming a more Fully Devoted Follower of Christ. While practicing some of these disciplines may involve assembling together in a large group (e.g., worship services) or in some instances doing them alone (e.g., private prayer), there is no adequate substitute for pursuing spiritual disciplines in the context of a relational small group. Various spiritual disciplines can best be done in some type of small group relationships whether it is a Bible study group, a home fellowship group, a prayer group, serving or outreach oriented group, etc.

Having noted "getting connected" foundational areas of focus for relational small groups, the obvious should be recognized. A particular relational small group is not expected to deal with all of the fundamental areas, as well as other areas of group interest, at one time. Each group needs to have a reasonable, doable focus. However, the disciple-making process is a lifetime endeavor. Overtime, covering these are the expected goals to be pursued. Or, as an alternative, groups will mature, split and form new groups. A quite likely scenario is for people to gravitate to another group which focuses upon a different facet of spiritual formation which they have yet to experience. Relational small groups will experience different life cycles, some perhaps lasting for only a year or a couple of years, others for several years. However, this shakes out for a particular individual, it is important that when leaving one group he or she proceeds to connect with another group. Being connected in deepening, mutual caring, affirming, and accountable relationships with other believers is an on-going essential element of Christian living and spiritual growth.

4. Relational Small Groups: Content

The following discussion focuses on some of the spiritual practices which are foundational for the relational small group experience with consideration of some possible program content with respect to each. As just discussed, regardless of the common interest which brings a group together, all relational small groups should include at least some of the foundational spiritual practices. However, setting forth several spiritual practices as foundational is not intended to derogate focusing on other spiritual practices which offer promise of spiritual growth for members of the group. Furthermore, focusing on one discipline practice does not necessarily mean doing so in isolation from other spiritual disciplines. Quite the contrary, spiritual disciplines are related in their common purpose, i.e., to grow toward a more Christ-like

life. Often doing one also involves doing another (e.g., combination of Bible study, meditation and prayer).

a. Overview of Spiritual Formation

We have been invited by God to enter into an intimate personal relationship with him. Amazingly, he also wants be our best friend But, how do we make this possible? We do so by seeking to experience his transforming power by becoming more Christ in our thoughts, feelings and actions. As John Calvin wrote, "By imitating Christ we are drawn into union with him…."[836]

In order to achieve union with God, we must be intentional and disciplined. Spiritual growth doesn't just happen. It requires intentionality, discipline, and work. While our effort has nothing to do with our salvation, it has much to do with growing in our personal relationship with God. One must make the effort to grow.

Spiritual growth emerges from the learning and practice of spiritual disciplines which are the intentional practices, relationships and experiences that give us space from other demands of life to keep company with God. They enable us to answer God's invitation to a personal relationship with him and to discern and respond to what God calls upon us to do. Spiritual disciplines are the tools which help us to know God, develop and intimacy with him, and grow our fitness for serving and reaching out to others. Spiritual disciplines are crucial to transformation toward a more Christ-like life in thoughts, feelings and actions.

Although we cannot replicate the character of Christ on our own, through the practice of spiritual disciplines we open up ourselves to God. God then uses the Holy Spirit, our desire to grow spiritually and the habits we develop through practicing spiritual disciplines to form in us the characteristics and qualities of Christ. Thus, learning and practicing spiritual disciplines is vital in our on-going pursuit of an intimate relationship with God.

If our church is to encourage equip and support our members (and possibly others) to grow in their spiritual formation, we need to make readily available programs and/or other experiences which, in the context of their relational small group, assist them in understanding the importance and the manner of practicing various spiritual disciplines. In addition to the discussion in PART THREE above, there is a wide variety of teaching and small group materials available which provide an overview of spiritual disciplines and/or focus on the understanding and practice of specific disciplines. Under the general category of overview of spiritual formation, we might explore and review the following for possible use.

- "Companions in Christ: A Small Group Experience in Spiritual Formation" (Upper Room Books) – This series seeks to offer transforming experiences in spiritual formation. Classical spiritual practices are explored and participants are invited to develop daily

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[836] John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* 3.1.3 (1536) as quoted in Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* 97 (2006).

patterns which open their lives to a deepening relationship with God and one another. This provides a journey moving through five units with five or six sessions allocated to each unit. The units are the Christian journey (spiritual formation), scripture (introduction to several ways of meditating and praying on scripture), deepening prayer, responding to God's call, and exploring spiritual guidance.

- *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* (2005) by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun. This book discusses over 50 spiritual disciplines under the categories of worship, open oneself to God, relinquish the false self, share life with others, incarnate the love of Christ, hear God's Word, and prayer. With respect to each discipline a series of reflection questions, spiritual exercises and additional resource materials are provided. Calhoun sets forth a manner of using the book in small groups. The choice of topics and formats are flexible so as to fit the needs of each particular group.

- Proven by followers of Jesus over the centuries, spiritual disciplines are exercises which strengthen endurance on the road to spiritual growth. In a six-session DVD small group Bible study, "*The Life You've Always Wanted,*" John Ortberg offers a study guiding groups through spiritual disciplines and teaches how one might transform his or her spiritual life. What does true spiritual life really look like, what keeps one from living it, and how can one pursue it? Ortberg invites people to join him on a road to transformation and spiritual vigor that anyone can readily take.

- "Pursuing Spiritual Transformation Study Series" (Ortberg, *et al*) – The first study introduces the core ideas behind transformation. The balance of the series focuses on the five G's of growing faith: grace, growth. groups, gifts and giving. Each study includes six sessions exploring life giving practices, experiences and relationships which God can use to bring about spiritual transformation.

- *Spiritual Disciplines Companion: Bible Studies and Practices to Transform Your Soul* (2009) by Jan Johnson – This book seeks to connect us with the God who wants to transform us. The book looks at time-tested practices in the Bible by looking at the everyday ways Jesus related to God. Companion studies and exercises aid exploring 16 core practices. Three segments on each practice (hence a total of forty-eight sessions) are said to enable going beyond superficial understanding so as to begin to live in a new way. The book may be used individually or in the context of a small group.

- *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ* (Greg Ogden) – This book covers the study of scripture topically. Its biblical

> readings follow a path to incrementally build the picture of Christian life. The book has 24 lessons divided into four categories (beginning to practice spiritual disciplines; comprehending the core teachings about the nature of God, the nature of the person and the benefits of Christ; process and qualities of transformation by the Holy Spirit; and engaging in service ministry). This book has received excellent reviews on the Amazon.com website. Some comments indicate its use in small group situations.

In addition, the spiritual formation programs suggested for short term small groups are also suitable for relational small groups. Those noted are "If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat" (John Ortberg); "Life You've Always Wanted" (John Ortberg), and "God Is Closer Than You Think" (John Ortberg).

As noted in other contexts, the suggested above sources are suggested for consideration as the church seeks to provide offerings for relational small group efforts to grow people toward a more Christ-like life. However, there is no suggestion here that other sources should not be explored as well.

b. Foundational Spiritual Disciplines: Content

Among the numerous specific spiritual disciplines, at some point three foundational and indispensable (but not exclusive) spiritual disciplines should be incorporated in a relational small group's experience These are (1) communicating with God through prayer, (2) spending time with God's Word for discerning and applying his truth in our daily lives, and (3) some element of worship.[837] Even if a group's focus is not specifically one of these disciplines, in each gathering in some manner incorporate prayer, the Word, and worship. These are in addition to allowing time for "the sharing of needs, aspirations, and victories; and fellowship in Christian love"[838] as well as mutual support and accountability.

(1) Spiritual Discipline of Prayer

As noted earlier, Jesus spent a substantial portion of his time in prayer. Since he is the model for all Christians, there can be no doubt that prayer is an essential element of Christian living. If we want to follow Christ, we need learn and understand the purpose of prayer, what prayer is and is not, the different types of prayer, different methods of prayer, what to expect and not expect from prayer, etc. However, learning alone is insufficient. To progress on the path of towards a more Christ-like life, we need to actually pray. It is difficult to overstate the importance of prayer in a Christian's life. We need to practice the spiritual discipline of prayer. The church needs to teach and offer prayer disciple-making experiences. Of course, prayer is corporately practiced in the context of a worship service. But here we are focusing on individuals focusing on private and small group prayer. The key is creating a context in which conversation with God is as natural and expected as conversations among families,

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[837] This is reflected in the recommended Model Relational Small Group Covenant which is discussed in PART SIX Section VI.B.3.a.(4) below).

[838] Donald N. Bastian, *Belonging (Free Methodist Church): Adventures in Church Membership* 137 (2002).

friends and acquaintances. The church's role is not to control whether or how anyone prays, but rather to afford opportunities to learn and experience the many ways and wonders of daily alone time prayer, prayer in small groups with others and prayer in a larger corporate worship setting context.[839]

Although believers are aware of prayer and, at least occasionally, engage in prayer, many are not familiar with the wide range of the types and methods of prayer experiences available. As a result, they may not have found those approaches to prayer which work best for them in growing toward a more Christ-like life and in their personal relationship with God. Since prayer is such a fundamental aspect being a follower of Christ, a major responsibility of any church, whose mission is disciple-making, is providing disciple-making experiences of understanding the nature of and practice prayer. Such experiences should encourage, equip and support persons in the development of both their corporate and private prayer life.

As earlier noted, while all of us are familiar with at least some aspects of prayer, we also may harbor some misconceptions or lack of awareness of various types and/or elements of prayer which restrict the effectiveness of our prayer life. There are different types of prayers for different situations. There are elements that enhance the effectiveness of prayer. To enhance our prayer life, we need a greater understanding of (i) the nature of prayer, (ii) what it is and is not, (iii) the alternative means of praying and (iv) the elements of effective prayer which need to occur. It should be emphasized that the vitality of prayer grows when praying (a) more often, (b) specifically rather than with generalities, (c) with faith, (d) persistently, and (e) for obedient action.[840] These are things to be learned and practiced. As discussed earlier, the A.C.T.S. method, for example, provides a format for a balanced prayer life. Different methods of prayer work better or worse for different people. Thus, given the common lack of a broad understanding of prayer, coupled with the crucial nature of prayer in the lives of all Christians, it is essential that we, as a disciple-making church offer programs and experiences which better enable our members to understand, commit to and practice the spiritual discipline of prayer. Here again, the relational small group provides an excellent vehicle for doing so.

The material on the spiritual discipline of prayer considered in PART THREE, Section I.A. above, affords an informational base upon which a program on prayer can be based. In addition, the introductory programs considered below in the context of short term small groups provide alternative or supplemental resources. Other resources on practicing the spiritual discipline of prayer should also be explored.[841]

(2) Spiritual Discipline of Spending Time with God's Word

Christianity is a revealed faith. We discover God only when he reveals himself to us primarily in the person of Jesus Christ. Although God can speak to us in

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[839] Michael J. Foss, *Power Surge: Six Marks of Discipleship for a Changing Church* 90-94 (2000).

[840] Lonnie Richardson, "Action Sheet on Prayer."

[841] *E.g.,* Bill Hybels, *Too Busy Not to Pray: Slowing down to be with God,* (1998) (also *Too Busy Not to Pray Small Group Study Guide* with DVD program); Lonnie Richardson. "Power of Prayer" (sermon series on prayer February 21 thru March 13, 2015; Stephen Peay, Seminar on Prayer, (February. 28 thru March 24, 1996 (First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa) (from notes prepared by Jon S. Hanson).

many ways, he does so especially through the Bible. Through the Bible he (i) brings faith to nonbelievers, (ii) provides principles for living, and (iii) leads us into a personal and transforming relationship with himself. Thus, the spiritual discipline of spending time with God's Word is crucial in growing toward a more Christ-like life and in one's personal relationship with God. In doing so, emphasis should be on experiencing Jesus, letting the Bible talk directly and personally to us, and then acting upon it.

To be an effective disciple-making church, the congregation needs to be continually reminded that the Bible is the foundation of our individual lives. Members of the congregation should be aware that they are expected (a) to read, study and meditate on the Bible and (b) to be equipped to do so.[842] To encourage, equip and support, the church needs to provide learning opportunities on how to read the Bible, resources to assist in reading the Bible (e.g., commentaries), and Bible study experiences.

Initial focus should be on Bible study programs aimed at *how* to study the Bible. That is, what method or methods should we use when we read the Bible to discern who God is and what he calls us to do in our daily lives. As noted below, a program modeling the *how* of Bible study lends itself to a short term small group program. However, for those relational small group members, who have not had the opportunity to partake in such program, it is also appropriate for the relational small group itself to commence spending time with the Bible with such a program. (For reference to examples of how to study the Bible, see C.2.*b*.(2) below.)

Once members of the group have participated in a *how to* study the Bible program, whether in a short term or a relational small group context, the relational small group then moves on to studying Bible content. That is, spending time with the Word shifts to the actual spiritual practice of spending time with God's Word. Emphasis in Bible study should be devotion oriented rather than simply an effort to amass information about God. We seek to come to know God rather than simply gathering information about God. We seek for the Bible to have a personal impact on us. Thus, we need to direct attention to those Bible study programs which engage individuals in the application of God's Word in our daily lives.

As expressed earlier in exploring the spiritual discipline of spending time with God's Word, abiding in God's Word is achieved by (i) receiving with an open mind, (ii) reading the Bible regularly, (iii) asking the right questions of the text and writing down one's insights, (iv) remembering, and (v) reflecting upon God's Word. Effective Bible study should not be approached casually. Meaningful Bible study stems from (i) understanding the purpose(s) of such study, (ii) learning and practicing the requisite skills, and (iii) adopting a committed attitude. These are essential elements for meaningful experiences when spending time with the Word. It is incumbent upon FRCC, as a disciple-making church, to offer meaningful and deepening experiences which better enable people to become devotionally immersed in God's Word and to grow in one's personal relationship with God.

In doing so, the church needs to provide ongoing learning opportunities in both personal and corporate use of Scripture. There are numerous approaches to delving into God's word. A

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[842] Michael W. Foss, *Power Surge: Six Marks of Discipleship for a Changing Church* 97 (2000).

relatively simple approach occurs when the reader asks himself questions about what he has read. Such questions might include

> What does this passage teach me about God—the Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit?
>
> What does this passage teach me about the Christian life?
>
> Is there a command to obey, a promise to claim, a warning to heed?
>
> Is there an example to follow or an error to avoid?
>
> What is the main lesson of the passage?[843]

Asking generalized questions such as these tends to prompt further questions as to the meaning of the passage being read. This turn impels a more thorough form of Bible study. Classical methods of Bible study include the synthetic, critical, biographical, historical, theological, rhetorical, topical, analytical, comparative and devotional methods.

Opportunities for learning and experiencing how to read, study, and pray with the Bible should be regularly be offered and opportunities to develop skills with other tools of the trade—commentaries, concordances, Bible dictionaries, and atlases should be provided as well. Beginning, intermediate, and advanced offerings in study methods, biblical content and application, should be made available and widely promoted.[844] Relational small group programs and participants' interactions provide an excellent forum for growing understanding of and connection with God's word.

One is not likely to spiritually grow without spending time with and learning God's word. However, all too often, believers reduce the disciple-making process to read this, study this and memorize this. "Too often, churches make the mistake of equating discipleship with taking a series of classes and cognitive content."[845] Instead, the goal of discipleship is to be more like Jesus. We are "to be conformed to the image of His Son…." (Romans 8:29) The purpose is not acquiring information, but rather Christ-like transformation. It is not about knowledge in general, but rather getting to know Jesus better.[846] Thus, while it is essential to emphasize spending time with God's word,

> we need "to be careful never to give the impression that that discipleship actually happens through the mere intellectual improvement. Real discipleship is… experiential. It is hands-on learning about being like Jesus.

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[843] Lonnie Richardson, "How to Study the Bible Workshop."
[844] Michael W. Foss, *Power Surge: Six Marks of Discipleship for a Changing Church* 98 (2000).
[845] David Ferguson, "Measuring Disciple-Making, OutreachMagazine.com, March 28, 2013.
[846] Ed Stetzer, "4 Strategies for Better Discipleship," OutreachMagazine.com, March 13, 2013.

> … And discipleship certainly involves learning, but it also involves yielding, doing, telling, serving, and going to find others who aren't disciples yet.[847]

The gospel is not something simply to be read, it is to be lived. Meaningful spending time with God's word results from personal investigation of the meaning of the Bible, making it one's own and then acting on it.

One resource material for understanding meaningful Bible study is the earlier discussion of the spiritual discipline of spending time with God's Word in PART THREE, Section I.B. above. Of course, there are numerous Bible study programs which, warrant review for possible use. In addition to those programs suggested for use in connection with the short term small groups, the following programs extend for significant durations thereby lending themselves for use by on-going relational small groups. These include, but are not limited to, the following.

- "WORD" (Warren) – This is a nine month Bible study course which embraces *wonder* about it, *observe* it, *reflect* upon it, and *do it.* (It is based on Rick Warren's book, *Dynamic Bible Study Methods*). Each session includes homework for self-discovery, lectures and small group discussions. Although all books of the Bible are important, the five core books studied first are Genesis, John, Romans, Ephesians and James.[848]

- Group Spice offers Bible studies, Sunday school materials, and family devotions supporting groups. Whether hosting a small group, looking for family devotion materials, a church wanting to start or sustain a small group ministry, or conduct a church- wide campaign, Group Spice offers resources to do so. All Bible studies are based on the Purpose-Driven paradigm and are designed to encourage fellowship, discipleship, ministry, evangelism, and worship. Among the offerings is the *Deepening Life Together* series which includes Acts, Ephesians, John, James, Parables, Psalms, Revelation, Romans, Ruth and various other topics.[849] Some members of Fox River have had experienced a couple of offerings in this series with positive reactions.

- "The New Testament" – This is one of the religion courses of the Teaching Company's Great Courses. There are 24 sessions of 30 minutes each presented on DVD. The courses sponsored by the Teaching Company are outstanding. However, drawbacks from our perspective are that the course is taught from an academic rather than devotional perspective and it lacks participant guides.[850]

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[847] Brandon Cox, "Is Discipleship About Growing or Going?" OutreachMagazine.com, September 22, 2015.
[848] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message* 351-52 (1995).
[849] GroupSpice.com.
[850] thegreatcourses.com.

- "The Kerygma Program" – Kerygma offers an extensive series of adult Bible study programs of varying lengths. Depending on the program, a resource book, leader's guide and/or DVD's are part of the package.[851]

There are a host of Bible studies, as well as resources on how to study the Bible, available beyond those noted above which are worthy of consideration.

In addition, opportunities should be made available to enhance the abilities of small group leaders or teachers in bringing people to a greater meaningfulness in spending time with God's Word. Among the sources which might be considered for doing are James C. Wilhoit and Leland Ryken's book *Effective Bible Teaching* (2nd edition, 2012) and R.C. Sproul's book *Knowing Scripture* (revised edition, 2009).

Despite the number of sources just noted, there is no suggestion here that other sources are not available. Such might be as good or better than the ones just noted.

(3) Spiritual Discipline of Worship

As considered earlier, in growing toward a more Christ-like life in our thoughts, feelings and actions, a follower of Christ strives to get connected with God by continually pursuing an intimate relationship with him. In worship, whether collectively as a community or personally in private, respond to God's invitation to enter a personal and intimate relationship with him. We respond to God's invitation to a personal relationship with us through our expression of reverence, awe, praise, thanksgiving and submission. Such expression exalts God with lofty praise, honor, thanksgiving and joy. This is worship.

Worship is commonly thought of in terms of church-wide worship services, not so much in the context of worship in private or in small groups. However, the spiritual discipline of worship applies in all three situations. It is incumbent on all Christian believers to understand the fundamental purpose of worship and practice this spiritual discipline in all three circumstances.

Sources for teaching and offering disciple-making experiences of worship should be explored. The earlier discussion of the spiritual discipline of worship offers one possibility, perhaps in combination with other sources. If understanding has not been sufficiently gleaned in other church contexts, widespread involvement of relational small groups is essential.

Incorporate each of the three fundamental spiritual disciplines of prayer, spending time with God's Word and worship, at least to some extent, in every of the relational small group gathering. Balance verbal times with nonverbal times. Move between discussion and quiet meditation. Call upon members to participate. Small groups offer the opportunity for everyone to participate according to their gifts.[852] Doing so is vital to individual's spiritual growth toward a Christ-like life.

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[851] kerygma.com.

[852] Thomas R. Hawkins, *Cultivating Christian Community* 90 (2001).

c. Growing in One's Faith: Overview of Basic Christianity

We can assume that the degree of knowledge of the basic underlying concepts of Christianity varies considerably among the members of our congregation. This will increase as we reach out to and bring more people in. Thus, a natural early step in our discipleship-making efforts is offering an overview of basic Christianity. This serves not only new believers but also it may have significant appeal for others as a refresher program of the essential principles of Christianity. Thus, we should make available Basic Christianity 101 type offerings to them as well. For those who have reached the point of participating in a longer term relational small group, a more in depth and breadth exposure to the basics of faith would lead to a growing faith and connection with God.

Several suitable resources are available to relational small groups for their understanding of the basics of the Christian faith including the following two.

- The *Alpha* course is an appropriate offering in the small relational group context for those relational small groups whose members haven't already participated in the short term small group *Alpha* course.

- *Foundations: 11 Core Truths to Build Your Life On* by Tom Holladay and Kay Warren offers an award-winning resource for teaching believers the essential doctrines of Christian faith, providing the theological basis for living a purpose-driven life in a small group format. This 24 session series, designed for small groups seeks to build a solid foundation as to what we believe and why.[853]

Becoming familiar with and/or refreshed about some of the basics of Christianity and the Bible, through overview programs such as these constitute a building block for growth in an individual's spiritual formation. This sets the stage for further spiritual growth in depth.

d. Living the Christian Life

Closely related to the above topics is the general subject of living the Christian life. As the core values of FRCC emphasize,

> It matters how one lives his or her life. The gospel is not something simply to be read and understood, but to be lived. Faith is the fundamental and practical element of living. It extends to all of life. Every act and task in life, not simply one's act of worship, is the response of a steward of God. For the person of Christian faith, there is no distinction between religious and secular life. All of life is God's.[854]

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[853] amazon.com.
[854] Fox River Congregational Church Statement of Core Values.

Small group programming offers excellent opportunity for teaching and experiencing growth in one's Christian life. Offerings should include various topics relative to what is happening in people's lives. Among the seemingly countless alternatives worthy of exploration, three are noted below.

- Perhaps of particular note is a series of programs based upon Rick Warren's book entitled *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth am I Here For.* A six-week Warren introductory program is noted above in the context of short term small group offerings. In addition, there are more detailed programs of longer duration suitable for relational small group study encompassed in a *"Doing Life Together"* DVD Curriculum. This series is designed to help an individual live a purpose driven life through being a part of a purpose driven and Bible study small group fostering a balanced Christian life.

  Based on the biblical purposes which constitute the bedrock of Saddleback Church, the "Doing Life Together" programs are designed to help small groups discover what God has created them for and how to transform his purposes into one's everyday reality which, in turn, can lead to transformation experiences. The kit contains the complete, 6-volume Doing Life Together series. It includes one DVD with leader's guide insert and one study guide for each of the following titles: Beginning Life Together, Connecting with God's Family, Growing to Be Like Christ, Developing Your Shape to Serve Others, Sharing Your Life's Mission Every Day, and Surrendering Your Life for God's Pleasure. For each title, the DVD contains six small group study sessions. Study books are included, as is a song, if a group chooses to worship in music.[855]

- *Believe* – Grounded in selected scripture, *Believe* offers a multi-faceted approach providing a unique spiritual growth experience taking participants on a journey to think, act and be more like Christ. This approach is offered by Randy Frezee.[856] It leads participants through the 10 key beliefs of the Christian faith, 10 key practices of a follower of Christ, and 10 key virtues which characterize a person becoming more like Christ. Although the book offers the opportunity for a person to do this alone, a video based DVD Bible study helps groups of all sizes to experience a transformational journey through a 30 session weekly experience. Student editions are available as are is a church resource kit for a *Believe* church-wide campaign and an online resource library.[857]

- *The Congregational Way* offers a supplementary approach to living out a Christian life in an authentic and real way. The earlier discussion of the contents of an Exploring Church Membership Class noted several sources for short term programs on Congregationalism. These are also suitable for use in the relational small group context. Furthermore, Arthur Rouner's acclaimed classic on Congregationalism, *The Congregational Way of Life* (1972) which contains a study guide, provides a basis

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[855] As described by amazon.com.
[856] Randy Frazee, *Believe: Living the Story of the Bible to Become Like Jesus* (2nd ed., 2015).
[857] As described by christianbook.com.

for a longer term relational small group program. Our church drew extensively upon this work in developing FRCC's adopted "Essential Principles of Congregationalism.

e. Strengthening Faith by Dealing with Tough Questions

We all have questions and doubts concerning our faith. Is the Bible credible, can it be trusted? What about science in relation to religion? Why do bad things happen to good people? Why does God permit suffering? The list of questions can go on and on. For many, if such questions are not satisfactorily addressed, their faith may weaken and perhaps even become jeopardized. Relational small groups afford a forum for consideration of such questions and doubts. Various books and programs focus on questions such these. Several books are *The Case for Christ, The Case for Faith*, *The Case for a Creator* and *The Case for the Real Christ* all authored by Lee Strobel have been accorded high acclaim. In addition, several of Strobel's books are offered in short term DVD programs suitable for use in both relational and short term small groups. For example,

- *The Case for Christ* (2016) explores the evidence for Christ from the fields of science, philosophy and history. This program, coupled with a sermon series, was offered to the congregation in the Fall of 2019 in a short term small group context. It was well received by those who participated.

- *The Case for a Creator (*2004) explores scientific discoveries to determine if they provide a solid basis for belief in God.

- *The Case for Faith* (2014) investigates issues and doubts of the heart that threaten faith including doubt, the problem of pain, and the existence of evil. In addition, in a 10 session DVD small group Bible study entitled "Faith Under Fire: Exploring Christianity's Toughest Questions," Lee Strobel hosts, interviews and debates with respected Christians, people of other faiths and those claiming no religious faith at all.

In a DVD presentation "Reason & Faith," Dinesh D'Souza, Ravi Zacharias and Norman Geisler offer educated reasoning for faith through exploring how modern science and scholarship support Christianity; why we need to lean on God; and how we can prove that the Bible (based on its historicity) is God's inspired Word.

Pastor Timothy Keller is known for his intellectual approach to belief and faith. In a 6 session DVD curriculum, based upon his book *The Reason for God*, he responds to questions posed by unbelievers, skeptics and believers. This study draws upon literature, philosophy, reason and real-life conversations to explain how faith in the Christian God is a soundly rational belief.

In *Mere Apologetics: How to Help Seekers and Skeptics Find Faith* (2012), Alister McGrath addresses how to engage unbelievers with intelligence and imagination. He offers

various approaches to sharing your faith with others. He outlines pointers to faith, such as our innate sense of longing for justice, our appreciation for beauty, the order we see in the physical world, etc. He also shows there are many right ways to share your faith through explanations, arguments, stories, and images and how to decide which works best for your personality and your audience. This book aids readers in working out their own way to effectively communicate and defend the gospel.

In his book *Altar'd*,[858] Pastor Jay Cavaiani offers both historic and faith building evidence revealing how God used his own rules and master plan to restore his people into a relationship with him through the sacrifice of his son Jesus. Many powerful forms of evidence are shown to help engender and fan the flame of faith not only of those to whom one is trying to reach, but also the faith of the one reaching out to others. Many people need substantial evidence which leads to real lasting faith. *Altar'd* lays out the evidence revealing that God is real, that the Bible can be trusted, and that he has a plan for our lives. The book leads to the question, "have you Atar'd your life?" This book not only offers a basis from which to reach out to those outside the faith, it also serves to refresh and strengthen the faith of those reaching out to others.

These and other resources dealing with answering tough are available which deserve exploration. These resources not only offer disciple-making experiences to strengthen the faith of believers, they also provide support when we are confronted with such questions by people to whom we reach out to in our evangelism efforts.

C. SHORT TERM SMALL GROUPS

The small group stage of disciple-making involves two types of small groups; short term small groups and relational small groups. relational small groups are discussed immediately above. Short term groups are considered here.

1. Functions of Short Term Small Groups

As noted earlier, short term small groups can undertake various functions offering opportunities for disciple-making spiritual growth experiences. These include the following.

a. Basics of Faith

Short term small groups provide an excellent vehicle for learning the basics of faith. Programming can serve not only as an introduction to the basics for newcomers, but also as a refresher for others in the congregation. The content of a small group program may embrace any one of a variety of introductory and/or refresher topics.

The material might be presented in lecture form, as a video program, book discussion, etc. Whatever the nature of the presentation, it is critical that there be an opportunity for the attendees to then gather in small groups to discuss the material and interact with one another. Participating in the basics of faith stage of disciple-making may whet the appetite for further spiritual growth, a major step in growing more Christ-like in one's thoughts, feelings and actions.

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[858] Jay Cavaiani, *Altar'd: Faith-Building Evidence Leading to New Life* (2014).provides

b. Spiritual Disciplines: Sparking Interest in Spiritual Growth

Short term small groups afford excellent opportunities to present introductory and/or refresher experiences on various spiritual growth subject matters such as introducing and exploring the role and types of spiritual disciplines. Such offerings may spur one's curiosity and spark a deepening interest and longing for spiritual growth. A range of subject matters should be offered to attract the participation of those with different interests. Whatever whets the spiritual appetites of new or longer-term believers is a step in the right direction. Short term small groups, hereto, can serve as a catalyst to moving people to deeper and broader spiritual experiences.

c. Adult Faith Formation: Exploring Theological Questions[859]

It is not uncommon for a church to experience a lack of interest among its congregants in theology or to participate in church educational events. In today's modern society, congregants need to nurture the mind as well as the spirit in order to creatively face the challenges of our pluralistic and secular age. They need safe places in which to explore their faith questions, doubts and challenge childhood ideas about God and humankind. Although there are various ways to encourage congregational faith formation, one church has implemented and Adult Faith Formation approach resulting in a robust, intellectually lively, and inspirational adult theological education program.

Undergirding this program, in addition to a pastor spending some additional time in enhancing his or her own theological understandings, the pastor should look for the theologian in each congregant. People have theological questions often which are unaddressed even in church. Every person who asks questions about life, death, meaning, pain and suffering, what is the nature of God, etc. is a theologian. Congregants are reluctant to ask questions about what is most important fearing they will be misunderstood or that their ignorance will be exposed. So, urge congregants to put every question on the table; bring your thoughts, questions, and ideas. Make manifest that this is a mistake free zone, a place where no question is too big or too small. The pastor should make clear he does not have the answer to all questions. Furthermore, there may be more than one correct answer to important questions of faith. By creating this environment, people began to ask questions, express doubts. This, in turn, suggests themes for study and discussion. From congregants' questions or suggestions, implement an on-going series of adult faith formation programs which attract interest and participation of not only congregants, but also persons from outside the church.

For this approach to be effective pastors, as well as other church leaders, need to be in conversation with their congregants and attentively listening for their questions. Choose a person each quarter to select a theme, e.g., the problem of suffering using Job and the journeys of Paul as the biblical basis for the discussion. Then be prepared to lead the group by creating new materials or interpreting the works of others. The resulting Adult Faith Formation groups have proven quite successful for participating congregants (and others) in their deepening biblical/

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[859] This section draws primarily on Bruce Epperly, "Encouraging Lay Theology," posted by Alban.org on August 16, 2016.

theological understanding and faith formation. When it comes to adult faith formation, if we listen, respond, and provide various time options, people will come. One's faith journey can be made exciting. "Adult faith formation is holy ground and worthy of our best efforts."[860]

When done in a short term group context, such programs expose people to the small group experience. This, in turn, serve as a bridge leading to participation either in an existing or new relational small group perhaps formed out of this short term group.

d. Training

The fourth function of short term small groups involves training people in performing disciple making activities, hence progressing in their own growth as followers of Christ and helping others. For example, people need to be trained to lead small groups. Or, a short term small group training program might be sponsored by the Serving Team or Evangelism Team to equip those persons who have progressed in their spiritual journey to the point where they desire serving and/or evangelistic reaching out to others to become a part of their Christian life style.

e. Bridging

Typically, newcomers, and even some church members who have been around for a while, are reluctant to jump into a long term relational small group situation. They are not ready to take the step beyond worship to participation in a relational small group. They may be unsure what small groups are all about and/or are not confident about with whom they want to participate in an on-going small group relationship. However, when an appealing short term small group program emerges, e.g., a basic Bible study, financial management, etc., these people are much more likely to first participate in a short term group experience which doesn't call for a long-term commitment. By affording an opportunity to connect and build relationships with fellow church members, at least in an introductory way, the short term small group experience sets the stage for the next step. That is, if this experience engenders positive relationship building, it is likely to serve as a *bridge* to the essential discipleship step of getting better connected with other believers through participation in an on-going relational small group experience. By providing this bridging function, short term small groups play an important role in the assimilation stage of disciple-making and furthering a person's growth in following Christ.

That is, short term small groups enable people to test drive an introductory relational small group experience before committing to doing so on a long-term basis. Attractive well done short term groups provide a linkage or bridge to the indispensable spiritual formation experiences found in long term relational small groups. That is, short term small group experiences can serve as a catalyst to move people to deeper and broader levels of spiritual growth. The short term small group itself might morph into an on-going relational small group. A participant or participants may create a new group. Or, individuals might join other groups which are forming and/or are available to newcomers.

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[860] *Id.*

All small groups, whatever function they are performing, should foster the experience of positive relationship development. Many churches today offer short term small group programs. Although good can emerge in providing one or a combination of the various short term small group functions, a prime lacking in many of these church groups is the failure to develop at least the beginnings of continuing relationships among at some of the group participants after these short term group sessions conclude.[861] Ultimately, short term small groups need to foster movement to relational small groups by offering positive relational experiences and promoting movement to either an existing and/or newly created relational small groups.

Thus, it is incumbent upon the church offer a short term small group experiences which explores and practices the basics of small group life and enables people to meet others who are seeking, or at least willing to explore, a long-term small group-connection.[862] In providing a bridging function, the short term small group experience plays an essential role in the assimilation stage of disciple-making.

The availability of introductory short term small groups affords a simple and clear next step beyond conversion, worship services and becoming a church member disciple-making stages. Furthermore, short term small groups can offer more advanced topics for those who have progressed further in their spiritual growth journey. There may even be occasion to form a short term group made up of people who also participate in an on-going relational small group. For example, someone may be interested in exploring a topic which is outside his or her small groups' immediate interest. That person, along with other like-minded people, could form a short term group or participate in a church sponsored short term group program.

In any event, whichever function or functions a short term small group is designed perform, the conduct of such group must be done with excellence. Otherwise, a "downer" may deter people from progressing further in their spiritual growth through small group experience, either short term or relational..

2. Content of Short Term Group Programs

As considered in PART TWO, Section III.C., understanding of and commitment to spiritual disciplines are essential for spiritual growth leading to transformation toward a more Christ-like life. The degree to which individual members of FRCC understand and practice spiritual disciplines presumably varies to a significant extent. However, if the experiences of churches in general are indicative, it can be assumed that, even in our church, there is much to be done to inform, encourage, equip and support our members in growing their understanding and regular practice of spiritual disciplines. At the outset, this calls for program(s) to introduce and emphasize the fundamental role spiritual disciplines play in growing as a follower of Christ. Short term, as well as relational, small group programs, are well suited to this role.

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[861] *See* Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* 228 (2006).
[862] Missy Lovick, "5 Tips for Small Group Life," *Outreach* (March/April 2008).

a. General Introduction to Spiritual Disciplines

A short term small group program is well suited to provide introductory content on spiritual disciplines. Two approaches are suggested.

(1) Introducing Spiritual Disciplines

A wide selection of spiritual formation programs, typically a video presentation followed by small group discussion using a participant's guide, are available. They provide a general overview of the subject of spiritual disciplines. It is not the purpose here to recommend a particular program. However, a brief description of a few offers a perspective of the general nature of introductory material a church can use to introduce spiritual disciplines to both newcomers and current members of the church. Various books which include a means to facilitate small group discussion, offer an alternative source. And, depending on the circumstances in which a particular program is offered, an accompanying sermon series could be quite impactful. Catalogs and the internet should be explored for additional alternatives. What is important to note here is that there are introductory spiritual discipline programs available for use in short term small groups. Furthermore, the earlier discussion of the responsibility of the individual to grow as a disciple in PART TWO and the descriptions of spiritual disciplines in PART THREE might be useful to supplement such programs.

While the emphasis here is on implementing programs which introduce spiritual disciplines for short term small groups, such programs are also appropriate for longer term relational small groups. However, in the context of the latter, conclusion of program doesn't terminate the group. Use of such program is just part of that groups' on-going efforts in their Walk with Christ.

(2) Discerning Spiritual Styles

A church seeking to be an effective disciple-making church should also consider offering a short term small group program(s) on ascertaining one's own uniqueness in the context of pursuing an intimate relationship with God (spiritual pathways, learning style and personality traits – (see earlier discussion in PART THREE, Section I.K.). Most probably, few if any members of our congregation have consciously thought about and ascertained how their uniqueness works best for them. By ascertaining one's uniqueness, he or she could group together with others of similar nature in a relational small group. That is, a relational small group could be formed around a set of characteristics that works best for the group members.

How can one ascertain his or her spiritual style or styles? John Ackerman highlighted the book *Discovering Your Spiritual Style* written by Connie Ware. Ackerman found that congregations using her simple approach (somewhat rephrased in his own book) have discovered that this approach has proven to be an excellent method for people to begin talking about spirituality. Ackerman characterizes the test and calculation of the results, which may take 15 or 20 minutes, to be simple. There is no scale of perfection. No character flaws are mentioned. He recommends Ware's book (or his somewhat more simplified version) as a basis upon which to

lead small groups, leadership teams and even a congregation as a whole.[863] The latter might be done either as a part of a worship service focusing on spiritual formation, as the subject of a retreat, or on a piece-meal basis by conducting the effort separately with various small groups.

b. Introduction to Specific Spiritual Disciplines

There are host of spiritual disciplines. Both short term and long term relational small groups provide an excellent means to introduce specific individual disciplines. Though not exhaustive, PART THREE enumerates several spiritual disciplines focusing on connecting with God in a loving and intimate relationship. Each of these warrants being the subject of a short term small group program. Three are especially foundational to spiritual growth. i.e., prayer, spending time with God's Word, and worship.

(1) Introduction to Alternative Forms of Prayer

Most, if not all, members of our congregation recognize that prayer is one of the foundational elements of Christian living. Jesus devoted substantial time in prayer and teaching about the importance of prayer. With Jesus modeling prayer, there can be no doubt that prayer is an essential element of Christian living. As considered extensively in PART THREE, Section I.A., if we want to follow Christ, we need learn and understand the purpose of prayer, what prayer is and is not, the different methods of prayer, what to expect and not to expect from prayer, etc. However, learning alone is insufficient. To progress on the path towards a more Christ-like life, we need to actually practice the spiritual discipline of prayer.

Although presumably all believers engage in prayer, at least to some extent, many if not most are unfamiliar with the wide range of the types of prayer experiences available. Consequently, many may not have found those approaches to prayer which work best for them in growing toward a more Christ-like life. Thus, teaching and practicing the spiritual discipline of prayer needs to be reflected in our church's discipleship programming and experiences.

Introducing people to a deeper understanding of prayer and what might work better for them is a valuable role which short term small groups can play. As a church, we should consider alternative programs and books suitable for introducing the spiritual discipline of prayer for use in the short term small group context. Three in particular appear to be at least three worth reviewing.

- "Prayer: Does It Make a Difference" (Phillip Yancy) – This video series is described as probing the most challenging, perplexing and deeply rewarding aspect in our relationship with God. What is prayer? How does it work? Does it work? It recognizes that practicing prayer is fraught with frustration and mystery. Explore the mysterious intersection where God and people relate.[864]

- *Life-Changing Prayer: Approaching the Throne of Grace* by Jim Cymbala is a six-session video-based Bible study exploring God promises to hear and

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[863] John Ackerman, *Listening to God: Spiritual Formation in Congregations* 44-45 (2001).
[864] As described by churchsource.com.

answer prayer and extend his mercy when one comes to him. This study shows how approaching God's throne of grace through prayer can transform one's life.[865]

- *Too Busy Not to Pray: Slowing Down to Be with God* – Bill Hybels' book provides a widely-read accessible introduction to prayer leading to a rich and regular prayer life in the midst of life's busyness. He shows how to slow down to pray, listen to God, respond to what we hear, practice the presence of God and overcome prayer barriers. This practical book offers resources needed for growing ongoing experiences in prayer.[866] Although the book content is more extensive than can be covered in a short term small group setting, it offers an excellent four-session video Bible study based entitled *"Too Busy Not to Pray" which* calls both young and old to make prayer a priority and broadens the vision for what our eternal, powerful God does when his people slow down to pray.

- Also, the earlier discussion of the discipline of prayer (PART THREE, Section I.A.) offers a basis for developing a short term small group program on prayer.

(2) Spending Time with God's Word

Pursuing a loving intimate relationship with God requires getting to know him. God wants to be our friend, but it is difficult to be a friend with someone you do not know. The prime manner by which God reveals himself to us is through Scripture. We talk to God through prayer, God talks to us primarily through Scripture. Thus, foundational in our spiritual formation is the spiritual discipline of spending meaningful time with God's Word. Small groups play a vital role in effectively doing so.

As a disciple-making church, we need to address the question of Bible study from two perspectives. First, people need to learn *how* to study the Bible. That is, what method or methods should one use when reading the Bible to discern who God is and what he calls upon us to do in our daily lives? Second, once people learn effective means of spending time with the Word, focus shifts to the actual spiritual practice of spending time with God's Word which should be primarily devotional rather than simply an effort to amass information about God as if he were merely a subject of an academic course. But rather the ultimate purpose of Bible study is to know God, obey his call and then experience God's transforming power as we grow more like Christ in our thoughts, feelings and actions.

To reiterate earlier comments, effective, Bible study should not be approached casually. Spiritual growth stemming from Bible study requires (1) understanding the purpose(s) of such study, (2) learning and practicing the requisite skills, and (3) adopting a committed attitude. These are preparatory conditions for meaningful transformational experiences stemming from spending time with the Word. The *how* of effective Bible study lends itself to both short term

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[865] *Id.*

[866] As described by amazon.com.

and relational small group introductory programming. Each of the three elements (i.e., understanding the purpose, the learning how and the commitment) should be included.

It is the responsibility of the church, as a disciple-making church, to offer meaningful and deepening experiences which better enable people to become devotionally immersed in God's Word. Engaging in actual Bible study, in contrast to modeling how to do so, naturally fits within the context of relational small group activity supplementing an individual's private time. Spending time with God's Word is an on-going spiritual discipline rather than a short term endeavor. This is not to say that short term small groups should resist offering Bible study, but in doing so efforts should focus ultimately on moving people to relational small groups.

In offering an introductory program on modeling Bible study through a short term small group, we should explore the availability of alternative programs, books and other source materials suitable for small group discussion covering methods of Bible study. (For example, see those sources in this footnote.[868]) Such might be supplemented by using the earlier discussion of the spiritual discipline of pursuing intimacy with God through spending time with God's Word. through Bible study (see PART THREE, Section I.B).

(3) Worship

As noted earlier, most church members recognize, or at least sense, worship to be a significant element in living as a Christian. For some, periodic or perhaps even regular attending worship services is essentially a dutiful response to being a church member which may involve some after church socializing. Presumably, most church members sense that there is or should be more. But, what does it involve?

The worship stage of disciple-making comes early and continues on an on-going basis throughout one's Walk with Christ. However, for worship to meaningful be, one must understand its purpose and how to practice this spiritual discipline. As considered in earlier discussion, the fundamental purposes of worship are glorification of God, encountering God, and responding to God's invitation to be our friend in an intimate personal relationship. Authentic worship leads to life transformation toward the image of Christ. These are purposes that we need to learn and understand. And, we need to know how we go about worshipping in way that leads toward achieving these purposes as well as what we need to avoid (e.g., centering worship on ourselves rather than on God, simply being a spectator rather than being actively engaged in worship, etc.).

In his Great Commandment God calls us to love him. Here and elsewhere the New Testament calls us to worship God. A maturing follower of Christ actively and continually

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[868] There are numerous how to study the Bible sources on Amazon.com and Chriistianbooks.com as well as other websites. In addition, see Lonnie Richardson, "How to Study the Bible Workshop;" Brian Sonderrman, "Reading the Bible with Heart and Mind," No Regrets Conference, Elmbrook Church, February 5, 2011), Rick Warren, *Bible Study Methods: Twelve Ways You Can Unlock God's Word* (2006); and "How to Read the Bible,: Christianity Today, October 2011. A summary of methods for studying scripture is included in Jon S. Hanson, "A Spiritual Life Through Spiritual Disciplines," p.4 (as April 4, 2007) (drawing upon numerous resources over a 10 year period).

responds by pursing an intimate relationship with God through genuine participation in the critical element of vital transforming worship.

Thus, the why and the hows of worship need to be taught and learned. Both short term and relational small groups offer an excellent vehicle for teaching the spiritual discipline of worship.

Limiting the above discussion of short term small group content to the fundamental spiritual disciplines of prayer, spending time with God's Word and worship is not to suggest the same cannot be done for other spiritual disciplines. Consideration of spiritual disciplines in general and individual specific disciples offer meaningful small group content for those seeking to grow in Christ.

However, we should be continuously conscious of the potential negative effects of offering a multitude of short term small group programs addressing spiritual disciplines topics (e.g., studying various books of the Bible). Doing so would provide the option for people to simply keep bouncing around from one such group to another rather than taking the next step to becoming involved in an on-going relational small group.

c. Equipping Members for Disciple-Making Roles: Training

In addition to offering introductory programs on spiritual disciplines, short term small groups are well suited to provide training programs to equip people in various areas. For example, train people to serve as leaders of relational small groups, discern one's gifts and match those gifts to ministry, etc. Such training equips people to contribute to the process of moving people to, within, and through the various stages of discipleship.

(1) Leadership of Relational Small Groups

Since continuing participation in meaningful relational small groups is foundational in a Christ follower's on-going journey of growing toward a more Christ-like life, the importance of quality relational small group experiences is clear. To assure the quality of such experience(s), quality relational small group leadership is required. The demand for quality leadership will become more pressing when the expected growth of church member participation in such groups materializes. This necessitates that relational small group leaders be trained and equipped.

Training relational small group leaders is a role which short term and relational small groups can and should play. There are a variety of short term programs, books, etc. designed to provide content for small group leadership training. These need to be discovered, reviewed, selected and implemented. Short term small groups offer an approach to accomplish this training function.

In addition to or in lieu of a short term group leadership training program, a system of mentoring persons for leadership roles offers another approach to leadership training. The mentor might be a person on the professional staff of the church or perhaps a current small group

leader training someone in his or small group to assume a leadership role either as a successor in the current group or as a leader in a new group.

(2) Discerning One's Gifts for Serving

PART THREE, Section III. above focuses and elaborates on the spiritual discipline of connecting with God through serving others. Serving consists of offering one's resources (time, talent and treasure) for the care, protection, and nurture of other people.

God has blessed each of us with a different set of gifts. By using our unique gifts, we respond to God's call to "love your neighbor." To best be able to do so, we need to discern our gifts since these are the means through which we best participate in God's mission in the world. The basic questions are "What are the God-given gifts we each possess and how they can be best used in response to God's call to ministry?" Discerning our God given gifts leads to a sense of what God is calling us to do. As a disciple-making church, we need to "help people to discern their gifts and discover the ministry to which God is calling them."[869] Small groups can be utilized to encourage and assist persons in undertaking self-evaluations to discern their gifts and match those gifts with a particular ministry and/or other serving opportunity. In short, one's spiritual gifts and call to serve need to be discerned and his or her knowledge and skills need to be developed and practiced. (PART SIX, Section V.A. below elaborates on the church's role in fostering disciple-making success through the discernment of and matching people's spiritual gifts.)

(3) Serving and Evangelism

In addition to training relational small group leaders, discerning a person's gifts, and matching them to ministry, short term small groups can also support the growing into both the serving and the sharing Christ stages of disciple-making. Such programs focus on those persons who have progressed in their spiritual journey to the point where they desire that serving and/or reaching out to those outside the faith become a part of their Christian life style. Serving and outreach not only contribute to a person's personal spiritual growth, they also contribute to conversion experiences through attracting newcomers to church and ultimately leading them to Christ. Some short term programs available for consideration in the context of serving and evangelism are noted in later discussion.

A short term small group equipping program might be made available for church-wide participation, i.e., open to anyone. Following the material presentation, the participants should gather into small groups. In addition, a short term small group program can be integrated into a relational small group activities when the members of that group desire to progress together along the path of serving and/or reaching out to others.

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[869] John Ackerman, *Listening to God: Spiritual Formation in Congregations* 98 (2001).

d. Summary of Content

The content of short term small groups can be wide ranging, serve a host of functions, and contribute to various stages of disciple-making. Generally, short term small group experiences should focus on introductory subjects which provide a foundation for further spiritual growth through spiritual disciplines, providing the basics of the Christian faith, helping people to assimilate into the church, providing a bridge to relational small groups, and equipping people for serving in various ministries of the church. In short, utilization of short term small groups play a crucial role in encouraging, supporting and equipping people in progressing in their Walk with Christ

3. Small Groups, Not Just Classes

a. A Caveat

It has been quite common for churches to present subject matter which would be appropriate for small groups, but do so in a large class room setting. By themselves such programs have not proven to be very effective. They tend to primarily be information based. This tends not to be effective in transforming persons to Christ-likeness. Class participants tend to be passive recipients of information with little follow-up or action. Few such programs reflect the uniqueness of individuals as to their current status in spiritual growth. Class oriented presentations contribute little to the building of relationships. Furthermore, class-based programs generally lack personal accountability to and or mutual support among others for progress in spiritual formation. Classes are not an adequate substitute for participation in a small group.

Discipleship is fundamentally about choosing to follow Christ. It is a way of life. Good programs can provide needed information and skills. However, they are tools for growth process, not discipleship itself.[870] Discipleship cannot just be taught; it has to be lived. The relational element in Jesus' model must be at the heart of a disciple-making strategy. Although relationship building typically needs to contain programmatic elements, incorporating relational dynamics in short term as well as relational small groups is most important.[871]

b. Mandatory or Encouraged Participation in Follow-Up Small Groups

Little wonder that simply relying on class room or seminar type of programs fails to engender significant progress in disciple-making. However, this weakness can be somewhat alleviated by tying a classroom/seminar type programmatic presentation to participation in a follow-up small group discussion. At the conclusion of the presentation, the attendees break up into separate groups. If there are multiple sessions, maintaining the same group for each offers at least some limited potential for relationship building.

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[870] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* 36 (2006).
[871] Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* 123 (2003).

When offering follow-up small groups, one of two approaches might be followed; either conditional or encouraged participation.

(1) Conditional Participation

The strategy of conditional participation in follow-up small groups seeks to create the expectation that, if a person wants to attend a presentation which incorporates a follow-up small group(s), he or she will only attend on the condition of participating in such a group.

However, the conditional approach poses the following question. Even though a person attends a class session but not the small group follow-up, doesn't he or she benefit at least somewhat from the information gained? If yes, why deter such people from participating even though they don't intend to participate in a follow-up small group?

The answer lies in the essentiality of a small group relational setting for spiritual formation and the importance of short term small groups in providing a linkage or bridge to becoming involved in relational small groups. If we fail to tie instructional programming to small group participation, we tolerate, accommodate and it make easy for people to approach spiritual growth in a manner most likely to result in spiritual stagnation. The experience of numerous churches that present programs solely in a classroom format resulting in little spiritual growth evidences the need to tie class room type programming to follow-up small group interaction. The little or no permanent benefit, in terms of spiritual growth, for those simply attending the class room session will be outweighed by the loss of significant spiritual growth for those who would have moved on to small groups if it hadn't been for the availability of the easy option of simply attending the class room presentation. Furthermore, as we encourage small group participation as a foundational element in our disciple-making efforts, failing to condition the classroom attendance on also committing to participation in a follow-up small group could dilute our message and efforts.

Conditioning participation in classroom type programming to participating in a follow-up small group does not leave persons refusing to do the latter without options. For those who want only class room type programming, there are numerous other churches more than willing to provide them. In contrast, we need to be serious in being a discipling-making church and focus on encouraging movement through the disciple-making process. If we are to be an effective disciple-making church, we need to maximize that which moves people to a relational small group setting. Participation in short term small groups serves as a key linkage for doing s0.

(2) Encouraged Participation

An alternative approach to conditional participation is encouraged participation in the follow-up short term small group. Conditioning attending the class room setting on also participating in a small discussion group might discourage people from attending who would otherwise attend. Presumably they would gain some benefit and may even be encouraged to attend the small group despite their initial disinclination to do so. If they are precluded from attending the former, we lose an opportunity to encourage them to attend the

follow-up short term small group. Furthermore, this approach avoids saying to a member of our church that you are not welcome to attend a church function if you don't attend the follow-up small group. This runs contrary to the "open meeting" concept embraced by our church.

c. Middle of the Road Approach

In balancing the pros and cons of both the conditional and the encouraging participation alternatives, the following conclusions with respect to tying programmatic participation to short term follow-up small group participation are warranted.[872]

(i) Participation in small groups, short term as well as relational, is a foundational element in spiritual formation.

(ii) A small group opportunity should be a part of all class room type presentation (subject only to very rare exceptions in unusual circumstances).

(iii) As a church, we should do all we can to encourage people to participate in a small group following a class room type presentation.

(iv) Participation in the class room session should not be conditional on participating in a follow-up small group.

(v) If, however, experience demonstrates that a significant number of people opt for participating only in the programmatic presentation with no follow-up to small group experiences, we should reconsider employing the conditional approach.

VIII. GROWING INTO SERVING

In addition to pursuing *an intimate relationship with God* and pursing Christian fellowship in the church by *sharing life with other believers*, the third mark of growing in one's Walk with Christ is the spiritual discipline of *connecting with others through serving.*

The disciple-making Stage of Growing into Serving confronts the individual Christian with what needs to be learned, understood, practiced and committed to. The delivery of the content underlying serving is primarily the responsibility of the church. The content underlying the serving of others and the delivery of the content to church members is the focus of the following discussion.

A. UNDERSTANDING THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE OF SERVING

The life of following Christ not only involves but also requires serving others. God keeps loving the world and he does this through Christ's disciples. Today, that means us.

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[872] This section draws primarily from Fox River Congregational Church, Task Force on Disciple-Making, Minutes of November 19, 2008 Meeting, pp.3-4.

Serving others, in the context of disciple-making experiences, requires understanding the spiritual discipline of serving which is considered at some length earlier in PART THREE, Section III. That discussion covers Christ's call upon each of us to serve. The nature of serving involves not only good deeds but also visibly presents Christ. The range of serving embraces small as well as large deeds and discerning, developing and using our God given gifts to serve. Every Christian is called to connect with others, whether or not Christian believers, by serving their physical, emotional and spiritual needs either directly or indirectly.

We all are part of the body of Christ

> God has no other hands and minds in the world but ours. …God is still calling ordinary people to do his work and assuring us that he will be with us as we do.[873]

And, importantly, serving others not only contributes to the wellbeing of those being served, it also contributes to the server's own growth toward a more Christ-like life.

Christ sought "to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up." (Ephesians 4:11-12) Clearly, it is the responsibility of a disciple-making church to ensure that all of its people understand the spiritual discipline of serving, are drawn to serving, and are equipped to effectively respond to God's call to serve. A disciple-making church needs to strive to create a culture affirming serving not only others in the church, but also extending to those outside our church. Focused prayer, spending time with God's Word, worship, and participation in small groups can lead to participating in God's love for all the world through serving others.

Various small group programs, other resource materials, sermon series, etc. should be explored as a means to communicate understanding of the spiritual discipline of serving. The discussion in PART THREE on the spiritual discipline of serving offers a possible basis, perhaps as a supplement to or supplemented by other sources, for communicating understanding of the nature of the spiritual discipline of serving others. For a fuller discussion, see PART SIX, Section V.A. focusing on church efforts to foster successful disciple-making through discerning and matching people's gifts to a specific ministry(s) for which a person is well suited. ,

Furthermore, it should be noted that when talking about their faith journey, people often center on when they engaged in some type of personal serving others. Few things stretch a person in his or her faith walk as when he or she steps into a ministry environment for which they feel unprepared (e.g., leading a small group, teaching Sunday school, consoling or rendering care to someone other than family or a friend, etc.). The Bible is replete with illustrations of God calling people despite their sense of inadequacy (e.g., Moses, Joshua, Paul, the disciples). Engaging in a serving ministry, especially that which calls for direct personal involvement with others, better positions oneself to experience God's power working through him or her. While this may stretch and scare us, doing personal serving ministry compels us to depend upon God. In turn, this serves as another major catalyst in strengthening one's faith and growing more Christ-like in one's thoughts feelings and actions.

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[873] Lonnie Richardson, "To Be like Mary," December 20, 2015 (sermon).

> Serving other people is the quickest way to grow spiritually. It is the path to discipleship applauded by Jesus in his command that we should love our neighbors as ourselves.[874]

By lovingly serving others, we reflect that we are coming closer to knowing and connecting with God and developing a personal relationship with him. From both the perspective of our church, whose mission includes serving others and disciple-making of its members, and from the perspective of an individual seeking to grow into a more Christ-like life, participating in meaningful serving is crucially important.

In order to most meaningful serve as a follower of Christ, one needs to understand and practice the spiritual discipline of serving. To best do so depends upon learning not only the why of serving, but also the how and where each person can best meet the needs of the world with the love of Christ. In turn, it is the responsibility of the church to offer those disciple-making experiences which effectively communicate this understanding on a widespread basis throughout the church.

B. DISCERNING ONE'S GIFTS

As a disciple-making church, we need to ask "How does… [our] congregation help people to affirm their gifts and discover the ministry to which God is calling them."[875]

1. Role of Spiritual Gifts

Spiritual formation is the movement we experience from the persons we are, changing by degree, to becoming persons more in the image of Christ. Movement requires personal effort and commitment to learning, understanding and practicing spiritual disciplines including the spiritual discipline of serving.

God has blessed each of us with a different set of spiritual gifts which are to be used to serve others. The spiritual discipline of serving should not be approached in a casual, unthinking manner either by individual believers or by the church. The utilization of one's spiritual gifts is crucial in following Christ and furthering the mission of the church.

> …. God's hands have commissioned each of us to do the work of Christ and that we are called to become an "every member ministry." Your ministry is every bit as important as mine. Each one of us has received at least one spiritual gift. We are to use our gifts in ministry to help build up the body of Christ.[876]

Scripture makes clear that

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[874] Reggie McNeal, "The Path to Discipleship Applauded by Jesus," OutreachMagazine.com, May 25, 2014.

[875] John Ackerman, *Listening to God: Spiritual Formation in Congregations* 98 (2001).

[876] Pastor Mary Anne Biggs, 2016 Annual Report of First Congregational United Church of Christ (Eagle River, Wisconsin).

> spiritual gifts are abilities God bestows on every believer for the common good of the body or Christ. They are a large part of the answer to the question, "What should I do with the life God gave me?"[877]

Thus, it essential that a Christian believer understands the importance of God's gifts to him or her, what are the gifts he or she has received from God, and how and where to apply such gifts. It is critical for and responsibility of the church to communicate understanding of God's gifts and foster its members to apply their gifts in serving others.

2. What Are Spiritual Gifts?

Scripture makes clear that God gifts all of his people for the work of God's kingdom. The Book of Acts reveals a variety of spiritual gifts bestowed on believers such as the gifts of speaking in tongues, prophecy, apostleship, evangelism, teaching, healing, miracles, discernment and martyrdom. Listing of gifts are also found in other parts of scripture including Ephesians 4, Romans 12, and 1 Corinthians 12. Among the spiritual gifts commonly referred to are the gifts of administration/leadership, apostleship, evangelism, exhortation, giving, mercy showing, pasturing/shepherding, prophecy, serving, teaching *et al.*[878] However, some Christian thinkers maintain that these God-given gifts differ from God-given talents with which we were born or different from the skills we develop in faithfulness to God's call. That is, spiritual gifts are not the same as latent talents or trained abilities, but rather they are new manifestations of the power of the Holy Spirit. Others feel that spiritual gifts are simply another name for the natural talents used for the service of God.[879]

It is not the purpose here to delve into a deep semantic discussion as to which meaning should most appropriately used. However, when talking about spiritual gifts, it is important that there be a common understanding as to what is being talked about. Lonnie Richardson offers an encompassing definition which well suits this purpose.

> A spiritual gift is a God-given ability which enables a believer to effectively serve the body of Christ.[880]

This definition embraces our abilities whether they are deemed to be natural talents, developed skills, personality traits, or a perceived limited list of spiritual gifts. What is important is not specific labels. But rather, what is important is that all of these abilities come from God[881] and

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[877] Nancy Ortberg, "How Do I Discover My Spiritual Gifts? 3 Ways to Discern How God Wired You," October 2008 (christianitytoday.com).

[878] For a description of these gifts and how one might use such gifts in the context of ministry, *see* "Spiritual Gifts Descriptions," material provided in the Wisconsin Congregational Leadership and Lay Minister Training Program, 2012.

[879] "Discerning Our Spiritual Gifts," Wisconsin Congregational Leadership and Lay Minister Training Program, October, 2012.

[880] Lonnie Richardson, "Where Is God Calling You?" June 26, 2011 (sermon)

[881] "Discerning Our Spiritual Gifts," Wisconsin Congregational Leadership and Lay Minister Training Program, October, 2012.

that we recognize, develop, and use these abilities for the purposes of glorifying God and edifying others.[882]

3. Spiritual Gifts Vary

Every believer possesses a gift or gifts bestowed upon him or her by God. Each has different gift or gifts.

> *Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.* (Romans 12: 4-6)

> *Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.... There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men (and women).*
> (1 Corinthians 12:1-11)

Persons with differing spiritual gifts serve different purposes.

Spiritual gifts that *communicate God's Word* include evangelism, leadership, craftsmanship, and creative communication (preaching, writing). Spiritual gifts that *that educate God's People* include teaching, encouragement, wisdom, knowledge, and apostleship. Spiritual gifts that *demonstrate God's love* include mercy, hospitality, giving, helping, faith, administration, and shepherding (pastoring, serving). Spiritual Gifts that *celebrate God's presence* include social discernment, prophecy, intercession, healing, miracles, tongues, and instrumental and vocal music. And, spiritual gifts have been categorized as *extreme spiritual gifts*; pastor, tongues, celibacy, martyrdom, voluntary poverty, and missionary. However., one's talents, skills, and abilities are not spiritual gifts unless they are being used to "g*lorify God and Edify Others"*[883] There are a host of spiritual gifts differing from person to person. "We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us." (Romans 12:6) Individuals need to discern those gifts with which they have been blessed and match and apply them to a ministry for which they are best suited. And, in most cases, people doing what they are suited for enjoy what they are doing rather than becoming frustrated and burned out doing something for which they aren't suited.

In too many churches, the New Testament teaching about gifts has not been translated into ways to shape the life of the community. Instead of thinking simply and solely about slots on boards and committees to be filled and how a person's abilities might be used in various church roles, focus needs to shift toward how gifts can be discerned and used for serving both our own church members and those outside the church.

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[882] Stu Merkel, "My Spiritual Gifts; What Gift or Talent Has God Given Me?," Wisconsin Congregational Leadership and Lay Ministry Training Program, February, 2011.
[883] *Id.*

In short, God has gifted each of us in some way to fulfill some purpose whether large or small. Each of us possess different gifts. In addition to understanding the spiritual discipline of serving, we need to discern those gifts which we each possess and how they can be best used in response to God's call to serve the needs of our members as well as those outside our church. Each of us should use whatever gift we have received to serve others. (1 Peter 4:10) And to reemphasize, as a church, we need to "help people to affirm their gifts and discover the ministry to which God is calling them."[884]

Several years ago, recognizing this responsibility, FRCC adopted a strategy which included equipping members of the church for serving by (i) helping them discover their gifts and interests, (ii) guiding and matching their gifts and interests into an existing or a new ministry, and (iii) equipping them for ministry where needed.[885] Unfortunately, since that time. little progress has been made in this area.

Thus, to cultivate the fruit of the Holy, the church needs to foster people discovering and using the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the life of every believer. Every person has a unique set of gifts. Transformed life emerges for those who utilize their gifts in the context of ministry both in the church and in their daily living.

> The process of discovering our gifts is vital for the body of Christ to be built up and encouraged, to be equipped for service in ministry, and for loving and caring for the unbelievers in our reach.[886]

The church needs to foster and assist Christians to be good stewards of their God given gifts. See later discussion on discerning gifts in the context of the church's role of fostering discipling-making success – (PART SIX, Section V.A. below).

C, TRAINING: KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Often serving simply results from taking some small caring action of being nice to people in everyday situations. Generally, this does not require specific skills that require some type of training. However, in addition to discerning one's gifts for serving others, there are situations or specific ministries in which, to effectively utilize one's gifts, additional learning and/or skills are needed.[887] A disciple-forming church needs to develop and utilize various resources to offer opportunities to not only learn about the faith, worship, prayer and love, but also to develop the skills and knowledge needed for a particular serving ministry. Furthermore, it encourages and supports those seeking such preparation though opportunities available both inside and outside the church. And, when necessary, it needs to provide financial and/or other support to enable its members to go wherever the necessary training is available.

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[884] John Ackerman, *Listening to God: Spiritual Formation in Congregations* 98 (2001).

[885] Fox River Congregational Church, Outline of Comprehensive Strategy for Service (adopted June 6, 2004).

[886] Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church; 10 Traits of a Vital Ministry* 36-37 (1999).

[887] Jeffrey D. Jones, *Traveling Together: a Guide for Disciple-Forming Congregations* 58-59 (2006).

Once a person is grounded as a Christian, the next step in his or her spiritual growth addresses the question "How can Christians be mobilized to use their gifts in ministry."[888] Growing in serving, as well as growing into sharing Christ, as one progresses along his or her spiritual growth path, involves equipping oneself to do so. The goal of the church here is to encourage and enable persons to undertake a self evaluation process to discern their spiritual gifts, temperament and passion so as to better enable them to determine their personal mission, and insight into what God calls them to do. Thus, not only does a Christ follower define his or her focus through a church's mission statement, individuals are encouraged to discern their own personal mission through discovering their God given gifts. Individuals gain new excitement for serving when they are cognizant that their serving is based upon their God given gifts.

Self-evaluation can be achieved in a variety of contexts such as, for example, special classes, small group involvement, teaching, testing and counseling by which Christians come to discover their blend of spiritual gifts, passions and, temperament. Equipping better enables, encourages and motivates people to utilize their spiritual gifts in ministry to others. An important element of equipping is hands-on experience. Developing the use of one's spiritual gifts requires exposure to opportunities for ministry.[889]

D. BRINGING PEOPLE TO SERVING

1. Disengagement[890]

Most churches confront the issue of members remaining perpetually uninvolved. While faithful attendees, they are essentially spectators to what is going on. They fail to move on to becoming actively involved in the ministry of the church and the mission of God. "They go for the show, but not to serve."[891] Why? As a church, when we know why, we are better positioned to encourage and support them in moving to serving others.

It has been suggested that there are three basic reasons people remain comfortably seated in their pews without going the next step into some type of serving.

First, some *people feel useless*. They believe that they lack anything significant to offer in a serving ministry. They are not persons to serve in a ministry capacity. With respect to individuals holding this perception, what needs to be corrected is their ignorance of God's call. Those that feel useless may simply not know that they have not only been called by God to serve, but also they have been gifted to serve. As Peter wrote, ""Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms." (1 Peter 4:10) Clergy and laity are both called to serve. The only question is what kind of ministry for each person. The role of the church is to engage those who feel useless through patient teaching that God has gifted them for serving, Once ignorance is corrected, these individuals are much more likely to engage in some type(s) of serving others.

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[888] Linus J. Morris, *The High Impact Church: A Fresh Approach to Reaching the Unchurched* 175 (1993).
[889] *Id.* 175-76.
[890] Ed Stetzer, "3 Three Reasons People are Not Involved in Your Church," OutreachMagazine.com, June 10, 2014.
[891] *Id.*

Second, church members include those who have been *hurt or are hurting*. Some may have been hurt by other churches, church leaders, etc. Perhaps they served in an unhealthy situation. Because of their past experiences, they are hesitant to get involved again. For those who have been severely wronged, a means must be in place to provide gracious and loving help to bring them to healing. These people need encouragement to become involved.

Third, some people are lazy and simply do not want to serve. Let others do the work while we enjoy the benefits. People would rather be an object of the church's ministry than a partner in it. "Churches must make it much more difficult for those who want to come and be lazy. They need to be challenged."[892]

All churches have members who are not actively involved in serving in some ministry. However, the reasons for disengagement vary. A disciple-making church needs to embrace a means to determine those who feel useless and need encouragement, those who are hurting and need help, and those who are lazy and needs correcting and challenge. The role of the church is to make disciples. This requires engaging its members to serve in some manner.

2. Attractions

In addition to the nudges noted immediately above, people can be attracted to serving others in any one or a combination of several ways. For example, a church can create an atmosphere where serving is expected, acknowledged and celebrated. Offer opportunities to discern one's gifts. Offer training opportunities to acquire skills and confidence for various kinds of serving. Remind people that serving others begins at home, in the workplace and in other occurrences in their daily living, e.g., striving for and maintaining healthy relationships. Care for people with whom we are close and remain in contact with them. However, respect a disciple's right to say no when asked to serve in a particular church ministry which would give rise to a burnout situation.[893]

But most importantly reiterate and emphasize that serving is a call of God.

> There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land. (Deuteronomy 15:11)

Serving other does not necessarily nor most often require undertaking monumental tasks.

> [W]e can all watch for opportunities to show God's love to others. Whatever we do for others in the name of Jesus – a prayer, a kind word, an offer to assist with a simple task, a gift from our garden – is pleasing to God.[894]

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[892] *Id.*
[893] Michael W. Foss, *Power Surge: Six Marks of Discipleship for a Changing Church* 100 (2000).
[894] The Upper Room (Daily Devotional), February 25, 2018.

Small as well as large acts of kindness respond to God' call to love others. They also move us along toward a more Christ-like life.

E. PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

The New Testament envisions the "priesthood of all believers." This is not a new watchword of the Reformation. In writing to scattered Christians, Peter refers to "you [the church in aggregate] are … a royal priesthood." (1 Peter 2:9). Paul envisioned everyday Christians when he wrote "To each is given the manifestation of the Sprit for the common good." (1 Corinthians 12:7) All believers are given ministry gifts. The New Testament sets forth a full employment plan which values all believers utilizing their gifts for building and expanding Christ's church. However, the common reality today is that there is only a relatively small percentage of people who move beyond Sundays into the life and ministry of the church and/or who experience ministry as a way of life..[895]

A fundamental principle of our Congregational Way, as adopted by our congregation, embraces the concept of the priesthood of all believers.

> The Congregational Way accepts and fosters the principle that we are all ministers where we live and work as well as in church. Our Christian ministry is our understanding and expression of the mind and mission of Christ that demonstrates a common life of gratitude, devotion, witness, service, celebration and discipleship. All Christians are called to this ministry of servanthood in the world to the glory of God.[896]

This principle is central to the understanding of discipleship. The adopted concept of the priesthood of all believers and the substantial translation of this concept into the life of many members of our church demonstrates that the orientation and expectation at FRCC fosters this element in the making of disciples. However, it hasn't been universally understood in our congregation, accepted and or implemented by all members. The spiritual discipline of serving others, all serving in some type of ministry capacity, needs to be continually communicated, understood and implemented. On an on-going basis, our church should foster the priesthood of all in believers in our congregation.

F. SERVING IN THE COMMUNITY

1. Plumblines for Community Engagement[897]

A question a church should ask itself is whether it displays the generosity of the gospel in the community outside the church? Is there much joy in the community as a result of

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[895] Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship Making Disciples A Few At A Time* 24-25 (2003).

[896] Fox River Congregational Church, "The Congregational Way: Essential Principles of Congregationalism" (adopted June 22, 2003).

[897] This section is primarily drawn from J. D. Greear, "6 Plumblines for Community Engagement," OutreachMagazine.com, August 23, 2015.

the church being there? Would the church be missed by the community if it left the area? A realistic answer for many churches would be no.

One church felt convicted by God when it was unable to respond positively to these questions. It endeavored to turn itself around. Four years after ongoing involvement with an underperforming public elementary school, at a government sponsored publicly televised event, a county manger expressed that no one better expressed the spirit of brotherly love than that exhibited by the people of Summit Church. Wherever there was a need, someone from Summit Church would be there. This experience galvanized the church so that serving in the community has become part of the church's DNA. A significant portion of the church body has become involved serving the community outside the church. Its efforts are based upon six principles referred to as plumblines which may offer helpful as a guide for our church.

a. Plumbline #1: Everyone Is Called and All People Count

In Luke 14:12-14, in effect, Jesus said to his host when you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors. If you do, they may invite you back so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. Although they cannot repay you, you will be blessed.

Here, Jesus poses a question which is applicable to us as it was to his disciples. If our lives were a party, who would people say we were throwing it for? Jesus threw a party for people unable to repay him. Following Jesus means throwing the "party" of your life for those who are unable to repay you. This is what Jesus did. Those who seek to follow him must do the same. This is a calling for every disciple of Christ.

Putting this in the context of church efforts, church leaders, teams and membership as a whole need to confront the question as to how many ministries in the church are designed and or implemented to reach people who are unlikely to contribute back to the church resulting in higher budgets, nicer buildings, etc. Is the church equally passionate about reaching those unable to make such repayment? By refocusing, particular areas of need in the community can be identified; e.g., homeless, the orphans, the prisoners, the unwed mother, at-risk teens, those receiving substandard education, etc. Although reaching such groups may not yield a "high return" in the earthly sense, they are people whom Jesus has commanded that we serve.

Focusing ministry primarily on reaching those who can repay the church gives rise to the question whether we have lost touch with the Christ's calling and the cross he bore to save us. It has been said that if we marginalize the poor in our community, God will marginalize us. Churches and their members are called to serve the needy in the community. We are all called and all people count.

Of course, there are more well to do persons who are in spiritual, emotional or physical need. They are every bit as lost as those in material need. However, when the primary focus of a church's ministry is on reaching those can "pay us back," the church loses touch with the

Christ of our calling and the cross he bore to save us. As Tim Keller says, "if we marginalize the poor in our community, God will marginalize us." [898]

b. Plumbline #2: People Are the Mission[899]

Community serving projects are not solely ends in themselves. In addition, they offer catalysts in helping church members form relationships with persons in segments of society with whom they would not normally come in contact. The greatest need in a community is the gospel of Christ. Disciple-making is at the core of God's calling; it is the church's mission. Thus, projects should be designed to encourage church members do more than simply perform random acts of kindness and then return to their normal lives. Although serving others is God pleasing, to make most of the effort also seek to engender people to come to Christ community serving projects in order to embrace and encourage developing personal relationships on a one-to-one basis. Effective disciple-making is or should be at the core of all ministries of the church. This not to say that

> we only serve people to convert them. We serve them whether or not they ever show any interest in the gospel, and the good we do for them is a good, God-pleasing end in itself. But if what we believe about the gospel is true, we can never be satisfied to put shoes on their feet when their soul is in jeopardy.[900]

All who comprise the church (whether one is a church leader, staff, team member or church member) need to consider whether church members are effective at disciple- making, including themselves, on a personal, one-on-one level. Focus on this first before getting involved in the community. With a disciple-making focus, community engagement comes naturally. "Making disciples is at the core of every other ministry in which we engage."[901] People are the mission.

c. Plumbline #3: The Church Is God's Demonstration Community[902]

When the gospel was preached in the New Testament, it was accompanied by signs; sometimes by miraculous healings, other times by amazing acts of love of persons helping a community. Similarly, as we communicate the gospel, it is essential to tangibly display the love of the gospel through the work of our hands. Serving the needs others offers demonstrations of love and caring which contribute to persuading not only the needy, but also watching skeptics. As Francis Schaeffer famously said, "The final apologetic [defense of the faith] that Jesus gives is the love in the church."[903] Thus, when conducting community service projects, encourage members to invite an unbelieving friend to join them. The church can be God's demonstration community not only for those being served but also for those who observe and, perhaps actually participate in the serving.

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[898] *Id.*
[899] This section is primarily drawn from J. D. Greear, "6 Plumblines for Community Engagement," OutreachMagazine.com, August 23, 2015.
[900] *Id.*
[901] *Id.*
[902] This section is primarily drawn from *id.*
[903] *Id.* .

d. Plumbline #4: The Church Is Not a Group of People Gathered Around a Leader: the Church Is a Leadership Factory[904]

Jesus made an astounding pronouncement when he said

> Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do… greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. (John 14:12)

How can we do greater works than Jesus? We can't raise the dead or feed 5,000 people with only limited loafs of bread and a few fishes. So, what did Jesus mean? Through the Holy Spirit's presence in Jesus, followers, can exert greater power collectively rather than relying on power resting on just one or a handful of persons.

Unfortunately, often in churches there are those who turn this principal upside down by opting to build their ministries around a few gifted individuals to whom others offer their respect and praise. One's turf is guarded. But, that is not where the real power of the church rests and is found. Of the 40 miracles recorded in Acts, 39 occurred outside the church? God did not intend for all his power to flow through a few gifted individuals.

> So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. (Ephesians 4:11-12)

God does not call pastors and church leaders to bear the load of doing the serving ministry. But rather, they are to equip and guide others for the work of ministry. A church's success as a disciple-making church should not be measured only by its ability to bring persons into the pews, but importantly the degree of a church's success is measured by its sending capacity, i.e., sending people out to serve in the community. The Church should not simply be a group of people gathered around a leader. Instead, the church should be a leadership factory.

e. Plumbline #5: Best Ministry Ideas Are in the Congregation[905]

Accepting that Plumbline #4 is true, we also can expect that the Holy Spirit will implant ministry ideas within the hearts of congregation members well as church leaders. Encourage and teach members to think this way. Church pastors and staff should focus on equipping and empowering them to be in ministry. Leaders should catalyze community projects by identifying church members with ideas. Ask them to lead such efforts. In appropriate situations, provide church resources and, networking power to better able these community serving efforts to succeed. A church catalyzed to do serving ministry will achieve more gospel-good in the community than will occur when a church owns and staffs all of the ministries.

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[904] This section is primarily drawn from i*d.*
[905] This section is primarily drawn from *id.*

A church needs to do more than simply staffing ministries. This severely limits the potential of the people of God. Do not merely recruit volunteers. Instead, raise leaders. Rather only than asking people to get on board a determined ministry, also get on theirs.

f. Plumbline #6: The Gospel Is Not Just the Diving Board: It Is the Pool[906]

Saturating one's congregation in the gospel catalyzes church members to engage in mission. A passion emerges to reach out to and serve others when we understand all that Jesus has done for us and his passion for reaching the lost. This is what motivates people to give their time, talent and treasure for Jesus.

The gospel creates not only passion, but also offers the vision of the lostness of people in our surrounding community and of God's vision of reaching out to it. The gospel is not only the entry point to Christianity, it is both the diving board (entry) into Christianity and also the pool which embraces us as we grow in awe and worship who God is and what he has done for us. As we grow in our understanding, we naturally begin to serve others Fervency and effectiveness in reaching out to serve in the community emerge as the result of saturation in the gospel. Thus, continue to preach and teach the gospel until people are saturated in the gospel which is foundational to creating a widespread truly serving culture in the church.

2. Becoming Involved in Serving in the Community[907]

As elaborated on in the discussion of the spiritual discipline of serving (see PART THREE, Section III.A. above), we demonstrate our love for others by reaching out to and serving their emotional, physical, relational and/or spiritual needs. Christ's calling us to serve is not limited to helping and caring for only those who members of the church. We are also called to get out into the community.

To effectively do so involves getting to know the community that our congregation, relational small groups and/or individuals will focus on. Gaining answers to several key questions, such as the following is an important place to start.

- What are the primary issues in your community?
- How do the people in the community want the church to respond to those issues?
- Do the people in your community actually want the ministry you are proposing?

It easy to cogitate within the walls of the church and make assumptions concerning the lives of those in the in the broader outside community. It is more difficult to build relationships with community residents and grow in understanding their needs and desires. However, effective serving the needs of others builds congregation ministries upon what the community says it

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[906] This section is primarily drawn from *id.*

[907] This section is primarily drawn from "Knowing Your Community, Defining Your Mission," Alban Weekly, October 2, 2008.

wants. Building relationships with the community enables more likely focus on meeting unmet needs rather than duplicating what other groups are already doing.

Here we are not necessarily defining community as a geographic area, although commonly congregations focus on a neighborhood, town, or region. Instead, the church focus might be a particular group of people, e.g., those who are afflicted with a specific physical defect, with grief for loss of a loved one, etc.

The question becomes how to get to know the community. Various strategies have been suggested to help connect with the people the congregation has determined it wants to serve.

- *Connect with key leaders of the community on a one-to-one basis and build relationships with them.* They can provide introductions to others you need to know and can educate you on the needs and desires of the community. When asked, people like to share what they know. Key leaders might include political leaders, pastors and/or leaders of other churches, law enforcement officers, staff at a neighborhood school, program specialists in the program area that is your focus (for example, youth development, family counseling, or chemical dependency treatment).

- *Utilize demographic data and relevant studies*. Census data, local chamber of commerce, business associations and/or neighborhood groups may have information helping to bring into focus a community area for a church's serving efforts.

- *Connect with the community through church members*. Church members may live in the area to be served or work in professions or business which would provide needed contacts.

- *Join community organizations or boards*. If a group of people in the community is working on an issue which the church wants to address, consider joining the group. Participating in such group will result in hearing community concerns articulated repeatedly. This also afford opportunities to build new relationships with community leaders. Then ask "What can the church do to support the neighborhood?"

- *Attend community meetings*. When community members get together for discussions or celebrations, make sure there is at least one member of the church attends. Consider a portable booth for community events to promote the visibility of the congregation.

- *Walk around the community*. See people and their needs, be open to spontaneous conversations, learn on the street, find out where people "hang out," etc. Survey people as to what they see as the major issues for this community and how the church might respond to those issues? That is, how can the church serve you?

The Center for Parish Development offers an approach to fostering a community dialogue which is an opportunity for church and community leaders to share thoughts, understandings and experiences contributing to a church's understanding of its wider community

challenges and opportunities to serve. The *method* is to invite representatives and members from the wider community (social service agencies, governmental agencies, religious communities, service organizations, businesses, educational institutions) and one's church members to participate in a "Community Dialogue." Next engage in a *community trend analysis* of major factors, forces and trends at work in the local and wider community. The *process* is to engage in table size conversations which identify the current situation in the community and explore challenges and opportunities that are or will impact the community as it looks to the future. Through this process relationships are built, the current community context is clarified, opportunities are explored and next steps can be considered. In planning for community dialogue key questions for the church to consider include what we want to learn about the community context for our ministry, who should we invite to participate in the community dialogue, and what is the definition (boundaries) of the community to be used in planning for this community dialogue.[908] This approach to community dialogue provides an alternative to that noted immediately above or they might be somehow integrated.

Whether the church is fostering a specific congregation-wide serving ministry in the community or fostering individuals, groups of individuals or relational small groups, it should educate church members on approaches to discern community needs and build relationships with those to be served.

3. Weekend "Being" Church[909]

Several churches periodically (e.g., once a month for eight months a year) cancel their regular weekend worship services. Instead, members go out into the community in various serving capacities. This has been described as "being" church in lieu of "doing" church. This concept is predicated on several factors.

- Jesus loved to serve people in tangible ways.
- It encourages those who persons, who focus only on areas within the walls of the church, to go outside the walls resulting in a broader focus.
- It often leads people to engage in community serving activities in addition to that done on periodic Sundays.
- It provides an opportunity to serve alongside non-members and even non-believers thereby enhancing the likelihood that they may start down the path toward belief.
- This a bonding time for the people serving together on a project.

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[908] . Center for Parish Development, "Getting Ready for Renewal," presented at Willow Creek Association Fall Leadership Summit, September, 29, 2018.

[909] This Section primarily draws on Brendon Cox, "Why Your Church Needs to Hit the Streets," OutreachMagazine.com, August 9, 2015.

- Such serving projects is a means to communicate that "giving" encompasses more than the offering plate. It also involves one's time and talents.

- Serving the community blesses people around us, aids those in need, and earns the church a bit of trust relating the gospel when a receptive door is open.

- Although not a primary objective, participating in such an activity can be fun.

Periodically get out into the community in lieu of regular worship services is not done simply to attract attention. Although attention can be valuable, this is not the primary goal. Second, this is not about serving people in hopes they would favor the church with a visit. And. This is not to take a break from worship. In fact, serving is worship.

A church may want to try the take a Sunday off from a worship service on a infrequent basis to test the waters or on a frequent basis to discern whether a greater impact results. At least some churches have found that "being" church, rather than simply "doing" church has resulted in a definite, visible impact in their community. Furthermore, this contributes to building relationships with local agency leaders offering even more opportunities for community service.

4. Focus Relational Small Groups on Community Service

Relational small groups play a vital role in various aspects of both a church's disciple-making and an individual's efforts in growing as a follower of Christ. FRCC's Discipleship Team adopted a Relational Small Group Covenant incorporating a commitment to serve. Among other things, that covenant provides

> We will seek to grow in *service and evangelism* as catalysts for spiritual growth and as responses to God's call for mission.

Unfortunately, to date this has yet to play a significant and widespread role in our relational small group efforts.

Thus, an important church initiative is to encourage and support relational small groups to become involved in community service projects (e.g., regularly help elderly with yard maintenance, assisting a needy family, drive persons who lack transportation, cleanup neighborhoods, etc.). Scripture reveals that God wasn't just a sit-here and-listen type of person. God constantly sent people out to help those in the community.[910] Focusing relational small groups on community service is an important thrust for the church to foster.

G. SERVING AND EVANGELISM

A church serving in the community performs a vital role in being an effective disciple-making church. Members serving there in response to God's call to serve are not only helping

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[910] Scott Marshall, "Focus Small Groups on Community Service," OutreachMagazine.com, September 19, 2014.

others, they themselves are growing toward a Christ-like life. Thus, a disciple-making church should want and should intentionally find ways to engage the community within which it is located. "The mission is 'out there' not 'in here."[911]

Serving others in the community is a part of God's mission for us, it is not all of it. Witnessing the faith and serving others go together. "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus..." (Colossians 3:17) "As Christians, you represent Christ at all times – wherever you go and whatever you say."[912] Don't abandon the gospel in favor of acts of serving only. "God's mission does not progress unless people are talking about God's mission to save, about the transformation of individuals and communities which happens at the same pace that the gospel is proclaimed."[913]

Wherever and whenever appropriate, serving can and should involve more than simply performing good deeds. It offers an opportunity to reach out to and bring people onto a path toward accepting Christ as Lord and Savior. In response to Christ's command, as a church, we need to foster a more robust effort to incorporate serving evangelism in our good deed serving efforts.

H. SUMMARY OF CONTENT IN THE DISCIPLE-MAKING STAGE GROWING INTO SERVING

As disciple forming community, our church needs to place major emphasis on God's call to serve. The foundations of effective serving ministries for congregational care ministry programs for members of the church, for serving ministry programs for those outside the church and for participation in specific church functions supporting our mission purposes, include several elements:

- teaching the biblical and mission purpose bases for serving,
- aiding church members in discovering their interests and gifts,
- aiding people in matching their gifts and interests to a specific ministry,
- providing training for a ministry where needed, and
- drawing members of the church into serving in some capacity utilizing their gifts.[914]

These provide the content for growing people to serving.

Growing into serving is an essential disciple-making stage of a person growing more like Christ in one's thoughts, feelings and actions. As a disciple-making church, it is our

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[911] Ed Stetzer, "Kingdom Mission: 4 Steps for Stronger Engagement." OutreachMagazine.com, August 25, 2015,
[912] *Life Application Bible* (NIV) (revised 1991) (study note for Colossians 3:17)
[913] Ed Stetzer, "Kingdom Mission: 4 Steps for Stronger Engagement." OutreachMagazine.com, August 25, 2015,
[914] Fox River Congregational Church, "Outline of Comprehensive Strategy for Service" (June 6, 2004). An Outline of Comprehensive Strategy has been adopted by the Congregation for each of our mission purpose teams at its June 6, 2004 Meeting.

responsibility to offer and implement experiences leading our members in progressing to and within the disciple-making stage of growing into serving.

IX. GROWING INTO SHARING CHRIST: EVANGELISM

Earlier discussion considers program content appropriate to fostering connecting with God in an intimate relationship, connecting with other believers through sharing life together, and connecting with others (both believers and non-believers) through serving their needs. This section considers program content and the delivery of the content involved in connecting with people outside the faith through growing in sharing Christ and bringing people into church fellowship, i.e., evangelism.

A. MISSION AND OUTREACH

All too commonly in churches today evangelism is either dying or never was very prominent in the first place. When a church does grow, growth more than likely results from the transfer of a Christian from one church to another rather than bringing a new person to Christ. When evangelism is not a priority in the church, the church is on the path of decline.

> The reason our churches start failing is because over time the church tends to turn inward—to focus on pleasing those on the inside. They stop reaching out to the lost and disenfranchised. As a result, the church becomes a comfortable museum of what God once did rather than an example of what God still does.[915]

This poses the question, *why should evangelism be one of the highest priorities in a church?* In short, evangelism should be a church priority (i) because Christ commands it (Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), (ii) because Christ is the only way of salvation ("I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6), and (iii) because Christ died for the world (John 3:16). It is manifest that evangelism is a foundational element of an effective disciple-making church and must be an intentional prime priority in what a church does.[916]

> Jesus didn't tell the world to go to church, he told the church to go to the world.[917]

James said "It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God." (Acts 15:19) This should be one of the benchmarks by which all decisions are made in the local church. Today, it is our responsibility to function as a gathering of people in a process and a place where the curious, the unconvinced, the skeptical, former

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[915] Brad Powell, "Beyond Groundhog Day." OutreachMagazine.com, January 25, 2018.
[916] Thomas Rainer, "The Greatest Tragedy in the Church Today," OutreachMagazine.com, May 23, 2014.
[917] Lonnie Richardson, ""You Can be a Witness," April 28, 2013 (sermon).

believers, and the broken can gather together in Christ. Churches need to rid themselves of impediments which render it difficult for those who might possibly turn toward God.[918]

By its nature and purpose, the church should be a contagious place infecting an increasing number of those outside the faith with the Christian faith. Focusing on being a teaching church or a worshipping church to the neglect of reaching out to the spiritually lost is like a man saying, "Sure I neglect my kids, but I am a great husband to my wife. In the Great Commission, Christ gave us our mission including reaching out to and "making disciples." A church, which neglects to reach out to and bring in the lost disregards Christ's divine mandate. It is essential that a church's mission be aligned with the Great Commission and that the church is active in carrying out the mission.[919]

The recommended Mission for Fox River Congregational Church calls for encouraging, equipping and supporting people in growing toward more Christ-like lives in thoughts, feelings and actions by getting connected in four different relationships. This includes getting connected with people outside the faith, through lovingly witnessing the good news of Christ, leading them toward to accepting Christ as Lord and Savior, and bringing them into congregational life. Evangelism is a fundamental/crucial part of our Mission

Unfortunately, there is a large gap between the lofty vision of witnessing for Christ and church reality of doing so. This gap needs to be addressed. The values of evangelism, discussed below, need to be lived. Simply putting on an evangelism event will not do the job. Both our church members individually and our church as a whole need to invest in evangelism. Get radical and get serious about evangelism. Bridge the gap between vision and reality.

> [W]hen churches are fully engaged in fulfilling their redemptive potential, the lost get found, the spiritually confused find truth, and lives are changed in this world and for eternity. Tell me: what other endeavor on the planet is so worthy of our time and effort?[920]

Some believe that there is only one way to do evangelism, i.e.. how it is done in scripture. However, the Great Commission expresses a mandate of *what* should be done. That is, Jesus told us what he wants us to do and *who* (the church and its members) should do it. However, he never set forth the *how* to do it. The *what* and the *who* is the command which spans over time. The *how* is the method which must fit the cultures existing over different periods of time. There is "no the method."[921] The method or methods for effective evangelism need to be developed and implemented within the context of the times, the locations which can be reached, and the various cultures being addressed. The following discussion centers on the how to structure for effective outreach here at Fox River Congregational Church.

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[918] Andy Stanley, *Deep and Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend* 93, 97 (2012).
[919] Mark Mittelberg, *Building a Contagious Christian Church: Revolutionizing the Way We View and Do Evangelism* 25 (2001)
[920] Id. at 11.
[921] Larry Gilbert, *How to Influence Your Loved Ones for Christ When You Don't Have the Gift of Evangelism: Team Evangelism* 27-28 (2003).

B. ROLE OF THE CHURCH

Early in his ministry, Jesus entrusted his message of the coming of God's kingdom to people capable of remembering and faithfully communicating that message to others. His parting words to his disciples, the Great Commission, mandated worldwide disciple-making, a process requiring evangelism. Despite seemingly insurmountable obstacles, Christianity experienced explosive growth. The Great Commission has been carried forward generation to generation, across the centuries spreading the good news changing the course of history,

In its most recent study on evangelism, the Barna group defined groups of people in the following manner.[922] This terminology is occasionally incorporated in our subsequent discussion., hence these definitions are included here.

- *Practicing Christians* identify themselves as Christian, agree strongly that faith is very important in their lives, and have attended church within the past month.

- *All others* are US adults who are not practicing Christians under the definition above. These fall into two main groups:

    - *Lapsed Christians* identify as Christian but have not attended church within the past month. Only 4 percent consider their faith very important.

    - *Non-Christians* identify with a faith other than Christianity ("religious non-Christians") or with no faith at all (atheists, agnostics and nones").

{According to Age]

- Millennials were born 1984 to 1998 (ages 20 to 34).
- Gen_X were born 1965 to 1983 (ages 35 to 53).
- Boomers were born 1946 to 1964 (ages 54 to 72).
- Elders were born before 1946 (age 73+).

Having always to face challenges, Christian history experienced failures as well as successes. Today's generations confront plenty of cultural and demographic changes leading to times of unprecedented challenge.[923] The overall number of practicing Christians is falling, against a cultural backdrop that is increasingly difficult to define.

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[922] *Reviving Evangelism: Currant Realities that Demand a New Vision for Sharing the Faith* 8-9 (2019) (a Barna Report produced in Partnership wit Alpha USA) hereafter referred to as Barna, *Reviving Evangelism* (2019).

[923] Significant societal upheavals have led us here. They include the innovative disruptions of the internet and social media, generational shifts accompanying the coming of age of Millennials and Generation Z, and increasing political rifts between Christian conservatives and progressives. Complicating this turmoil are factors actively tearing at the social fabric: the breakdown of institutions such as the traditional family; the rapidly diversifying racial and ethnic makeup of America; the revelation of sexual aggression and abuse in once-hallowed religious, artistic, academic

> Lapsed Christians are *the largest group self-identified Christians in the US;* they make up more than two-thirds of those who identify as Christian. They may hold some measure of Christian belief, but they do not prioritize faith either internally (by considering it personally important) or externally (by regular involvement in a local church).[924]

Further compounding the problem, even practicing Christians are not immune to the destabilization so widely felt. As the older generations age out of dominate influence, barring greater and more effective evangelism efforts, the public perception of the Christian faith will continue to decline as evidenced by many in Gen Z, whose oldest members are close to their 20s. "feel little cultural pressure to maintain a faith identity, Christian or otherwise."[925]

These dynamics point to an existential crisis for the Church.

> Cultural decline and fragmentation cannot threaten the existence or integrity of the Church as a gospel community, but the failure to share our faith certainly can. We must ask ourselves how we are [as a church and individual member thereof] faring in our role as heirs of Jesus' call to the apostles.[926]

Evangelism is to present Christ in a way leading people to put their trust in God through Christ by accepting Christ as Lord and Savior and to bringing them into fellowship of a local community expression of his Church. "God wants the lost found, saved and incorporated as responsible members of His church."[927] If a church lacks the passion to find and bring in the lost, it is no longer true to its purpose.

Let's take a moment to reiterate some earlier comments on the spiritual discipline of connecting with those outside the faith. Both individually and collectively as the church, we need to care about what God cares about. Christ reveals God's loving obsession for people. Since God wants all of his lost children found, to be God's friend we must also care and engage in reaching out to the lost. This is what evangelism is all about. It is about reaching out to others, sharing the gospel and one's own story, bringing them to Christ, and bringing them into a community of believers.

From the perspective of an individual church member seeking to grow toward a more Christ-like life, incorporating evangelism as an integral part of one's Christian life style is essential. From the perspective of our church, whose mission includes encouraging, equipping and supporting people, we are responsible to foster an evangelism life style in our its members.

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and political spheres; and highly public violence such as terrorist attacks and mass murders in community spaces. Barna, *Reviving Evangelism* 16 (2019).

[924] Barna, *Reviving Evangelism* 17 (2019).

[925] *Id.* at 17.

[926] *Id.* at 17.

[927] Linus J. Morris, *The High Impact Church: A Fresh Approach to Reaching the Unchurched* 128 (1993).

We need to overcome people's common failure to reflect the positiveness of Christ's influence on our lives to people outside the faith so as to attract them to Christ and to become a part of Christian congregational life. This is a responsibility which FRCC has already accepted as reflected by our church's Vision Statement.

> *Evangelism* -- We envision a Christian fellowship in which all members seek to win others to Christ by reaching out to all by entering into personal relationships, by sharing the Gospel and by bearing witness by word and deed to the power and love of God so that others may know and accept Christ as Lord and Savior, and by maintaining a welcoming and non-threatening environment in which those not yet committed to Christ can feel safe and free to explore the Christian faith. We envision expanding the community of Christ through growth in our own fellowship, growth through new church plantings, or through other efforts. Recognizing that God desires that we reach as many people as possible with the life-transformation message of Jesus Christ, we envision using a wide range of traditional and creative methods and policies to generate growth consistent with maintaining our integrity and commitment to biblical truth.[928]

Similarly, FRCC's Statement of Core Values of our Church expresses that

> *....God desires for us to reach as many people as possible with the life-changing message of Jesus the Christ. Thus, we are committed to pursuing a wide range of methods and policies (including one on one personal evangelism, life style role model evangelism and serving physical, mental and spiritual needs), which do not compromise our integrity or commitment to biblical truth, to reach out and witness the Gospel to the unchurched so as to win them to being followers of Christ. (This is to be followed by discipling them toward Christian maturity). A fundamental reason for our church to exist is to lead others to accepting Christ as Lord and Savior (i.e., conversion).*

Although reaching out to, sharing Christ with and bringing people in is a fundamental aspect of being a follower of Christ, there are all too few people doing so. As Christ said, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few." (Matthew 9:37) The Great Commission announces Jesus' marching orders. Go and make disciples. As Lonnie Richardson emphasizes, "It says go, not find ways and slick programs that will attract person far from God to your building. That will get you only so far."[929]

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[928] Fox River Congregational Church, "Vision for the Future of Our Church," (adopted June 22, 2003).
[929] Lonnie Richardson, "Something Great To Be and Do," (Sermon, May 10, 2015).

It's natural that we to want others to experience that which what we love (e.g., I had a great steak the other night). "Unfortunately, when it comes to evangelism in America, this instinct is fading fast.... U.S. Christians are losing a desire to share their faith."[930]

> What needs to change so we can buck the trend and meaningfully share the love and truth of Jesus in a country where he is desperately needed? Because Romans 10:14 remains as true as it has ever been: "How can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them?[931]

Christ calls his followers to go and reach out to the unbelievers in relationships and bring them in. Thus, as disciple-making church, we need to better encourage, equip and support our members to grow in sharing Christ as regular practice in their everyday lives. The content of these efforts which need to be communicated to, absorbed by and committed to by our church members include that which is considered in the following section.

C. PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP EVANGELISM

1. All Encompassing Embrace of Evangelism

a. Great Commission: an Integral Whole

Evangelism is not a distinct call separate from other mission purposes and functions of the church. But rather, as Dr. Larry Gilbert emphasizes, evangelism is an integrated component of the Great Commission which calls for a process encompassing pre-conversion, conversion, and post conversion. In the Great Commission, Christ calls upon the local church (i) to lead people to accept Christ as Lord and Savior, (ii) to influence them to identify with and become active members in the local church, and (iii) to teach them to obey what he commanded (as revealed in the Bible) so that they may grow into mature Christians (i.e., toward a more Christ-like life).[932] This emphasis on the integration of the components of the Great Commission counters the tendency in many churches to segment its functions into separate teams/boards/committees without effective coordination and comprehensiveness as might otherwise be achieved.[933]

b. Evangelism for All Church Members

In past years through today, there has been a common and strong tendency for many Christians to withdraw into their own closed community rather than reaching out to and including others, at least on a widespread basis. This is not what occurred in the early church.

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[930] Barna, *Reviving Evangelism* 5 (2019) (comments by Craig Springer).
[931] *Id.* at 6.
[932] Larry Gilbert, *How to Influence Your Loved ones for Christ When You Don't Have the Gift of Evangelism: Team Evangelism* 22 -23 (2003). This book was used in the Congregational Lay Minister Training Program, Session 2, October 13, 2012.
[933] Jon S. Hanson, Summary Notes, Congregational Lay Minister Training Program, Session 2, Oct. 13, 2012.

The New Testament is replete with the call for Christians to tell people the good news about what Christ did for us. All Christians were expected to reach out to others, teach people the Word and nurture them in the faith. Similarly, today God calls on the church, whose members are the body of Christ, to evangelize. Evangelism is a part of the Great Commission.

Since holistic evangelism is a process involving both words and works, there needs to be a balance of people with varying styles and gifts working together to share Christ with others. The wider the variety of styles and gifts used, the wider is the reach for Christ. The more believers function within their individual personalities and styles natural to them, the more they will be willing to reach out to others and the more effective they will be in the process of sharing Christ and helping to lead persons toward accepting Christ as Lord and Savior, toward becoming involved in a church fellowship of believers, and toward growing a maturing faith. All members of the church need to recognize that they have important roles play, a responsibility to witness in a manner suited to their gifts. Widespread effective evangelism is a process whose success depends on the efforts of many throughout the church, each with different gifts and/or personality traits.[934]

A strategy for doing so has sometimes been referred to as team evangelism (not to be confused with the specific participants and functions of the Evangelism Team). It is premised upon God's providing every person at least one God-given gift (and/or personality style) which can and should be used in ministering to others through the local church. "[E]ach of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that." (1 Corinthians 7:7).

Since the needs and characteristics of persons coming to and growing in Christ are several, the process of bringing a person from little or only superficial awareness of God to becoming a mature Christian requires the church to bring a variety of gifts and personality styles to bear. This strategy envisions all members of the church working not only individually but also in tandem with other individuals and the church as a whole using a method suitable to each individual. This concept envisions a church-wide effort of its members working together to advance Christ's evangelism mission. An effective disciple-making church embraces, fosters and implements the call *for all members to be a part the evangelism effort.*[935]

c. Jesus' Marketing Plan: Let Your Light Shine[936]

Jesus amazed crowds with the inspiring message that the kingdom of God is open to all who believe in him. He wanted this message to be communicated far and wide both then, over the next 2,000 years, and now. To do so, he had a strategy which might be termed as his marketing plan. His strategy is revealed in Mathew 5:13-16.

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[934] Draws upon Jon S. Hanson, Post Session #2 Summary, Wisconsin Congregational Leadership and Lay Minister Training Program, Session 2, October 13, 2012 (drawing on Jeffrey A. Johnson, *Got Style? Personality –Based Evangelism* (2009).

[935] *Id.*

[936] This Section draws primarily on Lonnie Richardson, "Let the Light Shine: You Are the Marketing Plan," July 16, 2017 (sermon).

> You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness.... [i]t is no longer good for anything.... You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

Both salt and light radically influence whomever a person comes in contact with. Salt spices things up enhancing people's lives. Light illuminates and draws people toward it. Here, Jesus is tells his followers, both those then and now. Live your life in a manner that illuminates his truth, shines his compassion into places of despair, and attracts people toward him. In short, we are Jesus' marketing plan.

Christianity is attractive and compelling when Christians reflect love, joy, caring, encouragement support and assistance. Christians also can put-off people by being somber, joyless, self-righteousness, and smug. Jesus said we are the light of the world. Thus, both as individuals and as a church,

> [w]e want to be an impression of God's kingdom whose light shines like a searchlight and says to people all over... "come let us tell you about this Jesus who revolutionized our lives, because he can revolutionize yours too."[937]

And, as Ben Franklin said. "Hide not your talents. For use they were made. What's a sundial in the shade?"

As will be later considered in more detail, bring one's varying abilities, aptitudes and interests to bear in reaching out those to people outside the faith. However, underlying all effective evangelism efforts is the type of light we reflect and bring to bear on what we do. Let the good light shine.

2. Personal Relationship Evangelism: Invest and Invite

Too commonly today churches are characterized by insiders reaching insiders. Customers are being reached who have already been reached. Yet there is a huge market out there consisting of those who have not been reached. There is a massive potential audience which is being sacrificed as churches focus on keeping a handful of traditional customers satisfied. Instead, listen to what Jesus commands; seek the lost, go and make disciples. Churches need to strike a balance between fostering the growth of believers and reaching those outside the faith. Although a few insiders might leave if there is a shift in priorities which embraces the those outside the faith, they are likely end up in another church thereby not lost to Christ.[938]

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[937] *Id.*

[938] Andy Stanley, Reggie Joiner and Lane Jones, *7 Practices of Effective Ministry* 143-45 (2004).

Christ is calling upon all of us to reach out to others. However, most members of a church lack the evangelistic gift or personality to clearly and creditably present the gospel to a variety of people in a manner to get a decision for Christ. However, virtually all, if not, all people in a church have natural relationships with others, e.g., families, friends, neighbors, relatives, social and work colleagues, etc. The average Christian can work comfortably engaging those with whom he or she knows and has a trusting relationship. Those without evangelistic characteristics enjoy greater success in outreaching to others by focusing on those persons within their normal sphere.[939] The Bible and early historical records reflect that simple friendship serves as one of the main carriers of the gospel.[940]

Jesus is the model. He was deeply relational and it seems he liked relationships with those outside the church at least as well as hanging around people within the church. We are called to follow his lead. As we strive to become an effective disciple-making church, the church needs to emphasize and encourage all of our Christian members to build relationships with people outside the faith. Get involved outside the church in schools, in community league sports, volunteer services, neighbor activities, etc. "Salt only realizes its purpose if it gets out of the box and into the food it needs to season."[941]

Various means may be used in trying to influence people to come to salvation and/or come to church. Although dated, one survey came up with the following results. Advertisement has the lowest impact influencing people to come to church, i.e., 2%. Organized visitation and pastoral contact each reach about 6%. In comparison, invitations from a friend or relative account for 86% of persons who come to church.[942] A George Barna nationwide survey discovered that one out of four people would attend a church service if a friend would invite them.[943] People whom we know and care about, people with whom we have existing personal relationships, are the most receptive. Effective personal relationship evangelism generally occurs within the context of these informal personal relationships. It is active, not passive. Each Christian believer should assume responsibility for creating ministry rather than being just a consumer of ministry.[944]

Lonnie Richardson has long emphasized that the ideal scenario is for unbeliever newcomers to cross our doors due to an *invitation by a member* of our church who has established some degree of friendship and credibility with such person. By accompanying such newcomer to church and continuing to develop a personal relationship with such person over time, when appropriate, this member (or some other member with whom the newcomer has become familiar) can communicate one's faith. (This may involve offering personal witness, scripture for comfort, prayer together, etc.) When this process sufficiently matures, eventually he or she can ask whether the person is ready to accept Christ. This is the most effective means to bring someone

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[939] Larry Gilbert, *How to Influence Your Loved ones for Christ when you don't have the Gift of Evangelism: Team Evangelism* 66 (2003).

[940] Tim Keller, "Turning Laypeople into Lay Ministers, OutreachMagazine.com, October 8, 2012.

[941] Carey Nieuwhof, "How to Reach those Who Think They Don't Need God," OutreachMagazine.com, August 27, 2015.

[942] Larry Gilbert, *How to Influence Your Loved ones for Christ when you don't have the Gift of Evangelism: Team Evangelism* 66 (2003).

[943] *Id.*

[944] Tim Keller, "Turning Laypeople into Lay Ministers, OutreachMagazine.com, October 8, 2012.

to the faith. Of course, reliance upon personal relationship evangelism requires that our church develop an effective method to equip our members to engage in such evangelism.[945]

Research also indicates that 75% to 90 % of persons coming to Christ is due to the influence of a friend or relative. Building relationships through personal relationship evangelism, by far, offers the most effective approach for evangelism. It is natural and non-threatening. And, everyone in the congregation can do it. The combination of relationship building and church programming sensitive and meaningful to the unchurched leads to dramatic growth.[946]

Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, the average Christian has few if any significant *non*-Christian friends. A church needs to encourage every believer to build bridges with non-Christians and utilize and/or initiate fellowship opportunities to better enable this to happen. "Non-Christian relationships are bridges that God provides over which the gospel can travel."[947] Rather than withdrawing from those who are non-Christian, believers need to reach out to them.

Consequently, our church needs to focus outreach efforts primarily on personal relationship evangelism. Existing relationships are the key bringing people in and leading them to Christ. The most effective outreaching churches are those that motivate, assist and support their lay members in reaching out to existing relationships. However, this is not to deemphasize and ignore those opportunities that arise when engaging with other persons on a casual basis.

The concept of team evangelism is premised on asking each Christian member of the church "to commit themselves to identify, pray for, and direct their efforts to personally to influence ... individuals to accept Christ and/or join their church."[948] Team evangelism does not rely on a few people to frequently lead two or three people to Christ. But rather, the goal is for every church member, as part of a church-wide team, to establish a goal of bringing in a designated number of persons within an indicated time frame (e.g., one or two a year, three over a lifetime, etc.). For those who are uncomfortable with the prospect of presenting the gospel, remind them that it is not necessary for them to commit to presenting a detailed presentation of the gospel, but rather to commit, pray for and reach out in a caring relationship to see that their friends (as well a possibly others with whom one has casually encountered) will sometime, somewhere, have the gospel presented to them.[949]

Highly effective evangelism is personal relational evangelism. When it comes to an important facet of a person's life, one does not usually rely on a complete stranger. This is especially true when it comes to the ultimate issue of one's spiritual destiny. If we want our Christianity to become contagious it will not happen through clever slogans, brochures or other forms of "hit-and-run" evangelism. Lives will only be changed when Christians develop significant relationships with people where they live, work, play, relate, and do business with

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[945] Jon S. Hanson, "Think Piece re Adopted Short Term Priorities," p. 3, June 18, 2004 (Fox River Congregational Church) Evangelism Team)..

[946] Linus J. Morris, *The High Impact Church: A Fresh Approach to Reaching the Unchurched* 193 (1993).

[947] *Id.*

[948] Larry Gilbert, *How to Influence Your Loved ones for Christ when you don't have the Gift of Evangelism: Team Evangelism* 68 (2003).

[949] *Id.* at 68-69.

each other. Thus, personal evangelism is not going door to door. Its not about thumping people over the head with the Bible. Nor is it being an "erupter" who tries to shoehorn God into every conversation. But rather, effective personal evangelism calls for each of us to be ourselves, using the gifts that God has graced us with, and simply respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit when it opens the door to developing relationships with people.

To effectively reach the those outside the faith, a church must be intentional on how it will do so. Personal relationship evangelism embraces the strategy, termed "*invest and invite.*" This approach has been successfully utilized by Andy Stanley's North Point Community Church at which every leader and church attendee is challenged and expected to make outsiders a priority. People are to prioritize time to so that they are investing in someone who is in need of Christ. This encourages spiritual dialogue in the context of a safe non-threatening environment founded on existing or developing friendships. Of course, every believer speaks from a different level of maturity and can take a friend only so far. Thus, when this level is reached, not only invest in that person, but also invite him or her into a non-threatening environment where spiritual issues can better be addressed. The process for a person to come to and grow in Christ is underway. Invest time in and invite a person is the essence of personal relationship evangelism.[950]

3. Dealing with Misconceptions

As considered later, an important stage in the evangelistic process of building a contagious Christian church is liberating and equipping every believer in the church for personal relationship evangelism. Many, if not most, believers are reluctant to engage in evangelism due to one or a combination of misconceptions as to what is involved and what it takes. To bring members of the congregation into active participation in what is termed as "*invest and invite*." misconceptions must be understood and addressed. It is the responsibility of the church to liberate its church members from their apprehensions and set them free from their negative misconceptions as to what is involved in engaging in personal relationship evangelism.

a. Misconception that One Has to Be Someone He or She Is Not

Too many, and perhaps most, believing members in many churches have decided that personal relationship evangelism is not part of their Walk with Christ. Many church members view evangelism to be the job of the pastor and/or some specific body in the church allocated the function of evangelism. Evangelism is for the professional and/or reserved for people with special abilities and gifts.[951] Furthermore, they have misconceptions and fears which keep them out of the game. They hold widely polarized stereotypes of what evangelism involves. One views a Christian evangelist as an outgoing, articulate superstar who is theologically knowledgeable, equipped and effective. At the other end of the spectrum is the negative view of

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[950] Andy Stanley, Reggie Joiner and Lane Jones, *Practices of Effective Ministry* 146-47 (2004).
[951] Rick Richardson, "Confronting the Challenges of Leading Evangelism," OutreachMagazine.com, May 12, 2020.

a person who is pushy, manipulative and one who crams the gospel down a victim's throat. A variety of negative images leap into people's minds when hearing the term "evangelist."[952]

One may picture infamous TV evangelists who bilk their trusting viewers out of hard earned dollars for personal gain. Others conjure up street preachers, megaphone in hand, blaring out the coming of the end of the world, God's impending judgment, and hell and damnation for those who don't repent. Perhaps a more common experience are those polite Bible thumping evangelists who come to your door and recite scripture passage after scripture passage every chance they get. Commonly, church members have decided not to participate because they aren't the first type and they don't want to be the second type. "If this is what evangelism is about, ugh, this is not for me." Unfortunately, many believe these are the only two ways to be an evangelist.[953]

However, Christ does not call for us assume the role of these negative stereotypes. But rather, he calls upon us to be enthusiastic persons lovingly and quietly reaching out to our family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, recreational colleagues, etc. and to contribute to their journey toward accepting God's gift of forgiveness, salvation and an eternal life here now and forever. Simply, evangelism is about loving, caring and reaching out to others who have not yet received Christ in their lives.

> At its core, evangelism is people sharing with others their personal understandings that life is better, richer, truer if one has faith in Christ and lives in a faith community.[954]

We are not called to be ranters, ravers and/or Bible thumpers. Instead, the term evangelism should invoke positive images.

Picture an enthusiastic person lovingly and quietly reaching out to his or her family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, recreational colleagues and/or others. Picture him or her non-offensively contributing to their journey toward accepting God's gift of forgiveness, salvation and a now and an eternal life in personal relationship with him, the perfect friend. This is what Christ's life's journey modeled and what he envisions when he calls each of us to reach out to others. Let's not fail to respond to Christ's call for evangelism because of negative stereotypes of evangelists which have no relation to what we are about.[955]

Despite this positive and compelling image of evangelism, many still might question whether they have the personality traits needed to reach out to others. Isn't evangelism for people with a certain type of personality and temperament? Isn't there a particular mold to which we

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[952] Mark Mittelberg, *Becoming a Contagious Church: Increasing Your Church's Evangelistic Temperature* 90 (revised edition of *Building a Contagious Church*).

[953] Mark Miller, "Liberating and Equipping Every Believer: Helping Everyone Communicate Their Faith with Confidence," (Willow Creek Association Conference on How to Build a Contagious Church, October. 15-16, 2004); Jon S. Hanson, "Where Congregationalism in Growing the Family of Christ," p.25, September 5, 2007 (prepared on behalf of the Church Development Division of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches).

[954] Jon S. Hanson, "Hear the Call," April 14, 2013 (sermon).

[955] *Id.*

must conform in order to be effective? Don't we need to know the Bible inside and out and be well versed in the various deep questions of theology? The answer is an emphatic *no*![956] "God can work through each of us in a manner well suited to our unique talents, personalities and capacities – providing myriad opportunities for us to share our faith with others."[957]

As has been said, "God does not call the equipped, he equips the called." We are not expected to reach out in a way that is unnatural for us. It takes different types of people to reach the diversity of unbelievers with God's message. As Paul manifested in 1 Corinthians 12, God created each of us with different gifts. He knew what he was doing when he made us. He custom designed each of us with a unique combination of personality, temperament, talents and background enabling us to reach out to people. God wants to harness our natural character. In being evangelists, we are to be ourselves, not somebody we are not. Thus, the rationale or excuse for saying that "being an evangelist is not me" no longer holds. Instead, becoming a contagious Christian calls for being the natural me.[958]

Furthermore, it takes different types of people to reach the vast diversity of unbelievers with God's message. God knew what he was doing when he made us. He custom designed each of us with a unique combination of personality, temperament, talents and background to reach out to people who are receptive to such character traits. God wants to harness the character of each of us to reach those who have yet to accept Christ. The key is to recognize that we are to be ourselves in reaching out to others – whether our natural approach is direct, intellectual, testimonial, interpersonal, invitational, serving and/or a combination thereof. Scripture provides models for each of these styles in witnessing to others. In being evangelists, we are to be ourselves, not somebody we are not. Again, the rationale for saying that "being an evangelist is not me" lacks basis. We are not expected to reach out in a way that is unnatural for us. But, rather God has created each of us with different characteristics and he calls upon us to use our natural attributes to reach those receptive to our natural approaches.[959]

God has created many styles of evangelism which can be grouped into six categories:[960]

- *confrontational style*
- *intellectual style*
- *testimonial style*
- *interpersonal style*
- *invitational style*
- *serving style*

God created us to use our own style rather than to be forced in a mold which is not us. Use one's own style when engaging in personal evangelism.[961]

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[956] *Id.*
[957] Lindsay L. Gray, "The Most Powerful Witness," The Upper Room, p.4, May-June, 2020.
[958] Jon S. Hanson, "Hear the Call," April 14, 2013 (sermon).
[959] *Id.*
[960] This are considered more fully in PART FIVE, IX.C.5.
[961] Mark Miller, "Liberating and Equipping Every Believer: Helping Everyone Communicate Their Faith with

The key to liberating every Christian in every church to be active in sharing their faith is to assist them in understanding that there are a variety of legitimate approaches to evangelism. One doesn't have to squeeze him or herself into a specific required personality mold in order to be used by God to reach others. In fact, one will be much more effective working comfortably within his or her own God given personality (style).[962]

b. Misconception that Evangelism Efforts Are Events Which Are Either a Success or Failure[963]

There is a misconception that evangelism is an event. It is not. Some hold the perception that if he or she does not get a person to accept Christ as Lord and Savior, he or she has failed. Thus, when it seems that one with his or her particular personality is unlikely to induce someone outside the faith to cross the bridge, his or her efforts are most likely to fail, so why try.

However, what needs to be recognized is that hopefully one's evangelism efforts will ultimately culminate in a person accepting Christ, evangelism is not an event. But rather, evangelism is a process. Paul said that if one plants the seed, God will make it grow. Keep trying. Sometimes one will move an unbeliever along the path and others will do the same along other steps on the path. Other times, if one persists over time, whether that be weeks, months or even years, eventually the unbeliever may come to Christ (perhaps as late as his deathbed). Don't stop praying for a friend, a relative or someone else. Continue to care for them, love them and pray for them.

> [*E*]*vangelism* is how we love the world, as God does, but *conversion* is the work of the Holy Spirit. Live the truth you tell. Tell the truth you live. The rest is God's business. When we wed ourselves to the idea that we are responsible for making people believe, we put ourselves in the place of the Savior or the Spirit. We take glory that doesn't belong to us.[964]

One may help a person all the way to the final destination (conversion), but more likely one can and will lead a person closer than when he or she started. Jesus told the parable of a person scattering seeds on the ground. The seeds eventually grow and mature through the hidden work of God. (Mark 4:2-29)

Confidence," (Willow Creek Association Conference on How to Build a Contagious Church, October. 15-16, 2004).

[962] Mark Mittelberg, Building a Contagious Church: Revolutionizing the Way We View and Do Evangelism 90-91 (2007) (revised edition of *Building a Contagious Church*).

[963] Mark Miller, "Liberating and Equipping Every Believer: Helping Everyone Communicate Their Faith with Confidence," (Willow Creek Association Conference on How to Build a Contagious Church, October. 15-16, 2004).

[964] Barna, *Reviving Evangelism* 28 (2019) (Q & A with Michelle Jones).

> It is important to have confidence in the power of the gospel and trust that God will do his good work with the seed that takes root through our witness.
>
> … [I]t is God who is at work in the process of conversion. It isn't as if someone is converted on account of our eloquence, wisdom or arguments. In the end, conversion is about a transforming and redeeming encounter between an individual and the living Lord. We can help bring it about – but that encounter is God's doing, not ours.[965]

Thus, it is important to communicate to the members of the church that events are part of the process. We never know which event/effort in the process will ultimately culminate in a person's acceptance of Christ. Nor do we know where in the process God will call upon each of us to contribute. As we engage in evangelism efforts, we do not grade people as successes or failures. We do what we can when we can. The rest is up to God.

Therefore, don't approach evangelism as an agenda-driven score-keeping Christian. When one gets the impression that the one doing evangelism is keeping score, simply trying to add another notch to one's belt, engenders the sense of a lack of authenticity. This, in turn, undermines both building a positive relationship as well as the authenticity of the message to be or being conveyed.[966]

c. Misconception that Unbelievers Are Widely Antagonistic Toward Christians

Many Christians are reluctant to engage in outreach efforts because of the sense that he or she will confront widespread rejection. Thom Rainer suggests that such fear is overplayed. Over several years he and his research teams interviewed several thousands of unchurched non-Christians. Among the insights he gleaned was their perspectives of Christians. The seven most common types of comments in order of frequency are the following. (i) Christians are negative, they seem to be against more things than they are for. (ii) I am interested in what Christians believe and would like to find one willing to spend some time with me. (iii) I would like to learn about the Bible but I don't want to go to a stuffy and legalistic church. A Christian invitation to learn about Bible in a home or place like Starbucks would be nice. (iv) There seems little difference in the manner in which Christians live as compared to everyone else, so it is hard to know what a Christian believes or whether they take their beliefs seriously. (v) I would like to learn how to be a better husband, wife, dad, mom, etc., from a Christian who I know and seems to have it all together. (vi) Some Christians act like they have no problems when I know better. (vii) Although I would like to go to a church, no Christian has ever invited me.[967]

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[965] Alister McGrath, *Doubting: Growing Through the Uncertainties of Faith* 69-70 (2006).
[966] *Id.* at 28.
[967] Thom Rainer, "What Non-Christians Really Think About Christians," OutreachMagazine.com, November 7, 2012.

There is a pattern here.

> [Many] non-Christians want to interact with Christians. They want to see Christians' actions match their beliefs. They want Christians to be real.
>
> In one study we conducted, we found that only five percent of non-Christians are antagonistic toward Christians. It's time to stop believing the lies we have been told. Jesus said it clearly: "The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few. Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest" (Luke10:2, HCSB)
>
> Satan is the author of excuses. There is no reason to wait to reach those who don't know Jesus Christ. We must go now. The harvest is waiting. And the Lord of the harvest has prepared the way.[968]

More recently, based upon one of the most comprehensive studies on the unchurched which involved a survey of 2,000 unchurched Americans, Thom Rainer reported on the results of survey, He found that 47% were open to a conversation on the gospel, 31% would actively listen albeit not participate. Another 12% would listen with some comfort. Only 11% would try to change the conversation as soon as possible. Thus, 8 out 10 unchurched Americans either welcome or are not antagonistic to hearing about the gospel.[969]

> We can't use the poor excuse that the unchurched really aren't interested in gospel conversations. In reality, church members are more likely not to be interested in initiating gospel conversations.[970]

The fear of rejection is overplayed. Receptivity is out there. Go for it.

d. Misconception that "I Can't Do Evangelism"

People have legitimate fears about doing something when they aren't prepared to do it. The same is true about evangelism. Believers need to be trained. Competence can be built. Competence builds confidence and confidence enhances competence. Good training replaces the "I can't do" perception with "I can do that." Good training, which is discussed more fully in Section 6 below, is essential.[971]

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[968] *Id.*

[969] Thom Rainer, "5 Insights About the Unchurched That Might Surprise You," OutreachMagazine.com, August 28, 2017.

[970] *Id.*

[971] Mark Miller, "Liberating and Equipping Every Believer: Helping Everyone Communicate Their Faith with Confidence," (Willow Creek Association Conference on How to Build a Contagious Church, October. 15-16, 2004).

4. Basic Elements in Doing Personal Relationship Evangelism

Different people have varying gifts and personality traits which can be effectively applied in churchwide team evangelism efforts. However, there are some basic principles in doing evangelism which apply across the range of evangelistic styles: (a) principle of prayer, (b) principle of identifying prospects, (c) principle of reaching out; "Just Walk Across the Room" concept, (d) principle of the stair stepping as a process, (e) principle of building relationships, (f) principle of conversation, (g) principle of relational integrity, (h) principle of saturation, (i) principle of witnessing for Christ, (j) principle of invitation to participate in a worship service, activity or event, (k) principle of relational momentum, (l) principle of apologetics, (m) principle of accountability, and (n) principle of context evangelism. To each of these we now turn.

a. Principle of Prayer[972]

(1) Individual Prayer

Prayer is an integral and essential foundational element of effective evangelism efforts. Ask God how best to connect with people. "The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective." (James 5:16) Fervent, sincere and zealous prayer by a Christian can be effective. When one prays, the Holy Spirit provides the desire and boldness needed to accomplish the task.

> Begin to pray for individuals with whom you might share Christ. Trust God to provide the opportunities for you to talk with them and the wisdom to know what to say.[973]

People are most likely to pray on a regular basis for those persons they really care about. When doing so, prayer tends to be more earnest, more sincere and more often. In the context of evangelism, prayer generally focuses on those unbelievers within the person's normal sphere of relationships.

To enhance one's ability and likelihood to engage in effective prayer, each church member should maintain a prayer checklist listing the names of personal prospects within his or her sphere of relationships of unsaved and unchurched people he or she wants to reach for Christ. Such most likely will be come from family, friends, neighbors, social and work colleagues, etc. Indication of their needs as they become known and evolve should be noted as well as when they were prayed for. Pray for each of these individuals often (e.g., daily) by name and by need. The key to effective prayer for others is being aware of those around us for whom one is praying, knowing the needs of these individuals and praying for them regularly.

The list of names, updated needs and calendar to check off when prayers were made for each individual afford a helpful mode of spiritual discipline as one seeks to reach out to others

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[972] *See* Larry Gilbert, *How to Influence Your Love Ones for Christ When You Don't Have the Gift of Evangelism; Team Evangelism* 83-88 (2003).

[973] Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, *Knowing Christ and Walking with Him* 15 (revised 2006) (booklet).

for Christ.[974] Furthermore, a prayer list and prayer calendar and regular prayer for specific individuals embraces the principle of saturation (discussed Subsection h. below). Prayer keeps one aware of those to whom they have committed to influence and to more effectively relate to what is happening in their lives by regularly keeping in touch with their needs and with God.

(2) *Group Prayer*

Group prayer can be thought of in two senses. First, group prayer involves a group of individuals gathering together periodically to pray, either out loud or silently for the needs of the various evangelism programs, other ministries of the church, and the leadership of the church. In effect, this is a total ministry prayer group. This prayer group consists of people whom God equips for the ministry of prayer.

Second, group prayer is important in those groups involved in evangelism. Group prayer supports individual group members by praying for their prospects. The list of the prospects of each group member needs to be available to other members of the group who then will regularly pray for each other's prospects both during and in between group gatherings. Caution, the list of names and needs of prospects are for prayer only. They are not to be given to those outside the group, nor should one member of the group approach another member's prospect based upon having been given the name unless invited to do so.

Both the church and its members need to be aware of a caution about participating in prayer activities. A person may feel that he or she cannot do or does want to do anything else. He or she can always pray. However, praying should not be used as a cop-out excuse to avoid doing something else. Each person has been given a gift or gifts from God to be used in outreach efforts as well as the gift of prayer.

Whether one prays individually or as part of a group,

> [n]othing you can do will enhance the effectiveness of your evangelistic outreach more than encouraging and developing an ongoing prayer ministry.... As we saturate our evangelistic efforts with prayer by name and need we go directly to God with the needs of the people we care about most. In turn God uses prayer as an avenue to show us how to minister to the needs that will ultimately lead those people to salvation and maturity in Christ.[975]

It is incumbent upon the church to develop and offer disciple-making prayer experiences for believers engendering the habit of asking God to lead them to an unbeliever or skeptic with whom one can establish a relationship as well as asking God for aid in doing so.

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[974] "Team Evangelism: Team Mate; Personal Ministry Planner," p.24 *et seq.*, sets forth a checklist for including a person's name, background information, calendar to check off daily prayers, touches made and times gospel heard. This booklet accompanies Larry Gilbert, *How to Influence Your Love Ones for Christ When You Don't Have the Gift of Evangelism; Team Evangelism* (2003).

[975] Larry Gilbert, *How to Influence Your Love Ones for Christ When You Don't Have the Gift of Evangelism; Team Evangelism* 87-88 (2003).

b. Principle of Identifying Prospects

People with whom one has existing relationships are more receptive to responding to initial steps leading toward Christ. Every church member should be encouraged to and responsible for identifying people who don't have a relationship with Jesus and/or lack a church family for possible outreach efforts. Those identified are added to one's personal prospect list. The list should include as many unbelievers and unchurched persons as the member knows. People with whom one has existing relationships are more receptive to responding to initial steps leading toward Christ. (e.g., family members, work associates, social colleagues, doctors, child's teacher, mailman, etc.). Prioritize the list according to those one most cares about and then select perhaps the top seven for potential outreach efforts.[976]

c. "Just Walk Across the Room" Evangelism[977]

(1) What Is It?

Personal evangelism often requires one to move beyond his or her zone of comfort. Each of us have our zone of comfort. We tend to relate and group with persons like ourselves. We are in our comfort zone. Yes, God might be calling us to reach out to someone in our comfort zone, but also, we should be alert to possibilities beyond one's comfort zone for someone around us that God might want to touch through us. Leave your zone of comfort. When the Holy Spirit opens the door take the risk and walk through it. Let the Holy Spirit prompt you. This may be a divine appointment.

When one walks across the room in an unscripted situation, the measure of success is not getting that person saved then and there. Instead, *the highest value in personal evangelism is being fully attentive and cooperative with the promptings of the Holy Spirit.* When one sees someone outside his or her comfort zone, the question to ask is whether I should walk across the room. If God says yes, do it and ask for wisdom in the conversation just ahead.

While the hope is that people will ultimately come to accept and be saved by Christ, it is necessary to recognize that the Holy Spirit may assign an individual a somewhat smaller task. Perhaps the task is to only to open the door. Or, the role maybe, in a given situation, to simply move someone from minus 10 to minus 8 on the scale of moving him or her to accepting Christ. With someone else, it might be to move him or her from minus 4 to minus 2. Other times the role might to close the deal by leading the person across the line of faith in the moment he or she accepts Christ. One's role is to go only so as far as the Holy Spirit wants us to go and no farther. Discern one's own role and don't consider oneself a failure when you are not ultimately the

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[976] *Id.* at 73-77.

[977] This approach to evangelism was developed by Reverend Bill Hybels, Founding and Senior Pastor of (Willow Creek Community Church) and presented in his book *Just Walk Across the Room: Simple Steps Pointing People to Faith* (2006). The discussion in this section draws heavily on Hybel's book and notes prepared by Jon S. Hanson integrating Hybels book with his presentation at 2004 Robert Schuller Institute for Successful Church Leadership as modified by presentation at "How to Build a Contagious Church," (Willow Creek Association Conference, October 15-16, 2004).

person closing the deal. Just walking across the room is a key element in the team evangelism process.

In his Great Commission, Jesus commanded us to go out and make disciples. As expressed by Nanci Rathbun here at FRCC,

> [w]e're not supposed to hunker down in our safe Christian homes, talking only to our safe Christian neighbors, and meeting with our safe Christian friends in our safe Christian church. We are to GO - to those who don't have the message, to those who wonder about the message, to those who scoff at the message, to those who reject the message. Go! And if we are rejected, shake it off and move on. Keep on going! That's the only way to make disciples. Don't worry if what you say doesn't seem to be accepted. Paul had the same experience and here's how he put it: "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow." (1 Corinthians 3:6) You never know when you've planted a seed. Someone else may come along and provide water, and with grace from God, it will grow. But there's no chance of that if the seed is never planted in the first place. So go![978]

Live outward into the community of non-Christian families, friends, persons met casually in the grocery store, doctor's office, etc. Don't permit fear to prevent one talking about church or one's experience with God, but try to be a witness wherever one goes. One never knows when a seed might be planted which will ultimately grow.[979]

(2) Basic Principles of "Just Walk Across the Room" Evangelism

Underlying Just Walk Across the Room evangelism are a several basic principles including the following.

- *Proximity Principle* – Locate yourself in an environment where people far from God, are likely to be. Even though one is the salt of the earth, it does little good in helping others if you don't get near them. Be around the people who need the cure. Intentionally put yourself in an environment where you might touch someone if the Holy Spirit prompts you.

> It's amazing the opportunities that God puts in front of us every single day… and when we see them and embrace them, we simply need to be normal, engage them in conversation, and communicate that we are interested in them.[980]

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[978] Nanci Rathbun, "Have You Forgotten," April 22, 2012 (sermon).
[979] *Id.*
[980] Perry Noble, "6 Thoughts on Evangelism Every Leader Should Know," OutreachMagazine.com, August 28, 2012.

The first step of effective outreach is seeing the opportunities for outreach which are all around us. Seek to find someone in our lives to engage in conversation which hopefully, at some point, will lead to spiritual conversations about Christ. Look for that person or persons whom God has placed near us at schools, at stores where we shop, in our families, in our neighborhoods and elsewhere. People who need Jesus are all over the place. Develop compassionate eyesight. Effective outreach starts with seeing the people around us who need to be reached for Christ.[981] Then, walk across the room.

- *Congruency Principle* – Be congruent with your own personality and temperament. God wired you this way for a reason. Be yourself. Your role is to reach out to people who are wired as you are. Don't be different from who you really are. You have a unique sensitivity or attribute that someone needs.

- *Commonality Principle* – When you cross the room, focus on things which you have in common with the other person. Build bridges rather than walls. If at a well, start the conversation about water. For example, start the conversation about the common environment that the two of you are in. Show interest in the other person and discern whether the two of you have common interests. Let non-church people see that you are normal. See where this leads.

- *Other Person Principle* – Key in on what interests him or her. Turn the conversation to talking about the other person. If the Holy Spirit opens the door and prompts us to talk, then we move to talking about God.

- *Extremes to Avoid* – There are two extremes we do well to avoid. First, don't be an erupter. Erupters are the evangelists who fail to spend the time on discerning what are some common grounds and what other people are interested in. Erupters can only put up with so much small talk before they have to shoe horn God into the conversation. "Chill it." Let God orchestrate the conversation. If the Holy Spirit opens the door, walk through it. If the Holy Spirit doesn't, don't barge your way in.

Second, then there are those persons who walk across the room and engage in a conversation. But, when the Holy Spirit opens the door, they are afraid to go through it. Maybe they are afraid that they will say something wrong. Or, they don't want to be identified as a God "guy." They just let the conversation hang in the balance. However, when the Holy Spirit opens the door, go through it.

Walking across the room is something all can do. Jesus left the ultimate zone of comfort (Heaven) and walked across the cosmos to reach out a hand to us. He gave himself for us. We should give ourselves to others. God wants all of us to be walk across the room people. Be in tune with the Holy Spirit and walk.

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[981] Robert Crosby, "Faith Talks: The Compassionate and Conversational Gospel," OutreachMagazine.com, January 27, 2014.

As discussed elsewhere, in outreaching to others, the average Christian can most comfortably engage with those with whom he or she knows and has a trusting relationship. Those lacking assertive/confrontational personality style enjoy greater success by focusing on those persons within their normal sphere. However, it should be emphasized the "Just Walk Across the Room (JWAR) principle complements rather than conflicts with persons focusing on persons they know. First, JWAR applies to unbelievers who may be a part of the evangelist's comfort zone. Second, when the opportunity arises in a non-comfort zone situation, taking the opportunity does not detract from a person's efforts with those within his or her zone. Both approaches should be wholeheartedly embraced and utilized. They are both an integral part of personal relationship evangelism.

In short,

> there is *no impact without contact*. Jesus followers must be willing to venture into the territory of the unchurched, de-churched, over-churched or the religiously unaffiliated. We must go to them rather than waiting for them to come to us. Jesus broke protocol by going into Samaria, a region that was geographically proximate but culturally distant to what was "home" for Jesus. But he was teaching his disciples (and consequently us) that, if we want to enlarge the kingdom of God, we must move from familiar circles of contact to unfamiliar territory. (And be enriched in the good news ourselves, by the way.)[982]

This might be done in various ways, e.g., through non-church sports leagues, volunteering in schools, participating in toastmaster or social clubs, etc. Such contacts can be on-going enabling one to keep connected with those he or she is reaching out to.

d. Principle of Stair-Stepping: Evangelism as a Process

Evangelism is not a "now or never" decision making situation. Most people come to Christ from a process starting from unbelief to uniting with Christ through a series of small decisions or thoughts that bring a him or her closer and closer to the point of a saving faith. In a post-Christendom era, most people lack the necessary background knowledge to hear the gospel and immediately grasp who God is, what sin is, who Jesus is, and what repentance and faith are so as to enable them to make an intelligent commitment. To do so typically requires overcoming objections and already held beliefs before for the gospel becomes readily plausible to them. Therefore, unbelievers need to be introduced and welcomed into community long enough for them to experience relations with Christians and hear multiple expressions of the gospel—both formal and informal—from individuals and teachers. When this happens in community, nonbelievers come to understand the character of God, sin, and grace. Many of their objections are answered through this process. Because they are "on the inside" and involved in ongoing relationships with Christians, they can imagine themselves as Christians and see how the faith fleshes out in real life.[983]

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[982] Barna, *Reviving Evangelism* 74-75 (2019) (Q & A with Rufus Smith).
[983] Tim Keller, "Turning Laypeople into Lay Ministers, OutreachMagazine.com, October 8, 2012.

Thus, at the outset, avoid trying for an immediate conversion to Christ by pushing for a formal prayer of repentance, belief, and acceptance of Christ as Lord and Savior. Instead, facilitate a process for the unbeliever to begin taking those steps which lead to becoming a follower of Christ. That is, move from focusing on the act of conversion to concentrating on growing a disciple. As one grows along this path, he or she grows to becoming a Christian who accepts Christ as Lord and Savior.[984]

Evangelism is a process involving a variety of steps which a person climbs in the process of progressing from having either none or a superficial awareness of God to becoming a mature Christ-like person. The process, or "stair stepping," does not cease at the moment a person receives Christ or joins the church. It continues as church team members functioning as a team use their various gifts to minister and teach newcomers as they progress from one step to the next.[985]

The principle of stair-stepping denotes the steps which an individual goes through as he or she grows toward spiritual maturity. The concept of churchwide team evangelism involves church members using their various gifts and personality traits in assisting a person as he or she climbs the steps from a superficial awareness of God to become a more Christ-like person. This does not mean that one church member assists a new person at his or her every step. But rather, an individual church member assists at those points where he or she can naturally do so. Others provide assistance at different steps in the process.

It's essential that each member, while engaging in evangelism, understand that he or she is part of the process. When a person being reached begins to progress to a point beyond the evangelizer's natural gifts and personality, the evangelizer should guide the prospect to another church member or program who can contribute to further progress. Similarly, a member possessing relevant characteristics should be willing to receive a prospect being passed on to him or her.

As discussed earlier, the goal is to move people through the stages of discipleship in their starting and on-going Walk with Christ. These stages reflect the recommended Mission for Fox River of connecting with God, connecting with other believers, connecting with both believers and those outside the faith through serving and through evangelism. These stages and the specific steps within each provide the steps to be climbed.

First, it is necessary to recognize who is an unbeliever (the lost) and begin to build relationships with such persons. Second, as relationships build and trust begins to emerge, prospects become more receptive. The goals are to reach them, lead them toward accepting Christ, get them actively involved in the church, and grow them toward becoming more Christ-

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[984] Mike Moran, "Evangelism in a Post Christian Society," No Regrets 2011 Conference of Christian Men (Elmbrook Church, Wisconsin).

[985] Larry Gilbert, *How to Influence Your Loved Ones for Christ When You Don't Have the Gift of Evangelism: Team Evangelism* 93 (2003).

like. Church-wide team evangelism envisions individual church members contributing at the various stages, not just the pre-conversion part of the process.[986]

e. Principle of Building Relationships

When entering into and building a relationship, practicing Christians need to recognize that the "others" responding to Barna survey say they are *not* on spiritual quests.[987]

> A sense of spiritual need… is simply not a conscious part of most non-Christians' experience.... Two-thirds of all US adults who do not practice Christianity say spirituality plays little or no role in their everyday lives.[988]

Consequently, "faith-sharing today most often should start on the assumption that most people do not deeply feel their spiritual need...."[989]

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[986] The following offers a specific stair-step ladder for a prospect to climb.

PRE-. CONVERSION & SALVATION	1.	Has only a superficial awareness of God.
	2.	Has faith that there is a supreme being.
	3.	Believes he/she is responsible to God.
	4.	Realizes he/she is a sinner.
	5.	Recognizes that Christ is the bridge to God
	6.	Realizes sin keeps him/her from salvation and his/her salvation.
	7.	Is willing to repent and accept Christ. Salvation/conversion experience. Accepts Christ as Savior.
POST CONVERSION	8.	Publicly acknowledges faith and conversion (in church or among friends).
	9.	Faithfully participates in church worship, study groups, or Sunday School.
	10.	Participates in discipleship training.
	11.	Actively shares his/her faith.
	12.	Accepts and is working toward God's design for the family and home.
	13.	Personal finances are based on biblical stewardship.
	14.	Uses his/her spiritual gifts in local church ministry.
	15.	Observes regular personal devotions and prayer.
	16.	Become Christlike

Larry Gilbert, *How to Influence Your Love Ones for Christ When You Don't Have the Gift of Evangelism; Team Evangelism* 95 (2003).

[987] Barna, Reviving Evangelism 31 (2019).

[988] *Id.* at 31-32.

[989] *Id.* at 34.

Jesus modeled personal relationship evangelism. He walked with the people in their culture. He lived with them, listened to them and told stories to them. He welcomed their children and recognized and met their needs. Jesus provides the model for us to follow.[990]

> Investing in a relationship requires more than simply having geographical proximity with a person. It means caring. It means demonstrating that the relationship is important. It means showing respect. It means serving. It means letting people know that you care about them. It means letting them know you are praying for them. It means praying with them even though they've never been to church with you. … It means being a shoulder to cry on. It means being a cheerleader to rejoice with them. It means letting evangelism and discipling flow from your care for them. It means even if they don't ever attend with us, you will still care for them. Even if they don't ever agree with us, you will still love them.[991]

The recent Barna study on habits and attitudes, found

> that Millennials, more than older generations, highly prize hospitality. To make space for others, to welcome them into your life, is understood by many young adults to be the very definition of generous. Increasing isolation and digital exhaustion prompt their strong cravings for… relationships and warm human connection….[992]

Clearly, it appears "non-Christians look most favorably on approaches that spark sincere, friendly engagement."[993]

> Spend time with… [people]. Win their confidence by doing things with them and for them. If they see that you really care about them, they will be more likely to listen when you present the gospel to them.[994]

> Evangelism is quintessentially relational, a fundamental act of vulnerability and radical openness.… By anchoring to the unchanging truths of scripture and the reality of God, *and patiently cultivating relationships of welcome and generosity*, we can lean together into realities that *do* change.[995] (Emphasis supplied.)

Also indispensable in evangelization is the witness of a holy life. Although the world makes fun of holiness, in reality, holiness has not lost its appeal.

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[990] Ed Stetzer, "What It Really Takes to Reach Your Community," OutreachMagazine.com, August 12, 2015.
[991] Lonnie Richardson, "You Are the Salt of the Earth," September 9, 2012 (sermon).
[992] David Kinneman, "What's Next for Evangelism," Barna *Reviving Evangelism 95* (2019).
[993] Barna, *Reviving Evangelism* 60 (2019).
[994] Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, *Knowing Christ and Walking with Him* 15 (2002 revised 2006).
[995] David Kinneman, "What's Next for Evangelism," Barna *Reviving Evangelism 95* (2019).

> Especially today in our narcissistic culture, *getting to know a person who is authentically self-giving, pure-hearted, humble, prayerful, joyful and in love with Jesus can be transformative.* Personal holiness is a compelling testimony to the truth of the gospel.[996] (Emphasis supplied.)

Don't give up.

> Stay with them.... Remember, you are establishing a friendship because you're actually concerned, and care for them! You have found something that has made a difference in your life, and you want them to experience it too.[997]

However, at some point whether a relationship is in its incipient stage or fairly well developed, it may become clear that the person will remain resistant to even considering the Christian message. At some point, it is best to move one's evangelistic efforts elsewhere. Jesus did so when rejected by his friends in Nazareth. He did not hide nor skulk away because of rejection. He continued the work of God, and sent his disciples out two by two to do the same thing. We are called to do the same. Don't fear rejection. Move on and keep trying as Jesus modeled.[998]

A major church responsibility is to encourage and move all of its members to commit, as a whole congregation, to building relational inroads with people who need to be reached, Build relationships as did Jesus.

f. Principle of Conversation

Building a bridge to those outside the faith and influencing them toward coming to Christ requires conversation.

> Loving God and loving others is the foundation of the Great Commission. You make disciples by loving others, building authentic friendships based on trust with the people outside of our churches, and earning the right to engage in spiritual conversations.[999]

Engaging in outreach does not necessarily mean that the person has to be the one who convinces and asks for a person to take the decisive step of accepting Christ as Lord and Savior. Others may be more likely be able to contribute to that process. Here, the question is how does one express his or her love for others in a manner influencing them to move toward coming to know Christ? This centers on one's ability and willingness to engage with others outside the faith in meaningful conversations, building trusting relationships and assimilating into involvement

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[996] Barna *Reviving Evangelism* 63 (2019) (Q & A with Mary Healy).
[997] Fox River Congregational Church, "Share the Joy and Invite a Friend!" iWitness Program (2013).
[998] Nanci Rathbun, "Have You Forgotten, Nanci Rathbun, "Have You Forgotten," April 22, 2012 (sermon).
[999] John Crilly, "God Talk: The Arts of Spiritual Conversations," OutreachMagazine.com, September 16, 2014.

with other believers in the church.[1000] Once the relationship progresses, throw a more spiritual pebble into the pond and discern from the response as to the best manner in how to proceed.[1001]

Most people don't hear until they've first been heard. People don't care how much we know until they know how much we care. Intelligent, caring conversation opens the door for evangelism with nonbelievers faster than anything else. It is *not* the church's task to give people anything they want or even need. But, the fastest way to build a bridge to those outside the faith is to express interest in them and show that you understand the problems they are facing. Felt needs, whether real or imaginary, are a starting point for expressing love to people.[1002] And, importantly, when engaging in conversations, recognize that the majority of both lapsed Christians and non-Christians value just two qualities in a conversation partner, i.e., a person who *listens without judgment* and who *does not force a conclusion.*[1003]

An all-too-common impediment to building a relationship is the trait of being a poor listener.

> If we want to build authentic relationships with people, then surely we must develop a genuine interest in them along the way, not just strategically in the hope that an "opportunity" will come along [to interject Christ into the conversation.[1004]
>
> "Pray for opportunities to mention Christ in casual conversation."[1005]

Yes, in wanting to reach people for Jesus, at some point it important to initiate a spiritual conversation, but do so in a natural timely way.

In doing so, ask what do we know about the persons we want reach. What do they like to do? What are their interests, fears, dreams, hopes and ambitions?

> The most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to *listen.* Just listen. Perhaps the most important thing we ever give each other is *our attention.*[1006]

Sharing faith is not an information dump. Listening is essential element which Christians need to rediscover today. It is an act of love offered with humility and generosity. Jesus modeled listening. He listened to what people said and extracted from their comments the cry of their hearts, their suspect motives and/or their uncertainties.[1007]

[1000] *Id.*
[1001] Mike Moran, "Evangelism in a Post Christian Society," No Regrets 2011 Conference of Christian Men (Elmbrook Church, Wisconsin).
[1002] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message* 40 (1995)..
[1003] Barna, *Reviving Evangelism* 49 (2019).
[1004] Mez McConnell, "Do You Know What Unbelievers Need?", OutreachMagazine.com, August 12, 2014.
[1005] Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, *Knowing Christ and Walking with Him* 15 (2002 revised 2006).
[1006] Rachel Remen as quoted in Les Wicker's "Thought for a Day," January 26, 2018.
[1007] Barna *Reviving Evangelism* 29 (2019).

> Listening makes room for people. In a culture that places high value on acceptance, this is no small thing. When we make space first for who people are, and then for what matters to them, only then can we know how to offer ourselves and our faith to them.[1008]

At the outset, instead of telling people the answers to questions which they are not asking and informing them as to what they actually need, listen to what are their real concerns. Of course, ultimately, people need to hear the gospel which is the *only* power of salvation for the lost. But, in the process build genuine relationships through conversations embodying sincere and caring listening. As did Jesus, engage people at a personal level before moving into the deeper, spiritual realm.[1009] In doing so, however, "[p]ray for opportunities to mention Christ in casual conversation."[1010]

A prime tool for initiating conversations is asking powerful sincere questions. Jesus asked questions all the time. Similarly, the nature of the questions we use communicates the degree of interest we have in the other person. People often find genuine caring interest to be irresistible to the furtherance of the relationship.[1011]

Although the person reaching out to others should be prepared to speak to them in their moments of grief, despair or other crises, limiting one's outreach to these types of situations misses opportunities to connect with nonbelievers who like their lives, have decent marriages and/or are successful in their work even without acknowledging God. In these types of situations, successful people tend to be on the quest for even more. However, the quest for more never fully delivers. Talk about and applaud their success but then probe whether the person wonders if there is more to life. Furthermore, don't be condescending of unchurched persons. Value the good seen in who they are and what they do. In conversations acknowledge their efforts and empathize with them. This enhances the likelihood that he or she will be more receptive to a challenge to seek more in the spiritual realm.[1012]

Commonly, one is not a good conversationalist. He or she, e.g., tends to talk too much, listens too little, makes hasty responses, talks about oneself rather than being interested in others, etc. If one is not good in normal conversations, he or she is not likely to effectively converse about spiritual matters. However, good conversation can be developed as a matter of normal routine. Build a bridge to those outside the faith and then get involved in spiritual conversations through, for example, a series of steps referred to as the arts of spiritual conversations, e.g., listening, asking questions, discerning others interests, etc. The average Christian can purposefully practice these simple arts of conversation in building relationships with people

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[1008] *Id.* at 29.
[1009] Mez McConnell, "Do You Know What Unbelievers Need?, OutreachMagazine.com, August 12, 2014.
[1010] Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, *Knowing Christ and Walking with Him* 15 (2002 revised 2006).
[1011] Robert Crosby, "Faith Talks: The Compassionate and Conversational Gospel," OutreachMagazine.com, January 27, 2014.
[1012] Carey Nieuwhof, "How to Reach those Who Think They Don't Need God," OutreachMagazine.com, August 27, 2015.

outside the faith, relationships that may eventually lead to ongoing spiritual conversations resulting in a life changing decision to follow Jesus.[1013] "We must get better at conversation."[1014]

It is easy to have a superficial conversation with someone. (e.g., ask How are you?"; response, "I'm fine."). Such conversation does not go very far. Too often most of our conversations aren't personal and lack depth. Instead, we should engage in conversations leading to getting below the surface to things that really matter. Rick Warren uses the acronym S.P.E.A.K. to help make conversations go deeper and be more personal:[1015]

- **S**tory: What is your story? – This open-ended question commonly gets people started. Most people like to talk about their story because being known is a basic need we all have.

- **P**assion: What motivates you?" – That which moves a person is one of the things that makes him or her unique. One is likely to make a significant connection when he or she takes an interest in what others care about.

- **E**ncouragement: "Do you know what you would be good at?" – Once one knows a person's story and passions, encourage him or her to do something he or she is good at or consider something they could do well. This offers a faith-building opportunity. People thrive when encouraged. Most people lack enough faith to believe in the dream God has given them. Encourage the person to take the next step.

- **A**ssistance: "How can I help you?" –You may the one who can give the person the help he or she needs to fulfill God's purpose for his or her life.

- **K**nowledge: "What do you know that I need to know?" – With the right question, one can learn from anyone. Draw out learnings from the experiences of others.

People today spend so much time on their mobile devices that they have forgotten how to approach one another and engage in a meaningful conversation. Questions, like those suggested by Warren's the acronym S.P.E.A.K., may give rise to such conversations.[1016]

"[*T]here is no information without real conversation.*"[1017] Use start-up questions which keep conversation going and sparks further questions and deeper conversation. It behooves Jesus-followers to more engage in dialogue rather from the outset give advice or information.

[1013] John Crilly, "God Talk: The Arts of Spiritual Conversations," OutreachMagazine.com, Sept. 16, 2014. There other sources on how to start spiritual conversations, e.g., Bill Hybels and Mark Mittelberg, *Becoming a Contagious Christian* (1994) and a *Leaders* and *Participant's Guides* by Mark Mittleberg , Lee Strobel and Bill Hybels which include consideration of direct, indirect and invitational ways of starting spiritual conversations, pp.94-98.

[1014]David Kinneman, "What's Next for Evangelism," Barna *Reviving Evangelism* 96 (2019).

[1015]Rick Warren, "5 Questions to Start a Meaningful Conversation With Anyone, OutreachMagazine.com, October 23, 2019.

[1016] *Id.*

[1017] Barna *Reviving Evangelism* 75 (2019) (Q&A with Rufus Smith).

> The relational skill of *conversation*, as modeled by Jesus, encourages openness and connection, not only in gospel sharing but also in every arena of life. It bonds us together, which creates a rich setting for sharing the gospel.[1018]

Never before has the value of listening come to be recognized as being so important. Everyone has something to say and wants to say it now and for people to listen. *But who is listening?* Relearn the art of give-and-take conversation. The art of conversation will engender the likelihood of being heard.[1019] Yes, we must get better at conversation.

At some point there must be conversation about Christ. Evangelism is the proclamation of Jesus Christ. One will never come to Christ if he or she doesn't learn about him. It is through the Word that people are saved. Although a conversation may lead to involving someone else to make the case, at some point conversation must come to be about Christ.[1020]

Remember, throughout the process "[o]utreach is not an argument, but rather a conversation that always ends in an invitation."[1021]

g. Principle of Relational Integrity

A common deterrent for a believer sharing the gospel is the fear of losing face and acceptance of friends and colleagues for attempting to communicate this "narrow-minded" message. When confronted by the choice of acceptance or silence, often Christians choose silence. This may be the major concern keeping Christians from becoming involved in evangelism.[1022]

Scripture pictures the Christian community as a countercultural force. To be holy means to be separate and different. A key characteristic of God's kingdom is people whose lifestyle is compassionate and one of serving. Live in a manner to glorify God. But today, what do people see when they look at the church? Reality reflects individuals whose lifestyles and values are not much different than those of the unchurched. Church people are not viewed much differently from unchurched people.[1023]

In reaching out to unbelievers, doctrine and prayer should not change. The Word of God and the Holy Spirit do not change. However, today people we seek to reach are usually biblically illiterate. Commonly they have not grown up in the church and may never have been to a church. Forcing proclamation on them is most likely to fall on deaf ears. Instead, shift from proclamation to demonstration. Before preaching the good news be the good news, let one's light shine. Demonstrate that following Christ makes a difference. Build trust before emphasizing content.

[1018] *Id.* at 75.
[1019] *Id.* at 91.
[1020] Perry Noble, "6 Thoughts on Evangelism Every Leader Should Know," OutreachMagazine.com, August July 14, 2015.
[1021] Robert Crosby, "Faith Talks: The Compassionate and Conversational Gospel," OutreachMagazine.com, January 27, 2014.
[1022] Gregg Stier, "Why Christians Struggle with Evangelism," OutreachMagazine.com, May 29, 2014.
[1023] Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* 29-30 (2003).

People don't care much about how much one knows before knowing how much one cares. In order to influence the unchurched, it is necessary to connect with them and then form relationships. Serve the community, form relationships, and demonstrate caring.[1024]

As considered previously, initiating new relationships and building up relationships once initiated or already existing is the primary key to bringing people in and leading them to Christ.

> It's Christians caring enough to pray for, befriend and simply hang out with people who don't know Jesus. Then the opportunity comes. That is evangelism. And that's the life style the local church must encourage.[1025]

To enhance the likelihood of positively impacting for the gospel, Christians need to be, in some way, *like* those around them yet in several ways be profoundly different, *unlike* them at the same time. Doing both requires relational integrity.[1026]

First, Christians should appear reassuringly similar with other people in the family, neighborhood and other circles within which they are involved. Be like their neighbors and colleagues in general appearance, cultural activities and civic engagement. Participate fully in the life with those whom they are around. A degree of commonality renders nonbelievers more receptive to the introduction of spiritual discussions since they perceive the Christian as one who lives and understands their world.[1027]

Second, Christians must reflect certain characteristics whether or not these are different from those reflected in their neighbors. Evangelism requires at some point the communication of the truth of the gospel message. In today's culture

> the perception of truth has changed, and quoting the Bible isn't enough to overcome that perception. In our culture, the truth of our Christian claim lies squarely within the way we live our lives. In the 21st century, truth is no longer an intellectual thing. It is a lived thing, and the word is authenticity.[1028]

Creditability in delivering the message depends on the way we live and are perceived as living our lives.

> Christians should be marked by *integrity*. Believers must be known for being scrupulously honest, transparent, and fair. Followers of Christ should also be marked by *generosity*. .... [They should be] generous with their time and with the money

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[1024] Mike Moran, "Evangelism in a Post Christian Society," No Regrets 2011 Conference of Christian Men (Elmbrook Church).

[1025] Dan Kimball, "The Simplistic Beauty of Outreach," OutreachMagazine.com, June 17, 2014.

[1026] Tim Keller, "Turning Laypeople into Lay Ministers, OutreachMagazine.com, October 8, 2012.

[1027] *Id.*

[1028] Shawn Stapleton, "2005 Congregational Lecture," Congregationalist, p,21, Summer 2005.

> they donate for the needy. .... Believers should also be known for their *hospitality*, welcoming others into their homes, especially neighbors and people with needs. They should be marked by *sympathy* and avoid being known as self-serving or even ruthless in business or personal dealings. They should be marked by an unusual willingness to forgive and seek reconciliation, not by a vengeful or spiteful spirit.[1029]

Christians should also reflect and practice countercultural values and practices such as Christian moral ethics. Failure to do so can destroy a believer's credibility as a Christian. Also respond to *adversity* in a positive manner. Being calm when confronted by failure and disappointment is crucial to one's Christian witness. Furthermore, one will noticed if he or she is committed to equity and the common good of the community.[1030]

Evangelism for a contextualized believer involves everyday life developing non-superficial relationships with their family, neighbors, colleagues, and others. It involves engaging others which can be done in a host of ways (e.g., take walks with a neighbor, participate in recreational activities with a colleague, hold a picnic, organize a discussion group, etc.). Three factors, being *like* others, being *unlike* others and *engaging* others constitute the foundation of relational integrity. Too many churches and/or their members think of evangelism essentially in terms of transferring information. However, the primary foundation for effective personal evangelism efforts attempting to bring people to Christ are significant personal relationships which are based on being both alike and unlike those we are trying to reach, i.e., relational integrity.[1031]

h. Principle of Saturation[1032]

To reach a person for Christ,

> you must first *win them to you*, second *win them to your church*, then and only then can you *win them to Christ*.[1033]

People are more receptive to making such commitment when they have become involved in a trusting relationship with others in the church and garner some understanding of what it is about.

Prayer is perhaps the most powerful tool in evangelism. Pray for the opportunity to meet. engage, and build trusting relationships with people outside the faith. However, if we do nothing but pray, outreach is not likely to be effective. Prayer needs to be accompanied by hands and feet. Team evangelism, in addition to prayer, calls for seven *touches* (hands) and three *hearings* (feet).

[1029] Tim Keller, "Turning Laypeople into Lay Ministers, OutreachMagazine.com, October 8, 2012.
[1030] *Id.*
[1031] *Id.*
[1032] This section draws primarily from Larry Gilbert, *How to Influence Your Loved Ones for Christ When You Don't Have the Gift of Evangelism: Team Evangelism* 103 -110 (2003).
[1033] *Id.* at 102-03.

Research indicates that a person makes a meaningful decision for Christ after the church has contacted him or her, on average, seven times. This recognizes that touching a persons' life only once in a while will have little influence. In contrast several touches draw people into a relationship by showing one cares. This involves not only working on existing individual relationships, but also networking the prospect into relationships with others in the church, e.g., invitation to a small group activity or get together with one or two additional church members. Multiple touches can be referred to as the principle of saturation

This principle of saturation also applies to the presentation of the gospel. Surveys indicate that persons who hear the gospel three or more times are more likely to make a decision that sticks than those who only hear it once. Thus, when working with a prospect, lead him or her to hear at least three different presentations of the gospel, but not until a point of receptivity has been reached.

In a nutshell, if one confronts someone with the gospel the first time encountering him or her, he or she quite likely will be offended and/or tune out the message. First build relationships which enhances the likelihood of attracting them to the church. This, in turn, enhances likelihood of networking them into the fellowship of the church. That is, first initiate and build relationships with people outside the church and then network them into the church. The more relationships newcomers have within the church, the greater the potential for staying. Team evangelism recognizes that to bond someone to a church and reach them for Christ, it is first necessary to win them to the person doing the outreach. The second objective is to win them to the church. And, most importantly, the third objective is to win them to Christ.

This process commences with building relationships employing the saturation (7 touch) principle) Then, when they become receptive, apply the 3 hearing principle to present the gospel. Team evangelism has been built upon the idea that seven touches and three hearings (saturation) are the hands and feet of prayer.[1034] This reflects the principle of saturation.

i. Principle of Witnessing for Christ

Christ's call upon all of us is clear when he said "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8) When one becomes a believer, he or she also becomes God's messenger. "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." (John 20:21) We are ambassadors for Christ. We are called to bear witness to Christ, to reach out to others, to share the Gospel and contribute to leading people to accept Christ as Lord and Savior.

Perhaps less10% of members of the church possess an assertive evangelism personality. However, the major source of power of the church (under the sovereignty and guidance of God) rests with the other 90% because they have nine times as many the contacts. Although not sales people, they can build relationships and influence people to take the first step leading an

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[1034] For lists suggesting examples for applying the concepts of 7 touches and 3 hearings, see *id.* at 106-109. These suggestions are categorized by touches for laity, for evangelists and leaders, for use at church facilities and for 3 hearings of the gospel.

unbeliever toward Christ.[1035] In the course of this process, although each follower of Christ has been gifted in different ways, all Christians are called to witness his or her Christian experiences and faith.

Even though a believer may not be a good salesperson (i.e., failing to conclude the sale with the prospect of accepting Christ), situations arise when a friend or other person comments that he or she doesn't believe in Christ and is doing fine without him. Or, they might ask "What is this Jesus guy all about." Or, they might ask "what do you believe." "How has Christ been relevant in your life?"[1036] Should one ignore such comments or questions or change the subject since he or she doesn't know what to say? Clearly doing so most likely will undermine the believer's credibility and perhaps deter any future outreach efforts to this person. All Christians need to be ready for such situations.[1037]

This raises the question, how? The answer is be prepared. The Bible instructs us to be prepared. "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope [faith] that you have." – (1 Peter 3.15)

> [A]ll Christians should be prepared to define their faith anytime the opportunity avails itself – to give the reasons for their faith or explain why they are a Christian.[1038]

Furthermore, Christians should not" be afraid to tell the truth, but do it with a loving, humble and gentle spirit."[1039]

Nevertheless, many possess the mistaken notion that if one leads a clean lifestyle that is sufficient witness and there is no need to verbalize one's faith. This is a misunderstanding which the church needs to rectify. Although one does not need to be confrontational, he or she needs to be able to verbalize his or her faith when opportunities arise. Each believer is called to witness. Acts 22:15 states "You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard."[1040]

[1035] Larry Gilbert, *How to Influence Your Love Ones for Christ When You Don't Have the Gift of Evangelism; Team Evangelism* 114 (2003).

[1036] Other questions commonly asked, which need a truthful and credible manner response by someone, include the following: is there a God, why are you right and all the other religions wrong, why should I give you my money, why should I believe the content of the Bible, etc.?

[1037] Larry Gilbert, *How to Influence Your Love Ones for Christ When You Don't Have the Gift of Evangelism; Team Evangelism* 113 (2003).

[1038] *Id.* at 114.. In developing an expression of one's on personal beliefs, the Lonnie Richardson iWitness program adaptation from the Wisconsin Congregational Leadership and Lay Ministry Training Program "I Believe (Credo) Worksheet" offers helpful suggestions in doing so.

[1039] Kevin Harney, "The Messy Journey to Jesus," OutreachMagazine.com, November 8, 2012. In our multicultural society, commonly non-Christians, and sometime even some Christians, perceive as arrogant the Christian assertion that the only one way to God is through Jesus. Nevertheless, the answer is the foundation of the Christian faith and when it is questioned a response is called for. The question is how without adapting to the unbelieving culture. Jesus offers the model on how to treat people. He listened to them, loved them for who they were, lived among them and shared the truth in the process. Christians today can have great impact if they do the same. Sean McDowell, "Is There Really Just One Way," OutreachMagazine.com, June 18, 2012.

[1040] Larry Gilbert, *How to Influence Your Love Ones for Christ When You Don't Have the Gift of Evangelism; Team Evangelism* 117 (2003).

Believers need be trained to share God's love with unbelievers. Timing is important. Share faith after friendship has developed. The manner of sharing is also critical. Don't use terms not understood by non-Christians, avoid Christian jargon. Don't sound preachy. Express how Christ relates to everyday experiences and felt needs. When a receptive door opens, be prepared to express a brief explanation of the gospel.[1041]

There are two particular areas of preparedness which all members of the church need to understand and being prepared to offer: (1) personal testimony and (2) presentation of the gospel.

(1) Personal Testimony

Every Christian should be prepared to share what God has done in his or her life, i.e., what difference has God made. The essence of witnessing is simply sharing one's experiences with God. One doesn't need to be a Bible scholar to be a witness. Witnesses simply reports what one saw, heard and/or what happened to him or her.

Each believer should have a *personal testimony* on how he or she was saved by God. In addition to one's salvation experience, one's testimony might include what God has done for him or her since accepting Christ or a special occasion when prayer has been answered, a need met, or help occurred during difficult times. These need not be dramatic events. Most peoples' events are not dramatic which perhaps makes them more credible to the listener. Simply "[b]e prepared to share whatever one thinks will demonstrate the love and grace of God and show your prospect why you have faith in God."[1042] Tell your story in a brief and interesting way. And, do so in a way that focuses is on God in an encouraging manner which evidences the kindness of the Lord.[1043]

While unbelievers, doubters and other skeptics may raise questions about the gospel message, personal testimonies can be particularly effective since they are a person's personal experience which is difficult for the other person to challenge. A person is the authority on his or her life. When unbelievers see a "satisfied customer," there is a lot of credibility.[1044]

Another value of personal testimony is circumventing intellectual bridges that are commonly difficult to cross at the initial stages of building a relationship. Most unbelievers are more likely to listen to a personal story than accept the authority of the Bible with which they may have little or no familiarity.[1045]

As is true with respect to the gospel message, each church member needs to be prepared to witness with his or her personal testimony. Personnel testimony can go a long way in attracting people to further exploration of Christ. It is not the responsibility of the person reaching out to another to save anyone. That is up to God and that person. However, verbally sharing one's own

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[1041] Linus J. Morris, *The High Impact Church: A Fresh Approach to Reaching the Unchurched* 198 (1993).
[1042] *Team Evangelism Teammate Handbook* 38 (accompanies Larry Gilbert, *How to Influence Your Love Ones for Christ When You Don't Have the Gift of Evangelism; Team Evangelism* (2003).
[1043] Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church; 10 Traits of a Vital Ministry* 147 (1999).
[1044] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* 290 (2002).
[1045] *Id.*

experience and the story of Christ in one's own words is the responsibility of the individual Christian. Then patiently wait for a new relationship to develop between other people and God.[1046]

There are various sources which offer helpful guidelines in formulating the sharing of personal experiences.[1047] One set of guidelines for sharing one's Christian experiences include the following.[1048]

- Generally speaking, it is more effective to begin with people one knows and cares about. There is already a knowing, caring, and trusting relationship which enhances the likelihood of receptivity and further conversations.

- Choose the right occasion and timing. The setting and time should be comfortable. The conversation should reach a point where the introduction of spiritual comments is natural rather than forced. Also, when a need arises the time to share may be appropriate.

- Start with people where they are. Different people are at different points in their journey. Listen before responding, discern what the needs are.

- Share experiences, do not argue. Point finger at Christ, not at oneself. Place your friend in the hands of Jesus. Uplift the problem or issue to God and ask for his presence and guidance.

- Extend an invitation for participation in some Christian fellowship and/or gospel exploration activity (e.g., Alpha, Beginnings, etc.) and commit to accompanying and participating with the person being reached out to for the entire program.

- Offer a short simple prayer at the end of the conversation uplifting that person, his or her problem or issue and asking God for his presence and guidance.

(2) Personal Presentation of the Gospel

Christians need to be compelling witnesses for God. The Gospel needs to be declared (proclaimed). That is, describe and define it with clarity. Christians need to be able to articulate the substance and basics of their faith.[1049]

> A carefully thought-out presentation of the gospel is necessary for effective evangelism. Many people are ready to respond to the

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[1046] Andy Langford and Mark Ralls, *Beginnings: an Introduction to Christian Faith* 203 (2013) (a participant's companion).

[1047] *See*, e.g., Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* 289-295 (2002); Mark Mittelberg, Lee Strobel and Bill Hybels, *Becoming a Contagious Christian: Participant's Guide* 51-60 (2007).

[1048] Andy Langford and Mark Ralls, *Beginnings: an Introduction to Christian Faith* 203-05 (2013) (a participant's companion).

[1049] Lonnie Richardson, "Contagious Christianity, Taking the Plunge," July 8, 2001 (sermon).

> gospel if they hear it presented in a clear, logical way. Every Christian should be trained to make such a presentation and to relate how Christ has made a difference in their own life.[1050]

Each believer needs to be willing to assume risks and initiate spiritual conversations, share what God has done in his or her life and to clearly articulate briefly in an interesting way the message of salvation in ways which non-Christians can understand. Consequently, it's imperative that the church develop and implement means to prepare all of its members to build relationships and articulate the truths of the gospel.[1051]

To be an effective disciple-making church, we need to find ways to overcome the lack of confidence in sharing the gospel. because of the confidence factor. The average Christian layperson has to be equipped and trained in ways to share the gospel in a simple way. If it's too complicated they are not likely to do it. The confidence will not be there.[1052]

However, one should not be a reluctant witness because of a lack of in-depth theological expertise. As Isaiah 55:11 states God's word that goes out of his mouth "will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." So' each of us needs to pray to God to help us to share his word faithfully and trust him to accomplish his will in those people around us. Thus, every Christian member of the church should develop and be prepared to offer his or her *own personal presentation of the gospel* when called upon and even to do so when not asked if one's presentation would make a difference.

There is no one and only right way. Such presentation need not and should not be complicated or lengthy. Here we are not talking about a dissertation in theology. Use any mode of presentation that communicates the essence of gospel. In a simple, clear and concise language using one's own words, communicate that God so loves people and, through one's belief and faith in Christ, his death, burial and resurrection, God forgives our sins, reconciles ourselves with him and promises eternal life.

The gospel essentially is not what you do, but rather it centers on what Jesus did for us. Sharing the gospel does not call for a detailed lengthy dissertation. Instead, present it in a simple and interesting way. Be prepared. Prepare for the opportunity to offer the gospel. Write it down, update when appropriate, become familiar with it and be prepared to verbalize the gospel not only when called upon, but also whenever an appropriate opportunity arises.

Often very effective is an easily jotted down or readily available graphic illustration such as the bridge graphic illustration.[1053] Another approach is utilization of the "Five Second Gospel" which simply expresses

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[1050] Linus J. Morris, *The High Impact Church: A Fresh Approach to Reaching the Unchurched* 198 (1993).

[1051] Mark Mittelberg, *Building a Contagious Church: Revolutionizing the Way We View and Do Evangelism* 74-75 (2001).

[1052] Jessica Hanewinckel, "David Gustfson: The Practice of Witnessing – Part 2, OutreachMagazine.com, June 17, 2919.

[1053] See "Steps to Peace," Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (mini pamphlet) and/or Mark Mittelberg, Lee Strobel, and Bill Hybels, *Becoming a Contagious Christian: Participant's Guide* 69-70 (2007).

- God loves us,
- We blew it,
- Christ paid for it,
- We must receive it,
- The Holy Spirit enters us.[1054]

Furthermore, sharing the gospel through storytelling can be very effective, e..g, the judge story.[1055] A brief summary of the Apostles Creed offers another approach.[1056] For persons who believe they need to perform good works to earn their way into God's forgiveness and favor, the "do versus done" illustration may be helpful.[1057] There are numerous books on how to share the good news. However, even if a person cannot bring himself or herself to do witness, at least make direct attempts to lead one's personal prospect to several situations where the gospel is presented (i.e., the 3 hearings principle considered in Section *g.* above).

In our pluralistic society, many do not believe in absolute truths. In responding to questions, comments and objections to Christianity, maintain confidence in the gospel message. Do not water down or change the message. While we need to be humble and respectful with others, remain confident in the power of God.

> I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.... (Romans 1:16)

"Believe in the power of the message, teach it and use it."[1058]

However, especially early in the development of a relationship, instead of expounding a point-by-point explanation of the gospel, a often better approach is telling stories from the gospel and how the stories relate to oneself. Through narratives, walk people through stories about God and what he is doing. People are likely to get caught up in the narrative. When the evangelizer reaches the time to get to Jesus, the stage is set.[1059]

In short, share verbal witness! Colossians 4:5 calls for us to "Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward others, making the most of the opportunity," We should

> [l]ook for opportunities (whether by asking spiritual questions or dropping clues as to one' own spiritual interests) and respond to

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[1054] For a bit of elaboration on each of these points, *see* Mark Mittelberg, Lee Strobel, and Bill Hybels, *Becoming a Contagious Christian: Participant's Guide* 66-68 (2007) and Jon S. Hanson, Answer to Examination Question #2, Wisconsin Congregational Leadership and Lay Ministry Training Program. Session #10, June 8, 2013.

[1055] *See* Mark Mittelberg, Lee Strobel, and Bill Hybels, *Becoming a Contagious Christian: Participant's Guide* 74-75 (2007).

[1056] Lonnie Richardson, "Tell Your Story," June 13, 2013 (sermon).

[1057] *See* Mark Mittelberg, Lee Strobel, and Bill Hybels, *Becoming a Contagious Christian: Participant's Guide* 76 (2007).

[1058] Mark Mittelberg and Lynn Marian, "Church on Fire," National Outreach Conference, November 9, 2006.

[1059] Mike Moran, "Evangelism in a Post Christian Society," No Regrets 2011 Conference of Christian Men (Elmbrook Church).

> interest by sharing a verbal witness which is appropriate for the situation such as sharing the Gospel in a simple manner, your own story as a Christian, what you believe, or simply an invitation to a church activity.[1060]

To effectively reach out to unbelievers, skeptics and others outside the faith, we need to engage in spiritual conversations engendering their interest or responding to their indication of interest in spiritual matters. Exercise initiative and steer conversation toward spiritual topics. The way one raises matters of faith depends upon his or her personality, the subject matter one intends to talk about, and one's own particular style of evangelism.

At some point, the occasion may arise when a person is ready to sincerely come to Christ. Such opportunity should not be lost. Like a salesman, when the time is ripe, ask for the order. We need not only to help a person understand, we need to inspire and challenge him or her to do something specific, to step across the line of faith.[1061] When one senses that an individual sees his or her need for Christ, one might ask "Have you ever received Christ as your personal Lord and Savior. If not, would you like to do so now? Christ stands at the door knocking and will come if he is invited." Then, if the person wants to proceed, one should be prepared to guide the process.[1062]Although there is no specific prayer or prescribed method for doing so, one should be prepared with an appropriate prayer.[1063]

(3) More to the Good News[1064]

Evangelism does not occur in a vacuum. Many don't like what they see. Not only do people need to be convinced that message is true, but also that Christianity is good for their own lives, their families, friends, neighbors and society as a whole. Although most lapsed Christians and non-Christians like and respect those Christians they personally know. many do not feel the same about Christianity. Christians need to recognize and act accordingly. All that Christians do is either evangelism or de-evangelism. So, not only must we know and show that Christianity is *true*, we also must show that it is *good* and demonstrate that by doing good.[1065]

[1060] Fox River Congregational Church, "Initial Strategic Steps," iWitness" Program (2013).
[1061] Bill Hybels and Mark Mittelberg, *Becoming a Contagious Christian* 182 (1994).
[1062] *See e.g., id.* at 183 *et seq*.
[1063] For example,

> Dear Lord Jesus,
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> I know that I am a sinner, and I ask for Your forgiveness. I believe You died for my sins and rose from the dead. I turn from my sins and invite You to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow You as my Lord and Savior. In Your name, Amen.

Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, *Knowing Christ and Walking with Him* 17 (2002 revised 2006).
[1064] This section draws primarily on James Choung, "It's Not Evangelism Until We Speak," OutreachMagazine.com, October 12, 2015.
[1065] Barna, *Reviving Evangelism* 99-100 (2019).

There are people who love to share the good news, as should we. In doing so, they not only re-experience wonderful moments and happenings, they also spread good vibrations to others. We are wired to share good news. Being created in God's image reflects God himself who loves to share good news.

> From the beginning of time when he proclaimed that all of creation was "very good" (Gen. 1:31), to the days he came to earth in the form of Jesus to launch the kingdom of God, our God has always been a bearer of good news.[1066]

Scripture speaks highly of those who spread the good news.

> How beautiful… are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation…. (Isaiah 52:7)

But, if we are wired to share the good news (the gospel), why do many find themselves hesitant or resistant to talk to those who don't know Jesus. What we can say is the best hope for all of mankind, the greatest expression of love in the entire universe, the climax upon which history hinges? Perhaps we think that a person won't receive our message as good news, or perhaps we may question whether what we have to say is really good news.

Traditionally the central thrust of message about Jesus, with which many Christians grew up, is that if you believed in Christ and died tonight you would go to heaven. Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sins so that we might have eternal life. It was all about the afterlife. Even if one did bad things (did not care for his or her neighbor, lied, stole, etc.), if he or she said the right prayer when 8 years old, Jesus would be with you forever. Limiting the telling of the gospel message to this perspective might not feel like particularly good news, especially for those who have not yet come to Christ. This narrow perception of the good news seems to set people up, in the name of Jesus, to live self-centered lives. Furthermore, this narrow focus and understanding seems just giving people an escape ticket to heaven while the world falls apart.

The gospel should offer more than this. Instead, shouldn't the gospel tell us not only what happens when we die, but also how to live? Yes. The gospel story reveals a deeper purpose for a meaningful life. It offers peace of mind, comfort, hope and help with decisions and problems. The gospel story is relevant to how we live as well as what happens when we die [1067]

Jesus said, in proclaiming the good news of God, "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15) Jesus core message is the kingdom of God has come near. God is in control and making wrong things right, right now as well as in the future.

[1066] *Id.*

[1067] "Is There a God? What Difference Does It Make?" Awake, March 2015, pp.3-5.

> The kingdom of God has always existed.... What was new with Jesus was that the kingdom of God has become available for human beings to enter into and live in. That's his gospel: the kingdom of God is now available, and if you want to, you can come right on in and live in it.[1068]

The good news is that God's kingdom is in our lives now and further realized in our eternal lives to come.

> There is an eternal future that exists for all of us, and through the cross we are forgiven. And at the same time, God is serving the hors d'oeuvres of that future banquet in our present day. His kingdom has come, and we're all invited to be a part of it.[1069]

There is more to the good news than eternal life. Telling about both the coming of the kingdom as well as Christ's sacrifice on the cross, both in the context of one-on one interactions and church offerings (e.g., worship, small groups, etc.) offers a more attention getting and gripping scenario in sharing the gospel message.[1070]

(4) Good News from Perspective of Younger Generations[1071]

Each generation needs to discover the gospel afresh for itself. What is good news to older generations often seems to be mediocre news to younger generations. Older Christians' explanation of the gospel often tries to answer questions Millennials and teens are not asking. For example, previous generations ask "How do I get to heaven?" Younger generations ask very different questions such as "What does it mean for me to thrive as a human being?"

One factor influencing this shift is the higher level of anxiety that Millennials and Gen Z experience as compared to people in the past. This renders it harder to think very far into the future. They react to what they are experiencing here and now with little thought to the distant future. For many young people questions like "What happens after I die?" simply are not perceived matters of high concern at this point in their lives. Teens and young adults ask where they belong, whether and how are they significant, how to deal with anxiety, how to deal loneliness, etc. If they don't see the gospel answering questions such as these, the gospel is not perceived as good news. However, if the gospel is seen as addressing and answering these longings, they are much more likely to receive the gospel as well as share it with others as how God impacted their lives.

To effectively reach the younger generations, church leaders need to address how to remove the barriers to the younger generations considering the good news. Church leaders need

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[1068] Dallas Willard, *Living in Christ's Presence: Final Words on Heaven and the Kingdom of God* 52 (2014).
[1069] James Choung, "It's Not Evangelism Until We Speak," OutreachMagazine.com, October 12, 2015.
[1070] James Choung, *True Story: A Christianity Worth Believing In* (2008) may be worth considering as a church seeks to better enable its members, as well as the church itself, to effectively communicate the good news message.
[1071] This section draws on Barna, *Reviving Evangelism* 49-53 (2019) (Q & A with Josh Chen).

to relinquish the assumption that the gospel that was perceived, received and impactful as the good news to older generations is the entirety of the gospel. Such presentation too often does not work today. The gospel is robust enough to be good news for all generations.

> If our only understanding or expression of salvation is what happens after we die, then our message will not be perceived as relevant to most younger people. But when Jesus talks about being saved in the Gospels, he frequently is talking about *right now*, not the "after you die" that characterizes some older generations' gospel presentations.
>
> For Millennials and Gen Z, the good news of the gospel is that salvation is not only for later, it is something that is happening *now*—without diminishing the importance of "later." Jesus wants us to experience wholeness *now* physically, spiritually, emotionally and relationally. So, when it comes to their felt needs, we need to offer young people more than just platitudes or future promises. We need to walk them through the hard work of spiritual formation and an invitation to experience the power of the Holy Spirit. Right now....
>
> For teens and young adults, compassion – not judgment—is the starting place of the gospel. If we are serious about reaching new generations, we need to be willing to challenge our assumptions about what the gospel is. We also need to engage people out of compassion and love rather than judgment, because it is the kindness of the Lord that leads to repentance. If we can communicate and reflect a Jesus who loves them and meets their greatest felt needs... many young people will decide to follow Jesus—and share a vibrant faith with coming generations.[1072]

j. Principle of Invitation to Church Worship Services, Activities, and Other Events

A major and common reason undermining effective efforts in reaching out to unbelievers, skeptics and those who have strayed from church and their Christian walk is the all too frequent failure to invite a person to a church worship services, activities and/or other events and not offering to accompany such person or meet him or her at the location.[1073]

In contrast,

> [g]rowing churches are full of people who invite their friends. ....[T]he invite culture of your church is at the very heart of your church's ability to reach its full redemptive potential. ... [People

[1072] *Id.* at 53

[1073] Thom Rainer, "10 Reasons We Have Not Reached the Unchurched," OutreachMagazine.com, July 14, 2015.

> need] to understand that a part of being a follower of Jesus is reaching out to the world a around them; that being an 'inviter' is an essential part of every Christian life.... [Inviting someone] needs to become a normal practice for all Christians.[1074]

In today's culture, for many of those outside the church, churches are increasingly perceived more and more to be like private clubs to which non-members are neither welcome nor invited. For churches, the necessary bridges are personal invitations by someone whom the invitee has a positive relationship.[1075] Of course, for nonbelievers to hear and experience, they need to come. To reach nonbelievers, the church needs both worship and other outreach activities to which members can invite the unchurched. Invitations must not be limited to a one-time effort. On average it takes seven invitations before a person positively responds and comes.[1076] And, it may take additional invitations to induce return visits. Thus, a Christian needs to offer, albeit not in an obnoxious manner, repeated invitations at appropriate times for appropriate events. Furthermore, whenever possible and appropriate, a church member should accompany the person to such activity.

A combination of worship and/or non-worship events, the message of the Word and a welcoming church are all part of a necessary mix for attracting the unchurched. A worshiping and loving fellowship of the church can be communicated. Worship services which engage those caught in the secular world, but who may have a bit of curiosity about this religious stuff, have proven to be an effective event for members to bring unbelievers. Also, there ls a variety of non-worship events which offer numerous possibilities. For discussion of worship service evangelism see PART FIVE, Section II.E above and for non-worship service events or activities, see Section E. below and PART SIX, Section VII.D.6. below. A strategy that integrates an individual's outreach efforts with a well-executed outreach event has proven to have powerful impact. This requires that in their invitational efforts, our members need be aware of the various church activities, events and programs that are available. Then, extend an invitation.

k. Principle of Relational Momentum[1077]

Being prepared to share one's faith and Christian experience, as well as the gospel, is an important ingredient in bringing people outside the faith to Christ. However, for most it is not enough for one Christian to befriend and share his or her faith with another person. Nor is it commonly the most effective initial step in the process. But rather, in today's post-Christian society, unbelievers, doubters and those who have strayed from the church often require the intersection of three elements in their lives in order to ultimately come to find faith and become part of a church Christian fellowship. These elements are

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[1074] Rich Birch, "Why the 'Inevitability of Your Church Is Important," OutreachMagazine.com, August 11, 2019. For discussion on measuring the level of inevitability in a church, factors people are most likely to talk to their friends about, and a free program for better understanding of the church's inevitability, *see id.*

[1075] Carey Nieuwhof, "Why the Church Needs to Adapt to Reach Post-Christians," October 8, 2018, Out reachMagazine.com.

[1076] Lonnie Richardson, "Becoming More: A Plan for Church Growth," April 28, 2002 (sermon).

[1077] This section draws primarily from John Burke, "The Key to Sharing Your Faith in a Post-Christian Culture," OutreachMagazine.com, August 4, 2014.

- friendship with someone who genuinely listens, cares, serves, and talks openly about faith in a non-pressuring manner,

- relationship with a small group of Christians (e.g., four or five) with whom they enjoy hanging out and who make them feel like they truly belong; and

- offering a "come as you are" learning environment where they can learn about the way of Jesus.

When these elements intersect in the lives of those far from God, many find the love and grace of God and also bring their network of friends and family along with them. But for this to happen, it is critical to build relational momentum. Here the focus is on the second element, i.e., building relationships in the context of a small group, i.e., build relational momentum.

The negative stereotypes of Christianity existing in much of current society pose barriers which need to be overcome if efforts to reach out to the lost are to be successful. To do so very often involves getting people to know multiple Christians willing to be open concerning their own struggles while at the same time reflecting the hope and positive results of a spirit filled life. When non-Christians encounter Christians, who act as if they have all the answers, who never have to struggle, and who suggest quick fixes for every problem, they recognize the pretense and want little to with that kind of faith. However, when the unbelievers, doubters and those estranged from the church observe Christians who try to love, care and serve while also reflecting struggles, real setbacks and need for encouragement, the basis for trusting relationships begins to build. It is relational momentum between believers and others that draw people to Jesus. Thus, the question becomes, how does a fledgling core group of Christians build relational momentum?

Start by building relationships where you live. Prepare a list of people whom God has placed in your path (family, neighbors co-workers, social and recreational contacts, etc.). Commence by praying for them. Then start getting to know them. Throw a neighborhood party. Invite someone into your home. Another excellent approach to developing friendships with people far from God is simply engaging in activities you enjoy with people outside the faith. Serve, support and encourage others. As friendship and trust grows with one or more people, bring such person(s) into contact with your already core small group of Christians. In short, encounter people, interact with them, develop relationships with them and then invite them into a loving and caring small group fellowship with other Christians. As this process proceeds, relationship momentum builds leading toward learning environments and experiences for understanding and ultimately accepting Christ and involvement in the life of a Christian church.

l. Principle of Apologetics

(1) Need for Apologetics

Judges 2:10 speaks of a time when "another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done…." This has increasingly become the situation today. Many people have been and others are currently now raised without being taught about

God, the Bible and the Christian faith. So, understandably, they don't understand God's love and grace through Jesus. New generations have not come to know the story of God.[1078]

Not knowing the Bible's story, today's culture increasingly portrays Christianity as a religion of ignorance, intolerance and even hate. Stories have emerged negatively portraying Christians as hateful, Jesus as just one more religious teacher, one religion is no better than another, God of the Bible is a jealous, violent deity, etc. Atheists and others extract bits of the Bible out of context or use verses in isolation to portray God and Christians in negative ways. The internet and various forms of social media enhances and accelerates the spread of the negative narrative stories to an increasingly wider audience.[1079]

It is a cultural reality that many people in a post-Christian world are genuinely incredulous that anyone would think like what they believe Christians think. So, they ask questions like what is wrong two people of the same sex who love each other to get married, why is engaging in sex bad, why does a loving God send someone like Gandhi to hell, why do bad things happen to good people?" Being able to effectively deal with these types of questions lies at the heart of modern-day apologetics. Apologetics needs to grapple with the indictments which the world lays at the feet of the church including judgmentalism, hypocrisy, anti-intellectualism, lack of tolerance, and legalisms.[1080]

However, apologetics for many in the younger generations requires more than responding to a few specific objections. Spiritual illiteracy is the defining mark of the post-Christian world. They do not know what the Bible says. They do not know the basics of Christian belief or theology. They do not know what the cross is about. They do not know what it means to worship. But, their spiritual illiteracy is deeper than that. Many even lack awareness of the gospel. Not having experienced God, they experience the sickness of the world without a story, without a transcendent meaning or purpose. Nothing is calling them to be more than they are beyond themselves. Yet they cannot help but be incurably spiritual. That is the defining mark of what it means to be human. However, we all are made in the image of God. We are created to be able to respond to and be in a relationship with the God. This inherent urge is there. The story needs to be communicated using bridges to which they are likely to respond (e.g., science) to address their questions and barriers facing a faith narrative.[1081]

Overcoming unbelievers' lack of understanding of the biblical story and the negative offerings of many in today's culture calls for the willingness of local churches and of their Christian members to be prepared for and actively engage in apologetics. The term apologetics simply means defending the truth of Christianity. In his great Commission, Christ calls upon all Christians to reach out to unbelievers and lead them to becoming disciples. To counteract the negative caricatures of Christianity and lead people to Christ, "we must be proactive, using

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[1078] Dan Kimball, "Why We Must teach Apologetics Unapologetically," OutreachMagazine.com, October 29, 2013.
[1079] *Id.*
[1080] James Emery White, "Crossing the Bridges and Breaking Down Barriers," Outreach.Magazine.com, April 28, 2018. White's Mecklenburg Community Church conducts series which address these issues. For example, a series titled "Judged" examines how judgmentalism works in our world. The series "In Search of a Better God" looks at how we put God on the stand for our perceived sense of his injustice. The objective is to defend, explain and examine the character of God. *Id.*
[1081] *Id.*

apologetics to teach what the Bible really does and does not say, and what Christians actually believe and why."[1082]

The cultural environment today should not be viewed with abject distress. Lee Strobel says,

> I really believe we're on the cusp of a golden era in Christian apologetics. We're living in very exciting times. The water has been stirred by atheists, anti-theists and agnostics, and there's an atmosphere of skepticism because of it. To me, that just *spells opportunity*; it means people are thinking about these issues, and they're willing to listen and engage and discuss these topics. *Apologetics has always been the handmaiden of evangelism. It's a tool that's used in the evangelistic process.* It's always about helping people get past those spiritual sticking points that are holding them up in their spiritual journeys (emphasis supplied).[1083]

(2) Threefold Approach When Employing Apologetics

Effective employment of apologetics is founded on a threefold approach.

First, to effectively engage in apologetics, one needs to *know his or her own beliefs.* This goes beyond a simple expression of the gospel which was considered earlier in the section on the principle of witnessing for Christ. But rather, here the focus is on basic questions and doubts one has dealt with in his or her Walk with Christ. When a person begins to understand what he or she believes and why such beliefs are true, that person becomes more confident in explaining his or her convictions to others. If people do not know why they believe something to be true, not only are they are less likely to be credible, but also they are unlikely engage in a conversation on that topic. Once persons gain better understanding of their own beliefs, then experiment explaining them to others seeking constructive criticism as to how the manner of expression comes across to others.[1084] And, of course, in doing so, one furthers growth in his or her own faith which moves one farther along in one's own Walk with Christ growing toward a more Christ-like life.

Second, the evangelism process is built upon *caring loving trusting relationships.* Befriend family, neighbors, work and social colleagues, etc. No one wants to be a Jesus project. Demonstrate first that they are loved whatever they believe. Care for them, walk with them. Don't try to ram arguments down their throats whether engaged in a face to face dialogue or through the internet. If one does not care for others, evangelistic efforts are unlikely to be well received. Effective apologetics require developing a loving and trusting relationship with the person to whom outreach is extended. One's heartfelt thought out rational underlying his or her beliefs need to be coupled with a *lifestyle* of caring, friendship and love. When presenting

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[1082] Dan Kimball, "Why We Must teach Apologetics Unapologetically," OutreachMagazine.com, October 29, 2013.
[1083] Lee Strobel, "What's Trending in Apologetics Today?" OutreachMagazine.com, January 19, 2014.
[1084] Mary Jo Sharp, "Why 'The Final Apologetic' Still Matters," OutreachMagazine.com, January 20, 2014.

apologetic rationale is coupled with a life reflecting these characteristics supporting the rationale, the potential impact is great.

> For instance, we shouldn't just argue that God's love is perfect, but we should also demonstrate the truth of God's love with a great love for one another. This is a powerful testimony we can give to the world: the lived-out truths of Scripture effectively renewing and transforming us toward Christlikeness.[1085]

Third, that which attracts a person to becoming and continuing as a Christian is not simply rational arguments overcoming obstacles, but rather it is *connecting with God through Christ*. Yes, we need to engage dialogue with our non-Christian friends talking about the issues that matter to them to remove obstacles that deter them from moving toward Christ. However, the removal of obstacles alone is not sufficient. People change their beliefs or lives when they are confronted with something better. In the context of outreach, that something better is Christ. Effective apologetics moves people toward God. We need to present Jesus and the gospel as amazing, loving, embodiment of truth, source of hope, and the foundation of a meaningful life. Christianity is about brass tacks, real-life stuff. We need to move toward an apologetic that doesn't just try win rational arguments, but more importantly offers way to love and meaning.[1086]

> We have a responsibility to confront propositional obstacles with one hand, then with the other we offer something better: helping people treasure Jesus. Like clearing a garden of weeds so you can plant it.[1087]

(3) Training for Apologetics

Apologetics is an essential part of the evangelism process. Consequently, it is something the church needs to teach. In past years churches have tended to rely on lifestyle evangelism. That is, when a person lives a Christian life, such attracts unbelievers and doubters to become interested in and ultimately come to Christ. Such an approach lacks intentionality and substantial widespread effectiveness. Leading a Christian life style is important for evangelical outreach, but also there needs to be more intentionality in seeking out opportunities for spiritual conversations and being equipped to explain the gospel and why we believe in it. There are many non-Christians who are only one question away from faith. They are hung up on one question, an issue that has bothered them. When one helps them find an answer, major progress can be made in their spiritual journey.[1088] "We need to be in actual engaged dialogue with our non-Christian friends talking about the issues that matter to them."[1089]

[1085] *Id.*

[1086] Paul J. Pastor, "Why We Need to Walk with Skeptics, "OutreachMagazine.com, November 26, 2017 based upon conversation with Mark Clark author of *The Problem of God: Answering a Skeptic's Challenge to Christianity* (2017).

[1087] *Id.*

[1088] Lee Strobel, "What's Trending in Apologetics Today?" OutreachMagazine.com, January 19, 2014.

[1089] Paul J. Pastor, "Why We Need to Walk with Skeptics," OutreachMagazine.com, November 26, 2017.

When Christians build caring and loving relationships with those outside the faith, trust begins to build. People become increasingly curious about our faith and questions will arise. In today's cultural setting, building trust and sparking curiosity about the faith may take longer than in the past, but the trust will come along with legitimate questions. However, recognize that few things more turn off people than Christian apologetics which are combative and poorly done. Christians need to be trained as to how to respond to objections and difficult questions. The question is how does this look like in a church? Various approaches to teaching apologetics, including the following, have been raised. These might be used separately or in some combination with one another.

- *Teach a series on tough questions every year*[1090]

  Don't rely simply on a class. An apologetic class tends attract a limited number of church members. Instead, teach a series of tough questions in the main worship and other church-wide gatherings. This reaches a larger number of members. It is teaches as many as possible and whets their appetite and mind to learn more.

  In doing so, rather than a church leader or leaders selecting the questions, ask college-age, youth and 20-somethings what questions they have. Create a survey to distribute or post online from which the five questions are selected and used in teaching a series on tough questions. This not only reaches the regular church gatherers, but also attracts non-Christians coming in on their own as well as being invited by church members.

  Create opportunities for open dialogue on difficult topics and theological questions by holding an open forum on the afternoon or evening that the teaching series is taught, or possibly at the end of the series. Encourage questions and dialogue. This has proven to be quite successful. Such forums, perhaps sometimes led by a guest speaker, are open to both church members and the general public.

- *Small Groups*

  As discussed previously, participation in relational small groups is at the heart of the disciple-making process. Short term small groups also play an important role in equipping people for various ministries including evangelism. Both can and should play a prominent role not only in equipping people for evangelism in general, but also with respect to apologetics. When tough questions are the focus of a sermon series, existing or newly created small groups can build upon such presentations.

  Small groups provide a safe environment where questions can be asked and explored. This is particularly important for members of newer generations who are often suspicious of churches offering one-sided teaching and creating the

[1090] Draws upon Dan Kimball, "Why We Must Teach Apologetics Unapologetically," OutreachMagazine.com, October 29, 2013.

sense that it's a bad to ask questions. Create an environment that encourages questions whether in the context of a small group or otherwise. Encourage inquiry and make it easy for people to raise their questions.[1091]

- *Practice Discussing Beliefs*

After gaining some knowledge about one's beliefs, he or she should experiment and practice explaining those beliefs. Words come across differently when sounded out aloud. Innocuous statements can be perceived by the listener as abrasive or condescending due to voice inflection. Within a small church group, whether already existing or newly formed, engage in conversations on the arguments. Ask for constructive criticism on one's ideas and thought delivery. Then go out into the world. Learn from your mistakes and love people whatever they believe. Importantly, loving people, is vital for effective apologetics.[1092]

- *Welcome Those Expressing Doubt or Disbelief*[1093]

In reaching out, be receptive of those expressing disbelief or doubt. Great belief starts with disbelief. "Without the capacity to doubt, there could be no progress – only complacent, unquestioning acceptance of the status quo and its established dogmatism."[1094] Many advances and great discoveries arose out of skepticism. Even John the Baptist, when languishing in jail, expressed doubt when he asked "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" (Matthew 11:3) Yet Christ still said "among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist." (Matthew 11:11) When there are doubts about the Christian faith, they need to be confronted, not pushed aside. Genuine faith comes through dealing with doubts. So, welcome those with doubts, respond to doubts and help people come to faith.

- *Don't offer simple answers if there aren't simple answers*

Complex questions may require complex answers or acknowledgment that there is not clear-cut answer. Quoting a verse or two to prove a point is not sufficient. A simple, take-it-or-leave-it, case-closed approach, to a difficult question will quickly lose people's trust. When dealing with difficult or sensitive topics, be sure not to dismiss challenging or perplexing questions with simplistic, tidy responses. However, if the answers are clear, don't shy away from giving them just because they're difficult teachings. On the other hand, it is not a weakness to admit, "I don't know for sure." This is likely to increase respect.[1095]

[1091] *See id.*
[1092] Mary Jo Sharp, "Why 'The Final Apologetic' Still Matters," OutreachMagazine.com, January 20, 2014.
[1093] This section draws primarily on Lonnie Richardson, "Dealing with Doubt," May 1, 2011 (sermon).
[1094] *Id.*
[1095] Dan Kimball, "Why We Must Teach Apologetics Unapologetically," OutreachMagazine.com, October 29, 2013.

In short

> Our primary "apologetic" is love. But we must also be ready to offer reasonable answers to this generation's most difficult questions, both in our individual contacts with people and in the life and teaching of the church.[1096]

It is the responsibility of a church seeking to be an effective disciple-making church to encourage, equip and support it members learning, practicing and putting into effect apologetics in appropriate situations. It is the responsibility on the church's followers of Christ to do so.

Various books, programs and other resources focus on tough questions. Several are noted in Section VII.B.4.e. above. These resources not only offer disciple-making experiences to strengthen the faith of believers, they also provide attractive small group opportunities to bring unbelievers into contact with the church as well as provide support to us when we are confronted with such questions by people to whom we reach out to in our evangelism efforts.

m. Principle of Accountability

Evangelism efforts can evaporate. If we don't have others in our lives with whom we can share our outreach stories and struggles, mission drift inevitably sets in. It doesn't take long for evangelism to slip off one's priority list. We all need people to encourage and support us in helping us move past our own evangelism-related barriers. Each person needs to seek out accountability to support one in his or her evangelistic call by Christ. This might be done in the context of a relational small group or a one on one relationship, in conjunction with a spiritual mentor, etc.

n. Principle of Contexts for Evangelism[1097]

Personal relationship evangelism can occur in various ways. Being aware of three general contexts in which opportunities for evangelism occur better enables one to prepare for and engage in effective evangelism efforts. Three general contexts for evangelism are contact, circumstances, and friendship evangelism.

- *Contact Evangelism* – Unique to this context is that it involves a person with a passion to share the love of God and his offer of forgiveness with an intentional desire to do so. The key here is that one is intentional about it. He or she may ask a complete stranger "I am talking to people about Jesus, would you be willing to talk?" This offers a person the opportunity to say yes or no.

  The experience of some is that a high percentage of people will say yes. This may be attributable to two reasons; first, asking the Lord to lead you to one who might be interested willing to talk and second, our secular culture is spiritually hungry. As

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[1096] *Id.*

[1097] This Section draws primarily on Jerry Root, "3 Perfect Opportunities to Share Your Faith," OutreachMagazine.com, March 18, 2018.

Augustine said, people's hearts are restless until they find rest in God. When a person is open to talk, ask about his or her faith and listen to his or her story. When opportune, present the gospel in a manner connecting the good news to the person's felt need. Of course, not all of us are wired for this method of evangelism. However, there are additional contexts for evangelism available to the rest of us.

- *Circumstance Evangelism* – This context of evangelism occurs when people are thrown together by circumstance, e.g., sitting together on a plane, train, bus, in a doctor's office waiting room, etc. Strike up a conversation. Ask, for example, where are you going, why are you here, what do like doing, etc. Being lovingly and genuinely interested may result in bits of information which leads to opening up the conversation. When spiritual interest begins to evidence itself, sharing the gospel in an unobtrusive way has often opened the door to a person becoming interested in Christ. Circumstances provide opportunities in everyday situations to reach out to people for God.

- *Friendship Evangelism* – Most people are more comfortable to engage in personal relationship evangelism in the realm of talking with their family members or friends rather than engaging in contact or circumstance evangelism.

  But friendship evangelism also poses challenges. Commonly friendships have developed over a period of time with little or no discussion of spiritual matters. Bringing such topic up now may be a bit awkward. One effective way to address these circumstances and bring the gospel into the conversation is simply comment to one's friend saying

  > You know, I was thinking about our friendship the other day and I became embarrassed about my failure before you. I have known you for years. I know so much about you; your favorite sports teams, your favorite restaurants, even the names and interests of your children. But I realize we've never talked about spiritual things. I know nothing about your spiritual story. Do you think, sometime, we can talk about this? I'd love to hear your story.[1098]

One organization, (Cru, the name for Campus Crusade for Christ International in the US) found that 90% of the people respond with a "yes" to this question. Set a time (perhaps for breakfast or lunch) at which time ask for his or her story and respond with your story. Note objections raised and come back with answers at the next opportunity. Overtime, spiritual things may become woven into the fabric of the friendship.

These three contexts (contact, circumstance and friendship) for evangelism are readily accessible. Engaging in one or more of them tend to be more enjoyable and satisfactory than some other approaches as one senses being in partnership with God and that one's own life is God loving others to himself through you

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[1098] *Id.*

5. Personality Based Personal Relationship Evangelism[1099]

As just discussed above, there are several general basic principles applicable to personal relationship evangelism. Yet, we are all different. In applying these principles, not everyone does nor should engage in outreach in the same way.

Evangelism efforts create opportunities for unbelieving persons to engage in a process leading to and prayerfully ultimately choosing to accept Christ. What is it that enables believers to be effective in reaching them? There is something God given in each person that enables him or her to be an effective witness. This something is one's personality. Personality is God's inherent wiring as to how people engage and interact with the world.

> More than anything else, *personality* is the human component involved in effective evangelism.[1100]

It is key to understand that a person does not need to squeeze oneself into a specific personality mold in order to be used by God to reach others. To the contrary, one will be much more effective working comfortably within his or her own God given personality. In moving people to participate in evangelism efforts, it is important for the church to communicate to its members that they do not need to be what they are not. And then, encourage, train and support them in using one's own personality style when engaging in personal evangelism.

Regardless of the style employed, one needs to understand that evangelism is not about converting the non-Christian. Converting is the work of God. But rather, evangelism is offering persuasive presentations both by word and/or action in sharing the good news. Persuasiveness stems from appealing to a need that already exists in a person. Its function is to converse with and relate to a person in a manner that communicates the gospel or leads to a situation in which the gospel is well communicated.

God created several styles of evangelism which can be grouped into six categories;[1101]

- *assertive/confrontational (direct) style*
- *analytical/intellectual style*
- *storytelling/testimonial style*
- *relational/interpersonal style*
- *invitational style*
- *serving style.*[1102]

To each of these we now turn.

[1099] This Section draws primarily on Jeffrey A. Johnson, *Got Style? Personality –Based Evangelism* 1-110 (2009).
[1100] *Id.* at 6.
[1101] *Id.* at vii (table of contents).
[1102] Jefferey Johnson uses the term incarnational style. However, the preference here is the term serving style which will be used throughout the following discussion.

a. Assertive/Confrontational (Direct) Style Evangelism[1103]

(1) Nature

Those with assertive personalities engage life with verbal (either oral or written) directness. They tend to be competitive, confident, bold and direct with very definite and passionate opinions. They are task oriented and tend to avoid small talk. To hearers or readers of their communications, assertive types may seem pushy and insensitive. Assertive types passionately offer and pursue their opinions through lecture, argument and/or correcting other people. Sometimes, without considering the consequences of what they are going to say, they are candid and truthful as they perceive the truth, even if the truth hurts. Although they might communicate with love, their emphasis is truth in a manner that ignores social boundaries.

The various personality styles include pros and cons. The primary potential fault of the assertive style is the possibility of repelling the person to whom the message is directed instead of drawing the prospect to the message. Furthermore, perceived canned presentations tend to be a turnoff. On positive side, the assertive style can be very compelling. Perhaps more than any other style, God uses the assertive personality to bring to fruition earlier efforts of other Christians possessing non-assertive personalities in moving people toward Christ. The assertive person is the most likely to "seal the deal." But, very few persons make a decision for Christ in the absence of several other contacts by Christians possessing other personality traits.

(2) Sub-Assertive Styles

Assertive persons may evangelize with different sub-styles; (a) public assertive, (b) personal assertive, and (c) phenomena assertive evangelism.

(a) Public Assertive Evangelism: – This style refers to situations in which one person stands before many people and shares the gospel in some verbal format. He or she communicates scripture and culminates in a challenge to make a decision for Christ. A prime example is Billy Graham standing before thousands of people (strangers) in a stadium presenting the gospel with paramount focus on salvation through the use of words. This was followed by a strong invitation to then and there accept Christ. Although public assertive evangelism can play a significant role in sharing Christ with and influencing others, it is not the only or primary sub-style assertive approach.

(b) Personal Assertive Evangelism: – This type of evangelism is akin to public assertive evangelism other than it involves one on one encounters rather than one person speaking to a group. Basic elements of this assertive personality methodology include the following:

- takes place between two strangers (e.g., door to door visitations),
- typically begins with questions about general things in life (e.g., how is your family),

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[1103] This Subsection *a.* is essentially drawn from Jeffrey A. Johnson, *Got Style? Personality –Based Evangelism* 20-38 (2009).

- conversation is maneuvered toward spiritual things (how is your spiritual life, if you died today, where would you end up, etc.?),
- conversation is rooted in scripture,
- results in a challenge to make a decision, and
- encounter is brief, perhaps only lasting a few minutes.

Assertive personalities offer very a structured systematic message. It is likely to be one-size-fits-all presentation. The presentation starts with a question and concludes with a challenge. Questions are intended to engage the prospect rather solicit an answer. The presentation may be extremely brief (lasting no longer than an elevator trip) or up to a few minutes. The content is rooted in scripture presented one verse after another in an ordered way to challenge the prospect to a point of decision.

To repeat the above, the personal confrontational assertive style is quite likely to permanently repel people in today's society or at least turn a person off at this particular point in time in his or her life. It has not proven to be very successful, not only with respect to coming to Christ but also with respect to even coming to church. However, as also noted above, assertive evangelism can be productive when integrated into the evangelism process involving earlier contacts and building of relationships.

(c) Phenomena Assertive Evangelism: – There are also other types of assertive evangelism. Phenomena assertive evangelism refers to evangelism arising from the occurrences of miracles. Prophetic assertive evangelism involves miraculous information when information about a person couldn't be known unless God whispered it into an evangelizer's ear. Phenomena assertive evangelism occurs in situations where God does something which a person can touch or see. Here, God puts people in situations in which they could not orchestrate themselves to bring someone to faith in Christ.

There are many styles by which to share the story of Christ. Different people respond to different approaches. The effectiveness of each vary depending upon prospects' environments, emotional needs, spiritual backgrounds and the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. "There is one right message, but no one right way to present it."[1104] The assertive/confrontational personality has a role to play, but there are others as well.

b. Analytical/Intellectual Style Evangelism[1105]

The analytical/intellectual style refers to those individuals whose personality views the world in a logical and commonsense manner. They like discussing and debating controversial issues. In reaching opinions and decisions, they weigh the pros and cons rather than leaping to conclusions and seek to delve into why people hold certain opinions. The analytical style evangelism is sometimes referred to as persuasion evangelism. Whereas those with an assertive personality tend to operate under the assumption that the gospel is self-evident truth to be accepted without debate, the analytical personality believes that since the gospel is truth, it becomes persuasive when it is tested, questioned and debated.

[1104] *Id.* at 38.

[1105] This Subsection *b.* is essentially drawn from *id.* at 40-54.

On the positive side, analytical personalities are inquisitive, curious, organized and open minded. They go where the facts take them and verbalize clear the gist of the matter. It may require an analytical evangelist to engage and convince an analytical prospect. However, he or she is not as quick or straight forward in a cut and dried manner as is an assertive personality nor as colorful as a story person evangelist. While the balancing out different views can be a plus, there may also be a tendency to over analyze and procrastinate. And, such persons may not well handle emotional issues which arise when engaging with a prospect. Importantly, however, an analytical individual may be quite adept in laying out the evidence for the Christian faith.

When speaking about Jesus, a person might ask analytical questions such as "Can the Bible be trusted" or "Why do good people suffer?" Whereas an assertive style personality might fire back a scripted response, perhaps a better response might be, "That is a good question. Let's think about it." Or, "I don't know but let me explore and get back to you." Here the person more likely will sense that you value him or her, are really listening, and show that what he or she said is worth considering.

Those possessing the intellectual style might be placed in positions leading classes, seminars or small groups on various religions, cults and secular challenges to the faith where they can help train others or provide a resource to others who encounter prospect questions for which they lack comfort in answering.

Each successive style of evangelism adds more to the quality of interaction with a person being evangelized. The more time spent getting to know people, what they value, how they live, and what approach renders them more receptive, the more likely a successful evangelistic outcome. The analytical style often plays a critical role in this process. But this takes time. Christianity is not likely to be successfully presented and processed in one brief encounter.

c. Storytelling/Testimonial Style Evangelism[1106]

The third personality evangelism style is storytelling. Effective storytelling proceeds from good listening. A storyteller should seek to discern the key points in the evangelized person's story and then shapes his or her own narratives to include connecting points and common ground. Storytellers are descriptive through words and demonstrative through gestures. The effective storyteller is one who is able to make the evangelized person sense that he or she is reliving the experience.

The storytellers, more than any other style, offer personal testimony of coming to faith in Christ. Personal testimony is a non-threatening way to introduce a person to Christ. Personal testimonies communicate to unbelievers why Jesus is important in our lives. Sharing one's own personal stories is compelling when they show how Christ changed or continues to change one's own life. The listener would be hard pressed to refute it.

Potentials negatives in storytelling include (i) taking too long resulting in the listener losing interest and (ii) telling one's own story without ever getting to the Jesus story.

[1106] This Subsection *c.* is essentially drawn from *id.* at 55-69.

Effective storytelling testimony touches upon three basic components:

- BC time (before the storyteller met Christ),
- EC moment (the storyteller encountered Christ), and
- AC time (after storyteller's commitment to Christ) when he or she is clearly changed for the better by Christ

Testimony should clearly contain, without apology, reference Christ by name since Christian life centers on a personal relationship with God through Christ.

In addition to directly interacting with prospects through the story telling/testimonial style, encourage this style person to write and publish his or her story for use, when appropriate, in worship services and outreach events as well as spicing up church bulletins and websites.

d. Relational/Interpersonal Style Evangelism[1107]

Whereas the first three style of evangelism (assertive, analytical and storytelling) are word based styles, the next three styles (relational, invitational and serving) are reflected by those individuals who engage in evangelism more by what they do than by what they say. Each of these has a specific orientation which focuses their energies. This section, focuses on the relational/interpersonal style which zeros in on initiating and building relationships.

Relational style evangelism individuals reflect such characteristics as caring, sympathy, availability, trustworthiness, nonjudgmental and patience. They believe in and are comfortable with shared experiences. Relational style people embrace emotional connections.

It is important to recognize that most often belonging occurs before believing. An unbeliever or skeptic is unlikely to reach a faith commitment before he or she gets close to a believer or several believers. A sense of belonging and trust normally is a precondition to believing. Thus, it is important to let people get close at the beginning of outreach efforts, Draw people to journey with us so that they may see the truth in the gospel being lived out in us rather than requiring them to commit to the faith before including them in a relationship. While embracing non-believers doesn't equate with salvation, doing so can serve as an important step to ultimate commitment to Christ.

> This practice of sidling up to a non-Christian describes belonging *before believing*. It gives people a sense of connection with us, even if they do not yet have that connection with Christ.[1108]

Jesus intentionally and constantly sought to connect with the not yet followers of God.

[1107] This Subsection *d.* is essentially drawn from *id.* at 70-83.
[1108] *Id.* at 78.

> Loving God and loving others is the foundation of the Great Commission. You make disciples by loving others, building authentic friendships based on trust with the people outside of our churches, and earning the right to engage in spiritual conversations.[1109]

Thus, it is important for members of the church to intentionally and continually seek to contact and connect with nonbelievers outside the church.

Studies show that no less than 75% of persons who make a faith comment to Christ, did so due to efforts of people they personally knew. Faith is most effectively shared by a person or persons with whom the unbeliever knows, or at least is familiar with.

It is important to understand that while the relational evangelism style deals specifically with relational matters, all styles of evangelism must be relational to some degree in order to be effective. Even in the assertive style, there must be some intentionality in creating some type of connection. However, those with the relational/interpersonal personality are particularly well suited to initiate and foster deepening relationships with those currently outside Christ's family. Also, those with interpersonal skills tend to be effective leaders in exploring Christianity small groups, Alpha group gatherings, as well as other small groups which can also serve as welcome centers for visitors.

e. Invitational Style Evangelism[1110]

Whereas the relational style is people oriented, the invitational style is more oriented toward events which embrace shared relational experiences. The invitational style evangelizer encourages the person, to whom outreach is being extended, to do something together. Those with the invitational style personality are hospitable. They are naturally inclusive desiring to welcome others into an experience. They embody such characteristics as being inclusive, thinking about others, like to do things with others, etc.

These are positive traits of the invitational style. However, it is too easy for such personalities to believe their evangelism responsibilities are fulfilled by simply inviting and accompanying a friend or other person to a Christian based event. There is more to leading a person to accept Christ than getting an acceptance to an invitation to a concert, revival, Bible study, Christian fellowship or even a worship service. There is an inherent danger for those with an invitational style personality to leave the talking to others. The invitational evangelist needs to communicate in some way, even simply and privately, to reinforce whatever spiritual message occurs during the event.

Invitational evangelism may be expressed in two different sub-styles; individual or home based expression and corporate or church based expression. The former offers a more intimate level of hospitality. Such opportunities, for example, include Bible studies in the home, a

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[1109] John Crilly, "God Talk: The Arts of Spiritual Conversations," OutreachMagazine.com, September 16, 2014.
[1110] This Subsection *e.* is essentially drawn from Jeffrey A. Johnson, *Got Style? Personality –Based Evangelism 85-95* (2009).

fellowship barbeque, or invitation simply for dessert and coffee. A small group starting in a home can build connections with people in the community in a non-threatening Christian environment of a home. The church sub-style of invitational evangelism includes events helpful to a curious person by presenting solid gospel content which avoids the use of church jargon. Or offer periodic evangelistic oriented worship services called Invite a Friend Sunday. For the invitational personality, select a church based or home-based location based upon discernment as to what would be most welcoming for the person to whom outreach is being extended. In addition to personally inviting prospects to a particular event or activity, often an invitational style person can contribute to shaping communication tools for use by the rest of the church members when inviting their friends or other contacts.

f. *Serving Style Evangelism*[1111]

The serving style is the third of the personality-based evangelism styles in the works-based category of evangelism. This involves sharing the gospel in a tangible way. As noted earlier, the relational component is involved in all six personality styles of evangelism. However, it is especially prominent as a component in the serving style. This style involves connecting with people and walking along beside them for perhaps days, weeks, months or even longer. The relational style is people oriented. The invitational style is events oriented. The serving style personality is *needs* oriented. When this personality style person becomes aware of a problem, he or she acts tangibly to do something about it.

There are major positives associated with the serving personality style of evangelism.

> Compassionate and needs-oriented… [serving style] people enjoy helping others in tangible, practical ways, rather than getting into long philosophical discussions they often perceive as irrelevant. These people would rather work with their hands than their heads. They prefer to express Christian love through actions rather than words…. [Serving] people believe actions will help others help to listen to what they have to say about Christ. These are empathetic people, not just sympathetic individuals. *Sympathy* is when one person feels the emotions of someone else. *Empathy* goes further. It is the ability to imagine oneself in another person's situation. But empathy is more than a feeling; it motivates and moves a person to do something about another person's difficult circumstances.[1112]

Empathy is a key component of the serving personality. As such, however, it contains potential weaknesses as well as strengths. While such persons can be great in serving people's physical, emotional and/or spiritual needs, they are susceptible to burnout. There is a tendency to take on too much of their recipient's pain. Furthermore, they are also susceptible to assuming too great of a workload. In either of these situations, their effectiveness is likely to decrease or they may completely withdraw.

[1111]This Subsection *f.* is essentially drawn from Jeffrey A. Johnson, *Got Style? Personality –Based Evangelism* 97-109 (2009).

[1112] *Id.* at 99.

Also, the serving style evangelism exhibits decided preference for action over words. This can become a weakness in the context of seeking to lead people to Christ. While Jesus was a person of action in serving people, he found it necessary to use words to interpret his actions, not only for people in general but also for his disciples.

> Life ought to back up lips. The walk should support the talk. But, there needs to be a balance between what we do and what we say…. [The serving] style is about doing the message before (as well as concurrently with) telling the message with your lips.[1113]

Thus, it is incumbent upon those engaged in serving evangelism to also incorporate some messaging contributing to the leading of the person toward finding Christ.

There are a couple of sub-styles of serving style evangelism; (1) service evangelism and (2) serving evangelism.

(1) Service Evangelism

The term service evangelism refers short term engagements of various types. All Christians should intentionally engage in sporadic acts of kindness when opportunities arise, e.g.., helping an elderly person across a street, carrying someone's bag, providing a lift to a gas station for someone whose car has run out of gas, etc.

Another type of short-term engagement service evangelism is to volunteer to help the church in its attempts to alert people outside the church walls as to the presence of the church in the community. There are multiple ways of doing so. For example, provide cold refreshments on a hot day at a local park, even, offer free car washes. In this context, short term service evangelism constitutes a step towards garnering a positive response to the question, "if your church closed its doors tomorrow, how many people in the community would notice or care". Here, the objective of service evangelism is to address a church's invisibility or irrelevance. It is intended to get the church outside its wall and create opportunities for longer term engagements. A person performing service style evangelism is one who shows up, performs his or her role during a relative brief period of time (e.g., minutes, couple of hours, etc.) and departs to do his or her own thing. It involves one shot efforts.

(2) Serving Evangelism

In contrast to one shot efforts, serving style evangelism involves deeper and longer-term needs. For example, these might include homeless needs; grief support; literacy, hunger, family or marital issues; financial needs or lack of understanding; etc. Serving evangelism addresses needed changes in society, both in individual and institutional contexts, to alleviate those conditions hurting people. Serving evangelism reflects validating a person's inherent worth which, in turn, may open up that person to become inspired by Word. In touching the outside of another person, the potential exists for touching the inside of oneself as well.

[1113] *Id.* at 101.

A potential weakness in serving evangelism rests in its motivation. Is it being done to bring people into the church to help its financial contributions or to boast egos arising from growing church numbers? Helping others should not be about more dollars or noses. Nor should the outreacher perform good deeds primarily to feel good about oneself.

> *We reach out to people because Christ commanded it.* ...This is about letting people in their unbelieving state come inside the church as we build relationships with them. We do this so they can experience a sense of belonging to the church family, even before they experience the salvation that actually brings them into the family of God.[1114]

In contrast to service evangelism's intentional but sporadic acts of kindness, servant evangelism requires a more systematic approach involving canvassing of a church's local community to discern where the church can contribute to addressing people's physical, emotional, vocational and spiritual needs. In doing so, recognize the importance of partnering with community-based organizations whether Christian or not.

Serving evangelism seeks to create an audience in a nonthreatening way with by non-Christians. Regardless of whether the style is service or serving evangelism offering short-term acts of kindness or longer-term systematic forms of assistance, most important is the offer. The offer made is analogous to Christ's sacrificial offer made for each of us.

6. Training: Equipping Every Believer for Personal Relationship Evangelism

Reaching out to the unbelievers/doubters is of fundamental importance for each of us in Our Walk with Christ. This is part of the "stuff" of our faith. It is an essential element of Christian living which needs to be emphasized and reemphasized. The recommended Mission Statement for our church (and similarly as does our current Disciple Mission Statement) commits us to connecting to the

> people outside the faith through lovingly witnessing the good news of Christ and the power of God's love for all people, leading them to accept Christ as Lord and Savior, and bringing them into congregational life.

Thus, it is essential that prime emphasis be placed on equipping our members for evangelism. Evangelism is not just something for the pastor and/or members of the Evangelism Team. As expressed in our Covenant, which all of our members own, evangelism is the responsibility of every member of our congregation. Evangelism should become an ingrained habit for each of us.

[1114] *Id.* at 107.

a. Overview of Training

FRCC's mission statement on outreach implicitly embraces not only reaching the lost, but also teaching our members on how to reach the lost.[1115] As a church seeking to be a high impact contagious Christian church, *a prime goal of FRCC needs to be motivating, equipping and supporting 100% of the members of our congregation for personal relationship evangelism.* It takes numerous contacts to reach one person for Christ. Thus, a church needs to strive toward unleashing the entire membership of a church to grow the Body of Christ. In order to do so effectively, it is crucial to enable people to be themselves in reaching out to others.[1116]

There is diversity in the Body of Christ, a diversity which God uses in reaching others. Each person has a role for which he or she is naturally gifted by God to perform. Consequently, each person needs to discover his or her own style. Get all church members involved with their varying gifts so they are able to contribute to the unchurched as they progress in their walk toward and with Christ. For example, the relational style person tends to get things started whereas the confrontational style person might be the closer (i.e., encourage the person to ultimately cross the bridge to accepting Christ as Lord and Savior). Other members can contribute at various stages of a person coming to Christ. God can use everyone regardless of their gifts and evangelism style. Thus, train the whole church in using their differing personality styles and God given gifts as part of the whole church working as a team in evangelism efforts.[1117]

Preparation is essential for every aspect of successful personal evangelism. Although preaching and teaching are important, especially in encouraging people to participate in evangelism training, good training is essential. In order to be effective when engaging in personal evangelism, one needs to be prepared. Thus, it is important for the church to offer training experiences that equip its members to share their faith and lead people into the body of the church.[1118]

Programmatic training evangelism, as distinguished from relying on individuals doing their own thing in outreach, has sometimes be denigrated as a "canned" approach to witnessing. However, as just noted, preparation enhances the effectiveness of outreach efforts. Offering motivation and guidance does not equate to a canned one for all approach to evangelism. Furthermore, a critical strength in a good evangelism program is some inherent system of accountability built into the program itself (e.g., done in an environment of small groups). Accountability engenders more witnessing attempts and evolving enhanced ability to effectively do so.[1119]

In offering offer training experiences equipping members to share their faith, a church may start from scratch on its own, draw upon one or more training programs which have proven successful in other churches, or do some combination thereof.

[1115] Joy Thompson, "Evangelism Naturally," OutreachMagazine.com, November, 11, 2015.
[1116] Mark and Lynn Marian, "Church on Fire," National Outreach Conference, November 9, 2006.
[1117] *Id.*
[1118] *Id.*
[1119] Thom Rainer, "10 Reasons We Have Not Reached the Unchurched," OutreachMagazine.com, July 14, 2015.

Willow Creek Community Church has offered several successful programs. For example, the Just Across the Room approach discussed above is available in a program format. "The three session "Three Habits of Highly Contagious Christians" is designed to aid believers (i) to hang out with and build relationships with family members, neighbors, work or recreational and social colleagues, and other who have yet to cross the line of faith, (ii) to look for open windows to share verbal witness with them, and (iii) to make the invitation bringing them to worship services and /or outreach events.[1120] The eight session Becoming a Contagious Christian: Communicating Your Faith in a Style that Fits You covers (i) why become a contagious Christian, (ii) being yourself, (iii) building relationships, (iv) what is your story, (v) what is Christ 'story, (vi) crossing the line, (vii) putting together and practicing, and (viii) responding to objections. Willow Creek also widely use the Alpha program noted earlier. Just Across the Room and Alpha have been the more recent focus at Willow Creek. These are just some evangelism training possibilities and experiences. A plethora of training programs can be found on the internet.[1121] Explore these and others to discern what programs might best work here at FRCC.

b. Training in Radical Christian Hospitality

Despite church efforts to encourage, equip and support all members of the church to be actively involved in growing into sharing Christ, at the outset, not everyone will actively participate in actual outreach efforts and perhaps some (prayerfully only a very few at the most) will not even do so eventually. However, at the least, it is important that all members of the church become fully aware that a prime purpose of the church is to reach out to people outside the faith and that the church is intentional in doings so. Consequently, at a minimum, all of the church members need to be prepared to actively receive and welcome newcomers who come to the church. They must be informed and trained to be a part of this effort. The goal is to change the outlook and culture of the congregation from self-reflection to self-giving.[1122]

Hospitality is a key ingredient attracting people to come and return to a church community. It is about welcoming strangers and others. Among the characteristics of an effective disciple-making church is the practice of radical hospitality which "rocks" the church with vibrant demonstration of what it means to be disciples of Christ. Such church does not reduce the idea of hospitality to simply a series of programs or strategies. But rather, the word "radical' in hospitality

> refers to the restlessness among genuinely transformed believers to reach out and touch people who are not being cared for. ... It's a human face to the words: "We are glad that you are here.[1123]

[1120] Gary Poole, *The Three Habits of Contagious Christians: A Discussion Guide for Small Groups* 26 (2003).

[1121] Books for use by individuals include, e.g., Jay Cavaiani, *Altar'd: Faith Building Evidence Leading to a New Life* (2024), Douglas Porter, *How to Develop and Use the Gift of Evangelism: a Practical Guide for the Layperson* and *How to Reach Your Friends for Christ* from, churchgrowth.org/product. Explore internet and catalogs for other possibilities.

[1122] Jeffrey A. Johnson, *Got Style? Personality –Based Evangelism,* Chapters 8 and 9 at 148-49 (2009).

[1123] Comments on amazon.com reviewing Robert Schnase, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations* (2007).

As a church community, we need to learn to reflect and extend genuine love and hospitality to others.

Sunday morning worship services, being the time when the greatest number of members gather, offer the best time to educate members in Christian hospitality. Although members like to think of their church as being friendly and welcoming, actions often fall short of such assumption. Through a series of morning messages on Christian hospitality, move members to actively seek out, converse with and perhaps even start a basis for offering friendships before and/or after worship services and even elsewhere.

A devotional prayer expresses this well.

> Dear God, show us how to offer hospitality to those we meet today. May our actions point toward you and your redeeming love. Amen.[1124]

Furthermore, there should be focus on each believer praying for a few non-Christians by name over weeks and even months. After a period of time, the likely impact is positive change in the lives of the one who prays as well as the ones being prayed for.

c. Personality Styles Assessment and Types of Training

(1) Assessment[1125]

An individual can more effectively engage in personal relationship evangelism if he or she does so in a manner most naturally suited to him or her. Individual personality assessment offers insight as to how one engages the world and correlates that with information on how he or she has been wired by God. Persons are most effective when they function in manner complementary with their individual personality style(s) rather than acting in conflict with it. A church seeking to initiate or enhance its current outreach efforts would do well to readily make available to its members a means for personality assessment. This will better enable an individual to more effectively direct his or her outreach efforts.

A church may develop its own personal assessment materials or explore the availability of other resources. For example, Jeffrey Johnson provides a personal assessment, including instructions, inventory and means of evaluation which affords a basis for greater understanding of a person's natural inclinations. He also offers a means to use assessment information gathered from individuals to determine the congregational personality.[1126] A more abbreviated assessment appears in the Becoming a Contagious Christian program. Here, each of the six styles of

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[1124] Upper Room (Daily Devotional), November 16, 2017.
[1125] This section draws primarily on Jeffrey A. Johnson, *Got Style? Personality –Based Evangelism,* Chapters 8 and 9 at 111 *et seq.* (2009).
[1126] *Id.* at 111-125.

evangelism are considered along with listing a couple of key personal character traits along with some cautions when employing a particular restyle.[1127]

Various approaches might be employed to engender the greater amount of participation in the evaluation process. These might include worship services, adult Sunday school sessions, weekday events, and/or through regular or e-mail.

(2) Type of Training

Other than perhaps in small congregations, a church's membership is most likely to embody evangelism styles ranging across the spectrum of most if not all of the six categories. It is not only important for an individual to become aware of his or her evangelism style, it is also important for a church to evaluate the personality style of the church body as a whole. Once the congregational evangelism personality is ascertained, the church is in a better position to offer training in each of these styles to enhance person's confidence, ability and motivation (eagerness) to engage in the evangelism process either individually, within the context of a small group or otherwise. For effective outreach, all the styles relevant to a particular church need to be discerned and individuals trained in their styles. Furthermore, people of the various styles need to be intentionally connected with one another in a collaborative effort to receive unbelievers. Effective evangelism embodies team effort. This requires a balance of people reflecting varying styles working together to share Christ with the skeptics and outright unbelievers in a manner for stair-stepping discussed in Section 4.d. above.

Every member of the church can benefit from and should participate in a personal relationship evangelism training program(s). However, training best occurs after evangelism personality assessments have been conducted and the personality composition of the congregation has been discerned. All members should not necessarily participate in the same type of training experience. To the extent feasible, training should be done according the personality style of the persons being trained.[1128]

Some churches simultaneously conduct training session in each of the six styles. Smaller churches may offer one or two styles depending upon which reflects the primary and secondary personality traits of the largest number of members in the congregation. The church should explore various alternatives to personality assessments and the integration of those results into evangelism training.

d. Applying Basics Across Range of Evangelism Personality Styles

Preparation is essential for every aspect of successful personal relationship evangelism. Although preaching and teaching are important, especially in encouraging people to participate in evangelism training, good training is essential.

[1127] Mark Mittelberg, Lee Strobel and Bill Hybels *Becoming a Contagious Christian: Communicating Your Faith in a Style that Fits You* (*Leaders Guide* (Session 2: "Being Yourself") 52 *et seq.* (1995).
[1128] Jeffrey A. Johnson, *Got Style? Personality – Based Evangelism* 149-50 (2009).

In addition to training for understanding the specific aspects and skills attributable to a particular type of evangelism personality considered above, evangelism training should include several basic components relevant across the board to most if not all types. As considered previously, these basic elements include the following:

- *Lost People Matter to God* – Hopefully and prayerfully, this and other evangelistic values are instilled in the members of the congregation as part of Stage 2 of the Evangelistic Process. (See discussion of evangelistic values and the evangelistic process in PART SIX, Section VII.C and D.) However, being critical to on-going evangelism effort, this value should be reinforced in training.

- *Prayer and Prospect Lists* – Pray for individuals with whom you might share Christ and for the opportunity to encounter them. Develop and maintain a prospect list and prioritize those for potential outreach efforts, especially those with whom one has an existing relationship.

- *Proximity (Just Walk Across the Room)* – Intentionally put oneself in environments where he or she might touch an unbeliever when prompted by the Holy Spirit.

- *Congruency* – Be congruent with one's own personality. Find one's own style and apply one's own unique sensitivity, attributes and gifts relevant to the other person needs

- *Stair- Stepping* – Use one's various gifts and personality traits in assisting a person as he or she climbs the steps from a superficial awareness of God to become a more Christ-like person. One assists at those points where he or she can naturally do so. Others provide assistance at different steps in the process. Believers work together, sometimes sequentially, in guiding a prospect along the spiritual path.

- *Relationship Building and Spiritual Conversations* – Engage in relationship initiating and building conversations. Then turn conversations to matters of faith when the Holy Spirit presents the opportunity and prompts one to talk. However, avoid being an erupter trying to shoe-horn God into the conversation prior to a prompting by the Holy Spirit.

- *Relational Integrity* – Bringing people to and growing in Christ primarily involves initiating and/or developing significant personal relationships which are based on being both alike those one is trying to reach and being unlike to the extent necessary to maintain one's Christian integrity.

- *Saturation* – Generally it takes several touches to draw a person into a relationship showing that he or she is cared for. Several touches are also needed to network a prospect into relationships with others in the church. This principle of saturation also applies to the need for several exposures to the gospel before one is likely to make a decision for Christ.

- *Witness Faith* – Share one's faith story in a personal, natural and concise style.

- *Witness the Gospel* – Share the gospel story in simple, clear and concise everyday language.

- *Invitation to Church Events* – For nonbelievers to hear and experience, they need to come. The church needs both worship and other outreach activities to which members can invite those outside the faith to attend. Since first time invitations commonly are not accepted, a Christian needs to offer, albeit not in an obnoxious manner, repeated invitations at appropriate times for appropriate events. Invest in the relationship and invited to events.

- *Answering Questions (Apologetics)* – Be prepared to respond to the most common objections to Christianity. Failure to adequately respond (either with an answer or a promise to get an answer) typically results in a loss of credibility.

- *Cross the Line of Faith* –Should the opportunity arise be prepared to help a person cross the line of faith by asking God for forgiveness and accepting Christ as the leader in their lives. This might be done through a crossing prayer or otherwise.

- *Accountability* – Establish a relationship of accountability with other believers for mutual support of one's evangelism efforts.

The degree to which the application of each of these basic principles of personal relationship evangelism are applied may vary as between persons favoring different styles. For example, the intellectual style is more likely to incorporate the ability to well respond to objections to Christianity. In a comparable situation, an invitational style person may be well advised to either guide the person to another church member with the former style (perhaps a pastor) or promise to get the answer and return with it. Nevertheless, the content of training for all styles should include these basic elements to enable each member to be better prepared when encountering varying situations and opportunities.

Furthermore, to be an effective witness in reaching out to unbelievers, one must be credible. Credibility develops when the evangelizer reflects several traits including the following.[1129]

- Look at the person who is the decision maker. Avoid looking down or around.

- Speak with confidence. Avoid hesitations, stumbling, and appearance of being intimidated.

- Listen carefully to the questions asked and/or the observations made. If one doesn't understand, ask for clarification.

[1129]Jeffrey A. Johnson, *Got Style? Personality – Based Evangelism* 2-3 (2009).

- Answer the questions or respond to observations made. If one doesn't know the answer, say so. Don't make something up or speculate. Offer to get and come back with the answer.

- Speak in plain language.

- Do not argue when questioned.

Training across the various evangelism styles needs to convey an understanding of what is involved in credibility and afford opportunity to practice those traits rendering one credible.

e. Modes of Training for Personal Evangelism

(1) Effective Training: Getting People Off the Sidelines[1130]

> Evangelism training is needed for *every believer*. Every Christian – regardless of the spiritual gifts he or she may or may not have – is a member of the church to which Jesus gave the great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) and consequently has a vital role in fulfilling it. …[The Church, its] leaders and influencers… need to make sure that they all understand this and do everything in our power to equip them for personal evangelism.[1131]

Training may take the form of a series of seminars, class room session, weekend retreats, small groups, etc. Such training should be reinforced with some on hands experience closely following the training sessions. The question becomes how to accomplish effectively training all believers in a church?

At Willow Creek Community Church. originally the answer was thought to be repeated high quality training seminars to equip not only the preponderance of all current church members but also on an on-going basis to train new members. The primary tool was the "Becoming a Contagious Christian" training course. Although the course has been highly effective in training over a million people around the nation and the world, this model alone proved insufficient in training all members of the church. Despite vigorous efforts, repeated year after year in many locations, most churches ended up training about 10-20 percent of their members. This limited success stems from the fact that this model relies on believers being motivated to take time off from other priorities and interests to participate in a course on evangelism, especially when this is an area they are scared to become a part of. Although many members did participate, most did not.

Willow Creek finally determined to cease depending solely upon an approach of relying on members signing up for a seminar. It became clear that drawing people into training needed to revolve around taking the training to places where they are already showing up - e.g., weekend

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[1130] This section draws primarily on Mark Mittelberg, *Building a Contagious Christian Church: Increasing Your Church's Evangelistic Temperature* 93- 95 (2007) (revised edition).
[1131] *Id*, at 93.

worship services, small group gatherings, adult education classes, as well as continuing to offer elective seminars as an alternative.

Furthermore, it was determined to focus the entire church all at once on a campaign focusing on reaching the lost (a foundational element of mission here at Fox River). This gave rise to the vision for church-wide Contagious Christian campaigns which, over a six-week period, utilized Sundays' sermons to inform and inspire their congregations. At the same time, all small groups and classes would engage in updated evangelism training. Specifically created new short term small groups might also be created for this purpose.

Willow Creek Community Church has long used the program "Becoming a Contagious Christian." More recently it focuses on offering "Just Across the Room" and the "Alpha" courses. Programs such as these, typically include six sermons for the Sunday services, training DVDs which a small group can simply plug in and play, and participant guides.

Furthermore, such offerings are not limited to just adults. They are available in age-appropriate forms for training youths (junior high and high school age programs). In this way, everyone is on the same page in learning the evangelism styles and the basics of sharing their faith with others. If kids can learn the importance of personal relationship evangelism at an early age, it may set them on that path for the rest of their lives.[1132]

(2) Build Competence, Confidence and Enthusiasm through Practice, Feedback and Repetition

Once the teaching part of the training is done, people need to practice what they have learned in a safe environment where mistakes can be discerned and corrected through feedback by others. For example, tell the gospel story to a partner who will provide feedback. And then reverse the roles. Repeat the process until that which is being worked on achieves a high degree quality. This will build confidence, competence and enthusiasm to do it for real. Furthermore, there should be periodic retraining both to refresh and to improve.[1133]

Even more effective is to conduct the training course in the context of a small group setting where discussions are at a personal level and members of the group encourage one another and hold one another accountable.[1134] Either initially or after other after initial training experiences, further training of church members might be done in groups according to a person's individual evangelistic style. That is, group people according to their style (*confrontational, intellectual, testimonial, interpersonal, invitational, serving,)* and train each group specifically for that style. Develop strategies for each style and practice accordingly.[1135]

[1132] Bill Hybels, "5 Ways to Embed Evangelism into Your Culture," OutreachMagazine.com, May 1, 2014.
[1133] Mark Miller, "Liberating and Equipping Every Believer: Helping Everyone Communicate Their Faith with Confidence on How to Build a Contagious Church Willow Creek Association Conference, Oct. 15-16, 2004.
[1134] Mark Mittelberg, *Building a Contagious Church: Revolutionizing the Way We View and Do Evangelism* 169-70 (2001).
[1135] Mark Miller, "Liberating and Equipping Every Believer: Helping Everyone Communicate Their Faith with Confidence on How to Build a Contagious Church Willow Creek Association Conference, Oct. 15-16, 2004.

The biggest mistake churches make in the area of evangelism training is to make it a one-shot deal or only an annual event. Evangelism is at the heartbeat of the church. It must be an on-going effort. Training experiences should be offered at multiple settings and different times to render training readily accessible to all.[1136]

And, strong promotion of the course is essential. Employ ever means of communication possible. Highlight, explain and promote, especially by the senior pastor. Urge everyone to go through the training and retraining periodically, e.g., every two years.[1137]

7. Contagious Diversity: Maximizing Impact around Styles of Evangelism[1138]

Liberate every believer from their negative misconceptions as to what is involved in engaging in personal relationship evangelism. As addressed in Section 5. above, the key is for believers to understand that there are a variety of legitimate approaches to evangelism. One does not need to squeeze him or herself into a specific personality mold in order to be used by God to reach others. To the contrary, one will be much more effective working comfortably within his or her own God given personality. God has created several styles of evangelism which can be grouped into six categories:

- *confrontational style*
- *intellectual style*
- *testimonial style*
- *interpersonal style*
- *invitational style*
- *serving style*

In moving people to participate in evangelism efforts, it is essential for the church to communicate to its members that they do not need to be what they are not. And, then, encourage, and support them in assessing their individual personality style and then train them in using one's own style when engaging in personal relationship evangelism. When members utilize their own style in their evangelism efforts, the impact for reaching people for Christ, as well as growing its own members in their own spiritual walk, will be maximized.

a. Maximizing Outreach Around the Confrontational Style[1139]

The assertive/confrontational style is hard hitting, direct, to the point. It challenges people to get off the fence and follow Christ. There are some people who need someone to get in their face with the truth. Although the confrontational approach may involve

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[1136] Mark Mittelberg, *Building a Contagious Church: Revolutionizing the Way We View and Do Evangelism* 169-70 (2001).

[1137] *Id.* at 171.

[1138] This section draws primarily on Mark Mittelberg, *Building a Contagious Church: Revolutionizing the Way We View and Do Evangelism*, Part 3 Contagious Diversity 244 *et seq.* (2001).

[1139] Mark Mittelberg, *Building a Contagious Church: Revolutionizing the Way We View and Do Evangelism* 247-59 (2001).

varying degrees of being more gentle, nevertheless it is done in a direct manner which calls for serious reflection. Those with confrontational personalities should come to recognize that God created them with this nature, thus wants them to utilize their personalities to build the Kingdom of Heaven.

An example of the direct touch is to visit homes in the neighborhood. "Ask, do you attend church regularly?" If the answer is yes, encourage them to continue to do so and move on. If the answer is no, ask "Is it a problem about believing in God or is it something else? Offer information about and invite them to upcoming church events that may answer their questions.[1140] Prior to such an event, follow-up with a personal specific invitation.

Furthermore, periodic church services can employ a confrontational approach although conducted with gentleness and respect. Give a hard-hitting gospel presentation and call for a response. Either include an altar call and/or make available cards for those wishing to respond privately. Then meet with them, answer questions, clear up understandings and challenge them to respond. Confrontational evangelism can be employed in various ministries and events, e.g., back to basics dinners, retreats, youth fun all night sessions, dramatic presentations, etc. The confrontational style, of the various styles, is the most likely to create action. For those individuals with this type of personality, it is incumbent on the church to encourage and coach them how to challenge people appropriately with the truth of the gospel.

b. Maximizing Outreach Around the Intellectual Style[1141]

Some believe that in the post-modern world people do not care about the truth. The younger generation tends to be more experiential in discerning what to believe. Often, they tend to be more pragmatic in searching for what seems to work in their lives. Furthermore, they usually possess far less knowledge about God and the Bible as compared to earlier generations. However, once their trust is earned, classic questions concerning faith tend to emerge.

> We won't reach people in a culture like ours by backing down and agreeing to stop talking about why we believe what we believe. While we can and should add other approaches to our evangelistic arsenal, we have to keep explaining the rational basis for our faith and helping people see we're building on a foundation of facts like no other religion has.[1142]

A church can put the intellectual evangelistic style to work in various ways. The key is to engage and address people having questions. Regular weekend services designed to attract newcomers is one place to start. Answer oriented worship services offer attractive occurrences for members to make a special effort to invite their friends. Use the service as a springboard for after service question and answer sessions. Also follow up with an investigating Christianity

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[1140] *Id.* at 254.

[1141] This Section draws primarily on Mark Mittelberg, *Building a Contagious Church: Revolutionizing the Way We View and Do Evangelism* 260-74 (2001).

[1142] *Id.* at 260-74.

class, exploring Christianity small groups, seminars, etc. which explore tough questions. Afford opportunities for persons to raise their own questions.

To develop the intellectual style in a church, first identify those who feel comfortable and natural with this approach. This might be done, for example, through an evangelism style questionnaire. Equip persons to provide unbelievers and doubters answers, reasons and evidence, along with a clear gospel message, to their questions. Such training may take various forms including classes, seminars, or better yet programs offered in the context of small group interactions. Out of this group, some may be selected to assist other members of the congregation confronted with a difficult situation.

c. Maximizing Outreach Around the Testimonial Style[1143]

The testimonial evangelistic style, when appropriately utilized, is highly impactful. As Rick Warren says

> People want to go where lives are being changed, where hurts are being healed and where hope is being restored. …[In worship services] we include a real-life testimony from a person or couple who have been dramatically changed by the power and love of Christ. This weekly parade of 'satisfied customers' is hard for skeptics to argue with.[1144]

The question is how to put the personal testimonial style into action on a church-wide basis to increase the number of unbelievers and skeptics hearing and grappling with God's work in people's lives? That is, "[h]ow can we take a personal testimony and leverage it for a wider public impact?"[1145] Since God is changing people's lives, tell people about it.

A variety of situations offer the opportunity for personal testimony evangelism. For example, in Rick Warren's Saddleback Church, a person is designated to collect people's stories. Other church leaders and members should keep their antennas out for such stories. Organize the stories by theme. When a story matches a theme of the day's message, ask if he or she would tell his or her story. These stories can be found everywhere. They come in letters to the pastor or staff, from testimonies prior to baptisms, in hallway conversations, and through the churches various ministries and small groups.

The designated person, or the pastor, would then meet with the person to be sure the story matches the theme and ascertain whether the individual is willing to share it with the congregation. If yes, where appropriate, provide an assist on getting the story down on paper, assure brevity and avoid extraneous or distracting off the cuff comments. The person tells the story during the message. When a story concludes saying something like "Everything you're hearing here today is true, and God has used it to change my life."[1146] The impact potential is

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[1143] This Section draws primarily on Mark Mittelberg, *Building a Contagious Church: Revolutionizing the Way We View and Do Evangelism* 276-288 (2001).

[1144] As quoted by Mark Mittelberg, *id.* at 279.

[1145] *Id.* at 279.

[1146] *Id.* at 280.

powerful. Furthermore, the message can draw upon the story to reinforce the theme of the message rendering the occasion even more powerful. Willow Creek slightly alters the approach by having the story presented before the message during which reference can be made to the story. Whenever a church member stands before the congregation during worship service telling about the events that led him or her to faith in Christ, it can offer a powerful picture. Offer a *parade of satisfied customers* through frequent opportunities for persons to tell their stories.

Personal testimony can be offered is a host of different ways and situations. A sermon might be replaced by an *interview* of a prominent person whose story would interest and inspire attendees. Help people tell their stories by means of a *video*. *Sharing a meal* (breakfast or lunch) with a clear and well-presented personal testimony has proven to be quite effective. *Baptisms* offer a prime opportunity since those committing to Christ have friends and family there to celebrate. Enable nonbelievers to hear how Jesus made a difference in the life of their friend. Using either a video or oral testimony of those being baptized offers an excellent way for visitors to hear how Jesus has made a difference in people's lives. *Read all about It.* One church puts people's written testimonies in print for people to read, e.g., through a periodic newsletter. Frequent reading testimonies reminds people that God is at work transforming people's lives.

Every believer can get in on the action using the testimonial style of evangelism. The church needs to teach this style (as well as others) to its members. Although this approach is more natural for some, nevertheless everyone whose life has been touched by grace has a story to tell. It does not have to be a dramatic to be effective. A non-dramatic story maybe more credible. Furthermore, if one who has been religious most of his or her life, one day discovers what it means to have a real relationship with Christ, this is a story one's friends need to hear.

d. Maximizing Outreach around the Relational/Interpersonal Style[1147]

To be an effective disciple-making church seeking to reach the unbelievers and skeptics, it is essential to recognize that

> [w]e live in a culture that increasingly distrusts spiritual authorities and religious institutions, but thankfully friends still listen to and trust friends.[1148]

The church needs to offer one or more types of training experiences equipping its members, especially those having a relational/interpersonal personality style. Such training and experiences need to encompass the various elements of personal relationship evangelism discussed above. Such training and experience can occur in a variety of contexts especially that of short term or relational small groups.

[1147] This Section draws primarily upon, Mark Mittelberg, *Building a Contagious Church: Revolutionizing the Way We View and Do Evangelism* 289 -301 (2001).
[1148] *Id.* at 300.

e. Maximizing Outreach Around the Invitational Style[1149]

George Barna's studies reveal that one out of four adults in the U.S. would go to church if only a friend would invite them.[1150] If one accepts the invitation and attends an effective church event, he or she may take another step. Even if the initial invitation is declined, it might spark a spiritual conversation leading to future opportunities.

For invitational style evangelism to be successful, the church needs to offer both worship and non-worship outreach events which are attractive to non-believers. First, the event needs to be one which the church member feels comfortable inviting a family member, friend, colleague or other person to attend. That is, the question becomes what kind of events and opportunities might a church offer to render it easy for church members to employ the invitational style of evangelism. Second, the event needs to be attractive to a potential first time attendee in order to encourage a future return. Various ministries and events can fuel the invitational approach

Outreach events and other ministries (e.g., grief support groups) can and should be engines that drive effective invitational outreach efforts. The invitational style becomes even more effective when combined with interpersonal evangelism that develops relationships which render greater the likelihood that invitations will be accepted.

f. Maximizing Outreach around the Serving Style[1151]

When a person sees that we care about them, rather than just hear that we care about them, caring actions model what Christ is like. Such caring can serve as a magnet ultimately pulling people toward him. In a world of hardship and pain, an individual Christian or fellowship offering selfless help stands out. Overtime it tends to reach even the hardest to reach people. There is no shortage of situations where we can reach out to people in need. However, it is important that we serve as Jesus served i.e., selflessly with no strings attached. Hopefully, people will be influenced to come to Christ, but serving should not be done in a way that manipulates or forces them to insincerely do so.

God is looking for people willing to help people outside their circle with love and kindness. For those who are not gifted as evangelists, the task of communicating the gospel can seem daunting. Serving evangelism offers another way. Every follower of Christ, even new believers, can become effective in evangelism through acts of kindness to others. Serving style people can serve in an array of serving situations while pointing to the love and care of God who motivates them. The role of the church is to encourage and equip all members for serving evangelism. For those whose evangelism style is serving evangelism, the church should mobilize and organize efforts where there are needs for these special gifts.

For further discussion of serving, see Section VIII above.

[1149] This Section draws primarily upon *id* at 302-320.

[1150] *Id.* at 305.

[1151] This Section draws primarily on, Mark Mittelberg, *Building a Contagious Church: Revolutionizing the Way We View and Do Evangelism* 321-338 (2001).

8. Strategic Steps in Carrying Out Personal Relationship Evangelism

The recommended mission for Fox River Congregational Church, with respect to outreach, expresses that it is the mission of FRCC

> *to encourage, equip and support people in growing toward more Christ-like lives in their thoughts, feelings and actions by...*
>
> > *connecting with people outside the faith through lovingly witnessing the good news of Christ and* the power of God's love for all people, *leading them to accept Christ as Lord and Savior, and bringing them into congregational life.*

However, unless the evangelistic values and good intentions are translated into a personal strategy geared specifically to these secular people, the evangelism efforts are unlikely to achieve significant impact. The strategic process set forth below draws upon and integrates that expressed by Willow Creek Community Church,[1152] Lonnie Richardson of Fox River Congregational Church,[1153] Stephen A. Macchia,[1154] Linus J. Morris,[1155] and Rich Warren of Saddleback Valley Community Church.[1156]

Step 1 –Prayer underpins a Christian's evangelism efforts. Pray for the opportunity to outreach to someone, guidance in doing so, and the receptivity of that person

Step 2 – Respond to promptings of the Holy Spirit

Step 3 – Understand the process which involves initiating and building personal relationships done out of authentic love and genuine concern for the spiritual well-being of the person being reached.

Step 4 – Know Whom You Are Trying to Reach. Seek the unchurched, either those who might be believers but who are inactive for some reason, and those who are not yet believers but might be receptive. The primary targets consist of those with whom one already has a relationship, e.g., family. friends, etc. who are more likely to listen and possibly be receptive. Similarly, greater receptivity occurs with those like oneself e.g., persons sharing common interests in sports.

Step 5 – Be Proximate with Potential Prospects. Go where and when people will listen. Locate oneself in an environment where people far from God are likely to be. Intentionally put oneself in an environment where one might touch someone.

[1152] Mark Mittelberg, *Building a Contagious Church: Increasing Your Church's Evangelism Temperature 68 et seq.* (2007) (revised edition of *Building a Contagious Church*).
[1153] Lonnie Richardson, "Becoming More: A Plan for church Growth," April 28, 2002 (sermon).
[1154] Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church; 10 Traits of a Vital Ministry* 145-48 (1999).
[1155] Linus J. Morris, *The High Impact Church: A Fresh Approach to Reaching the Unchurched* 193 *et seq.* (1993).
[1156] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message & Mission* (1995).

Step 6 – Be Sensitive to People with Needs. Turn on one's radar for persons experiencing difficulties in their lives. Although people may deny a need for God or the saving work of Christ, inwardly, most people have hurts and needs which may lead to an opening for the gospel message. Felt needs commonly occur in connection with transitions or changes in persons' lives. Life changing situations (e.g., new births, marriage, divorce, grief situations, financial or career setbacks, or other felt needs) offer windows of opportunity of people being more receptive to the building of relationships and ultimately receptiveness to the gospel. Identify those for possible outreach efforts. Respond to such situations by "just walking across the room" as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

Step 7 – Build Relationships. Initiate, build and strengthen trusting on-going relationships with those outside the faith whom one is trying to reach. Show interest in them and care for them. Nurture the relationship.

> .... [T]o follow the example of Jesus and lots of others in the pages of the Bible... challenge believers in this church to build relationships with nonchurched people. On a regular basis, we've got to leave the huddle of close Christian fellowship, take some risks and get to know some nonchurched people. ...We've got to build relational bridges....[1157]

Spend time with them. Once relationships are initiated, stay with them. When the relationship is, or becomes, one of friendship, the ability of the believer is enhanced for discerning what spiritual questions that person has and to provide him or her with relevant biblical answers.

Step 8 –Share a Verbal Witness. After building a trusting relationship, the next step in reaching out to the nonbelievers is offering verbal witness. It is incumbent on the believer, when an appropriate opportunity arises, to offer a brief, clear and/or compelling explanation of who Christ is and what he has done for us. Scripture calls upon us to do so.

> ... always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15).

Step 9 – Allow Time to Process. Evangelism is a process. People vary as to where they are in their stages of belief. One needs to discern where a person is spiritually before sharing the gospel. Evangelism is a process of helping a person move from one stage to the next with the ultimate goal of he or she coming to profess Christ and coming into the church body. Lack of immediate response is not a failure. Process oriented evangelism permits unchurched persons time to consider the gospel and its relevance to his or her life.

Step 10 – Invite Friends to Worship Services and Other Outreach Events. Many of the those outside the faith are or can be influenced to be, receptive to the Christian message when experienced in a friendly welcoming environment and presented in a clear and a non-

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[1157] Mark Mittelberg, *Building a Contagious Church: Revolutionizing the Way We View and Do Evangelism* 68 (2001) Willow Creek Resources).

indoctrinating-guilt producing manner. It is the role the individual church members to invite the unchurched to attend visitor friendly activities Repeat Invitations on several occasions are likely to be called for. Accompanying the invitee enhances the likelihood, in many situations, for an invitation to be accepted for both initial and future visits.

Step 11 – Reach Out in the Context of the Body of Christ. God does not ask us to work alone. Team up with others. Working within the common unity enables a vibrant community to effectively reaching out to the unbelievers.

Throughout the evangelism process, one should *employ his or her preferred style* in outreach efforts. For those who are confronters, confront. For those who are relational lead others to Christ through development of trust and true friendship. For those who are servers, serve in ways that people will observe acts of kindness stemming from Jesus. For the intellectual persuaders, dialogue and debate with those of similar inclination. For many, being one's natural self may involve more than one style of outreach.

9. Offerings to Equip Persons for Personal Relationship Evangelism

To motivate, equip and support our members for evangelism, as a disciple-making church, we need to offer disciple-making experiences for growing into sharing Christ. These offerings need to be considered from two perspectives. First, some offerings focus on equipping our members for personal relationship evangelism efforts. Second, other offerings are aimed at attracting the unchurched to come and experience our church. Church offerings which attract outsiders, at least in most situations, should also afford our members experiences in engaging those outside the faith and progressing in their own Walk with Christ.

The spiritual discipline of connecting with people outside the faith embraces several elements. These include reaching out to people by building and developing trusting relationships, witnessing for Christ, sharing the good news of the gospel, leading others toward accepting Christ as Lord and Savior, encouraging participation in Christian, fellowship with other believers in our church, and encouraging maturing in Christian faith within our Christian community. It is in these roles that our church members need to be motivated, trained and supported to not only increase Christ's community, but also to personally grow themselves toward a Christ-like life.

There are several resources available to provide content for offering disciple-making experiences to equip church members to participate in reaching out to people outside the faith. Among those available are the following.

- *iWitness Outreach Effort* (Reverend Lonnie Richardson): – In May 2013, our church launched a personal relationship evangelism effort initiated through a sermon series, an invitation to church members to participate and the provision of basic resource materials to equip an individual's evangelism efforts. The materials covered initial steps in outreach to others, ways to start spiritual conversations, development of one's own story of coming to and experiencing Christ as a basis for witnessing Christ,

development of one's own *credo* (faith belief statement), and ways to receive Christ.

- *The Arts of Spiritual Conversations*: – A key to effective evangelistic efforts is to love people? One is free to build loving relationships, without feeling pressured to follow the right steps or formula. Engaging in outreach does not mean that the person has to be the one who convinces or converts anyone. Others may contribute to the process. And. of course, ultimately it is God who transforms a person into becoming a believer.

  The big question for is "How do we love others so that they come to know Jesus?" This question is addressed in John Crilly, "God Talk: The Arts of Spiritual Conversations,"[1158] which is based upon the book *The 9 Arts of Spiritual Conversations: Walking Alongside People Who Believe Differently* (2016).[1159]. Building a bridge to those outside the faith and getting involved in spiritual conversations involves a series of steps referred to as the Arts of Spiritual Conversations:

  - Art of Noticing
  - Art of Praying
  - Art of Listening
  - Art of Asking Questions
  - Art of Welcoming
  - Art of Loving
  - Art of Facilitating
  - Art of Serving Together
  - Art of Sharing

  An ordinary Christian can purposefully practice these arts, which serve as small incremental steps to building relationships and on-going spiritual conversations with unchurched people.

  This approach to evangelism is explored in the two above referenced sources as well on the website of Q Place.[1160] It also ties into the iWitness Outreach Effort noted above.

- Os Guinness, *Fool's Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion* (2015) presents the power of creative persuasion, i.e., the ability to converse with those having a closed mind to the Christian. message. This book received the 2016 *Christianity Today* Book of the Year in Apologetics/Evangelism

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[1158] OutreachMagazine.com, September 16, 2014.
[1159] By Mary Schaller and John Crilly (Tyndale House Publishers).
[1160] qplace.com.

- *Becoming a Contagious Christian* (Mark Mittelberg and Lee Strobel) is a groundbreaking evangelism course developed by Willow Creek Resources. Based upon the book by the same name (authored by (Bill Hybels and Mark Mittleberg), this course has helped over one million people to share the Gospel. The revised and updated training DVD avoids common mistakes some Christians make when introducing others to Christ. Avoid stereotyped approaches that feel intimidating to your friends with this six-session course. Learn to share your faith in a natural and effective way while being the person God made you to be.

- *Just Walk Across the Room* (Bill Hybels), both a book and a DVD program, teaches how to share your story in 100 words. Using Jesus as a model and drawing from his own personal experiences, Hybels equips participants to step out of their comfort zone and share their faith stories with others.

- *Three Habits of Highly Contagious Christians* (Gary Poole) provides a discussion guide for equipping Christians to effectively reach those onside the faith by building relationships, sharing a verbal witness, and extending invitations to outreach events. Each session begins with a compelling story that sets the stage for group discussion and sparks ideas for putting into practice each of the three habits. Discussion questions walk participants through the emotional, motivational, and intellectual facets of each step and provide an opportunity to wrestle with the challenges and discoveries they make individually and as a group. The "Charting Your Journey" section helps participants go beyond discussion and move toward personal application. It provides an opportunity, before God and one another, to commit to specific actions that could make all the difference in the lives of people outside the faith and perhaps their friends and family members.

- *Our Gospel Story* is a free online resource[1161] of the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College. As a world hub of missions and evangelism training, the Center is committed to equipping and resourcing Christians to show and share the love of Jesus in winsome and creative ways. Our Gospel Story is a resource designed to be used in large and small group settings or individually. The main interactive evangelism video is designed to be used in companion with the six-chapter downloadable curriculum and the additional longer video resources.

- *Reimaging Evangelism: Inviting Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (Rick Richardson) offers a DVD program, providing insights into and develops skills for sharing Christ with friends. Develop spiritual friendships by identifying enjoyable activities to invite friends. Discover your gifts that can be used in developing spiritual friendships. Be thought-provoking by using the four basic spiritual discernment questions. Commit to listening to

[1161] ourgospelstory.com.

nonbelievers before jumping to respond to tough questions. Share your personal story of transformation, by learning two diagrams for presenting the good news of God's kingdom. Learn, questions to discern how to help friends take the next step toward Christ.

- *Go Fish* (Andy Stanley) seeks to take the struggle out of sharing your faith. A six session DVD program with study guide, *Go Fish* offers a new perception of the word "evangelism" by showing how believers can make it natural and easy part of everyday life.

- *Going Public with Your Faith: Becoming a Spiritual Influence at Work* (multiple authors) provides a 6 session DVD based series teaching how to create curiosity, stimulate spiritual interest, recognize spiritual hunger and cultivate common ground with non-Christians. It seeks to help people -ways to naturally share their friendship and faith in Jesus with clients, customers and coworkers.

- Rebecca Manley Pippert's *Out of the Salt Shaker & into the World* (1999) on evangelism as a lifestyle offers stories, biblical insights and plain common sense. She helps a person feel relaxed and enthusiastic about sharing one's faith. Offers an inspiring view of what effective engaging evangelism might look like for individuals as well as for the church. Subjects addressed include help for facing fears about evangelism, showing how evangelism can be a natural part of everyday life with family, friends, co-workers and neighbors, and drawing on biblical principles. A study guide is included for use by both individuals and small groups. Other resources by Pippert are also available.[1162]

In addition, other suitable outreach equipping programs should perhaps be sought and evaluated.

Programs such as these can be utilized in both a short-term small group and relational small group settings for those desiring to focus on connecting with the people outside the faith. In addition, the church should offer and occasionally repeat one or more of these programs, either separately or in combination with one another, in a short term small group format for those persons who are either not in a relational small group or who are in a group which is not currently focusing on the spiritual discipline of evangelism.

D. SERVING EVANGELISM

Compassion and serving sells. As a part of becoming fully devoted followers of Christ, we need to become imbued with compassion for others. In turn, this needs to be translated in to serving others. Not only do we grow toward a more Christ-like life (discipleship) when we embrace and carryout these values, we individually and our church as a whole become much more effective in reaching out to others and bringing them in. Combining this with equipping

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[1162] See e.g. amazon.com.

our members for personal relationship evangelism creates powerful evangelistic outreach. As Lonnie Richardson said,

> [p]lunge in, extend a helping hand. We need to show people that we really care about them and each other. The collective capacity for love in our church is this church's greatest strength. Jesus provides the role model. He cared for and helped people first and then other things followed.[1163]

1. Serving More than Good Deeds

As covered in PART THREE, Section III. discussing the spiritual discipline of serving, serving can and should involve more than simply performing good deeds. Serving others offers opportunity to reach out to and bring people onto a path leading toward Christ. Serve "through acts of kindness and intentional witness."[1164] When people see that we care through serving their needs and when they start gaining the sense that our caring actions reflect our faith in and following Christ, such caring can serve as a magnet ultimately pulling them toward Christ and exploring our church. In today's secular world, Christian caring and selfless help stand out. However, serving in some way at some point must be coupled which sharing Christ. While good deeds respond to God's call to help others, God also calls us to share Christ and bring people to him. Good deeds alone are not enough. Over time, caring service in a manner that also moves people toward Christ and his church tends to reach even the most difficult people. Every follower of Christ should become effective in evangelism through acts of kindness to others. The role of the church is to encourage, train, equip and support all members for servant evangelism. In response to Christ's command, as a church, we need to foster a more robust effort to incorporate serving evangelism in our good deed serving efforts.

2. Basic Elements of Serving Evangelism[1165]

Serving evangelism involves at least three basic elements; (i) prayer, (ii) care, and (iii) sharing the gospel.

- *Prayer* – Ask the Holy Spirit for opportunities to meet the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of others whether in family, neighborhoods, schools, and/or the workplace. Create ways for not only individual prayer, but also for group prayer and prayer walks.

- *Care* – Care for people, including those on the church's prayer list, by providing living witness to the love of Christ through words and deeds. Perform acts of kindness demonstrating the love of Christ. Build personal relationships as God affords natural opportunities.

[1163] Lonnie Richardson, "What Draws; People to Church and Keeps them There," April 21, 2002 (sermon).
[1164] Ed Stetzer, "Can We Make Evangelism Enjoyable?, OutreachMagazine.com,September 28, 2020.
[1165] Mark Mittelberg, *Building a Contagious Church: Revolutionizing the Way We View and Do Evangelism* 327-28 (2001).

- *Share the gospel* – All too commonly, churches and their members engage in socially merciful acts but fail to talk about Jesus. This fails to serve the most basic human need of those who have not yet found the Christian faith. Share one's personal experiences with Christ and/or the gospel when opportunities occur. Be open to questions. Share in hope, prayer and faith in the context of conversation. Share in a natural and sensitive way and embrace opportunities which arise. Let your light shine.

Serving evangelism is a fundamental element of an effective disciple-making church. However, it is important to recognize that while serving is part of God's mission, it is not all of it. Witnessing the faith and serving others go together. Don't abandon the gospel in favor of offering only acts of serving. God's mission does not progress unless people also talk about God's mission to save.[1166] Serving others and spreading the gospel go together. For discussion addressing the reluctance of people to speak out while serving, see consideration of serving as a spiritual discipline in PART THREE, Section III.B.1.b. above.

3. Small Acts of Kindness

a. Individual Acts Kindness by Caring Individuals[1167]

God seeks to enter the heart of every person wherever they are. He does so by reaching out through people. However, for those not gifted for evangelism, the task of communicating the gospel seems daunting. But, there is another way of doing evangelism. Operating on a simple premise, serving evangelism enables all Christ followers, whether they are new or mature believers, to be effective evangelists by carrying out simple acts of kindness.

Serving evangelism offers an effective approach in reaching out and leading people toward Christ. It is a straight-forward way of sharing God's love. Small acts of kindness and caring offer a powerful and impactful way of showing God's love in practical ways. Before confronting a person's mind with the gospel, small acts of kindness nudges a person closer to God in a profound manner bypassing a person's mental defenses. Through kindness, bridges are built for a person to receive a touch of love from God.

This form of serving evangelism is an effective approach to outreach because it is

- quick
- high volume

[1166] Ed Stetzer, "Kingdom Mission: 4 Steps for Stronger Engagement," OutreachMagazine.com, Aug. 25, 2015.

> Yes, we must maintain commitment to Gospel witness. But we also must realize that social action isn't just a pragmatic means to evangelistic ends; it is part of living out the gospel itself.

Donald J. Treier, "Who Is the Church?, *Theology Questions Everyone Asks: Christian Faith in Plain Language* 166 (edited by George M. Burge and David Lauber).

[1167] This section draws primarily on reviews of the work of Steve Sjogren, especially his book *Conspiracy of Kindness*. *See* various book reviews and other comments, e.g., book websites, servantevangelism.com etc.

- can be done singly or in groups
- gives the Holy Spirit an open door to convict those we are leading to Christ
- allows shy people to launch into effective evangelism
- families can do together
- easily picked up by new Christians
- simple
- friendly non-pushy, non-aggressive
- appeals to wherever one is or goes
- emotionally safe
- giving centered rather than asking centered
- provides an open door for the miraculous if God so moves
- can be fun

b. Teaching Serving Evangelism: Planned Acts of Individual Christian Kindness by Caring Individuals

Developing an intentional culture throughout all members of a church of performing small acts of kindness greatly enhances outreach efforts. Our church would do well to instill this culture and teach members how to more effective in this type of evangelism. A couple of sources for such guidance are noted immediately below.

- Conspiracy of Silence: – Steve Sjogren, who is referred to as "the father of servant evangelism," offers a proven vision, simple strategy, and real-life stories showing the amazing impact of servant evangelism throughout the world. In his book, *Conspiracy of Kindness* (2008), he focuses on how to communicate the love of God through small actions of kindness. The book shows how churches, groups, and individuals can use washing windows, cleaning toilets, handing out free sodas, etc. to impact their communities with the life-changing love of Christ. "This classic book leads us into non-threatening love actions that release the power of the gospel to transform lives forever."[1168] Servant evangelism can be launched through an available four week sermon series offered in coordination with people reading the reading the book. at the same time either individually or, better yet, in the context of a small group.[1169]

- *Acts 1:8 Ministry*: – When gathered with his Apostles following his resurrection, Jesus said "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8) Inspired by this and other biblical verses, a non-profit organization, named Acts 1:8 Ministry, was formed to help guide churches in reaching out in practical, non-threatening and caring ways to share the love and gospel of Christ. Churches have difficulty in reaching people in their communities who feel threatened by the gospel. This program offers a soft non-threatening way to reach out to people.

[1168] Dale Galloway, Dean of The Beeson International Center, Asbury Theological Seminary.

[1169] Furthermore, among other resources, Steve Sjorgen has also made available a PDF "The 10 Best Servant Evangelism Outreach Projects for Getting Started which provides 10 top picks for those starting out in servant evangelism.

While church members might not be bold about evangelism, when they get their feet wet through these types of efforts they tend to feel more empowered and go further out on the limb in reaching out to people.

Although reaching out to the community with free services or gifts is not a new form of outreach, Acts 1:8 Ministry's detailed and supportive approach is said to be distinctive and one of the best. It provides training for Christians to reach people through acts of kindness. The program provides 100 plus low-cost suggestions, e.g., from feeding coins into parking meters, raking leaves at homes, free car washes, free cups of soda or coffee in public places, etc. Guidance provided offers instructions for training volunteers and running outreach events. Also, there are cards which are handed out saying "God's love for you in a practical way" with the church address and times of services on the back.

The* P*lanned* A*cts of* C*hristian* K*indness) Program trains Christians to evangelize through kindness and can be used by churches, individuals and groups. Users have found that the P.A.C.K. program strengthens their faith lives, their churches, and their communities.[1170]

Other sources, for instilling small acts of kindness culture throughout our church and motivating and training church members and groups to actively participate, also might be explored.

4. Felt Need Groups

Drawing the unchurched to one's church doesn't necessarily nor primarily depend upon some large grandiose outreach events. Instead, in addition to personal one on one small acts of kindness, discover the needs of the unchurched in the community. Whenever Jesus met a person, he would begin with their hurts, needs and interests. For example, when he encountered a leper, Jesus didn't launch into a discourse on the cleansing laws of Leviticus. Instead, he healed the leper. Serious evangelism requires dealing with people's problems.[1171] Thus, more important than large outreach events is knowing the *community's interests and needs.* What issues are the people in our church's community dealing with right now? What are their needs? If the church offers means of meeting needs and gets the word out about the availability of its programs, activities and ministries relevant to those needs, big name events are not necessary to attract those in the community.[1172]

For later discussion on defining those whom we are trying to reach, see discussion of targeting strategy in PART SIX, Section VII.G. below. An important strategy for reaching the subcultures of the primary, as well as occasionally other target groups is the development of a system to deal; with "felt need" groups outside the church. To repeat what was quoted earlier,

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[1170] *See* acts81.org.

[1171] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message* 197-98 (1995).

[1172] James P. Long, "10 Ways to Make a Big Impact on a Small Budget," OutreachMagazine.com, December 11, 2014.

> The more a church can identify and minister to felt needs, the more effective its outreach will be. Understanding felt needs contextualizes ministry and connects the believers with interests and life stages of unbelievers. While felt need groups begin with a focus on a common interest, they ultimately move to deeper spiritual needs as well.[1173]

As Pastor Lonnie Richardson has maintained, a prime method to draw newcomers (whether believers or unbelievers), to the church is by having activities/ministries in place which are relevant to peoples' needs. This, rather than generalized outreach events, should play a major role in the church's evangelism efforts. However, it should be noted that some of the outreach events/activities considered elsewhere in this document fall into the felt need category.

A major reason Life Church Green Bay has quickly grown is intentional and systematic plugging new people into small groups. The church offers a myriad of groups enabling everyone to find something which appeals to them (e.g., bible study, accountability, mom's day out, jogging, etc.) or fits a particular need.[1174] Having available and creating new small groups when called for, not only attract people to the church in the first place, they serve to assimilate new people into the church, and serve the needs of the rest of the congregation as well.

a. Develop Felt Need Groups: Recognizing Spiritual Receptivity in Your Community

To be effective, evangelism needs to be planted in fertile soil. The message of Christ is too important to waste time, money and energy on nonproductive methods. Spiritual receptivity is something that ebbs in flows at various times in people's lives. God uses various tools to soften people's hearts and prepare them to be saved. Rick Warren suggests that there are two broad groups of people who tend to be most receptive to a spiritual message: (i) those persons in transition and (ii) those persons under tension.[1175]

People in Transition - When someone experiences major change, whether positive or negative, the hunger for spiritual stability tends to increase. Massive changes in the world tend to frighten people with the uncertainty created. People seek "islands of stability" when change becomes overwhelming. Such changes include a new marriage, new baby, new home, new job, or new school.[1176]

People Under Tension - Fearful or anxious people often look for something greater than themselves to ease the pain and fill the void they feel.

Ten of the most spiritually receptive groups include the following:

- second time visitors to the church

[1173] Linus J. Morris, *The High Impact Church: A Fresh Approach to Reaching the Unchurched* 145 (1993).
[1174] Christy Heiger-Ewing, "A Church for All Ages: Life Church Green Bay," OutreachMagazine.com, September 19, 2015.
[1175] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message* 181-82 (1995).
[1176] *Id.* at 182.

- close friends and relatives of new converts
- people going through divorce
- people feeling the need for a recovery program (alcohol, drugs, sexual problems, etc.)
- first time parents
- terminally ill and their parents
- couples with marital problems
- parents with problem children
- persons recently unemployed or having major financial problems
- new residents in the community.

A church seeking to both serve others and bring them to and grow in Christ should implement specific felt need ministries for as many of these more receptive groups in the community to the extent resources are available or readily accessible.[1177]

Similarly, and commonly high impact churches recognize and focus on social issues or circumstances as offering substantial opportunity areas for church felt felt-need groups to serve, e.g., helping refugees, counseling, feeding the poor, helping low performing and mentally retarded students with their studies, etc. Also, there are various life situations such as recovering from death of a loved one, divorce, substance abuse support groups, provisions for the homeless, pregnancies as well as needs arising from violence, crime, drug and alcohol abuse, joblessness, family breakdown, single parents, grief support, inability to deal with financial matters, etc. Each of these areas afford openings for the love of Christ and power of the gospel to touch lives of people in urban, suburban and rural areas.[1178]

Furthermore, especially urban and suburban residents reflect relational needs such as

> hunger for security, significance, belonging and meaningful relationships. Ministering to these needs shows that the gospel is relevant to the… [them]."[1179]

There are those who are more receptive to the gospel message due to some awareness that there is a God and/or possession of a bit of biblical knowledge. These persons frequently can be reached through their sense of wanting to learn more about Christianity. For these persons, felt need groups (e.g., exploring Christianity small groups) can offer discussion groups designed for seekers to consider bases for believing in God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Bible.

In short,

> When we address the needs of people, we open a window for them to understand that God cares for them and that knowing Christ makes a difference.[1180]

[1177] *Id.* at 183.
[1178] Linus J. Morris, *The High Impact Church: A Fresh Approach to Reaching the Unchurched* 145-46 (1993).
[1179] *Id.* at 145.
[1180] Linus J. Morris, *The High Impact Church: A Fresh Approach to Reaching the Unchurched* 46 (1993).

High impact churches reach out beyond their walls extending God's love to others. Such churches develop felt need ministry efforts which seek to meet the needs of those outside the church.

> When a church exudes care, warmth and contagious love, newcomers are attracted. Visitors spread the word that they felt welcomed, loved and accepted. An alive church is a genuine, caring body of believers.
>
> A life-giving, supportive church loves enough to become involved in the lives of the people in its community. A caring church adapts itself culturally so that non-members feel welcomed and comfortable. This leads to revitalization and growth, in a church.[1181]

b. Starting a Felt Need Ministry[1182]

To develop a felt need ministry, determine what are the needs of those outside the faith. First, ascertain whether the group will be aimed at attracting healthy or hurting unbelievers. Are the potential participants deeply hurting or are they healthier and interested in relationships founded on common interests?

Once a felt need is defined, start a felt need group with a motivated and capable leader whose skill and knowledge meet the needs of this specialized ministry. Avoid using a felt need ministry name which might deter or frighten persons in the targeted group. For example, the name "Bible Study" might deter an unbeliever who has little or no interest in God or a church. Establish a prescribed length of time so as not to deter those not interested in a long term commitment. A 6 to 8 week period should be adequate for the group to bond.

> The primary goal of a felt need-need ministry is to build relationships and community. Once a sense of community is established, there will be greater openness to discussing spiritual things.[1183]

After the initial period, the group can determine whether or not they desire to continue with a format which includes pondering the spiritual life.

> The high impact church strategy is based on penetrating the diverse cultural subgroups of cities [and/or suburbs]. Once a primary target group is chosen, the church's ministry is contextualized to reach ... unbelievers. The key to reaching them is for Christians to build friendships with them and to relate to

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[1181] *Id.* at 105.

[1182] Linus J. Morris, *The High Impact Church: A Fresh Approach to Reaching the Unchurched* 148-49 (1993).

[1183] *Id.* at 148.

their felt needs. A harvest awaits those churches who use this strategy.[1184]

5. Community Service

Section VIII.F. above focuses on serving needs in the community in response to God's call for all of us to serve. Serving in the community can take any one or more of several forms including repairing or cleanup projects, working through social agencies or school systems, etc. However, whatever the form, serving in the community offers opportunities to build relationships, share the gospel, and interest people to experience our church. As a church begins to connect with the community, attendance at church events, including worship services, tend to rise. Serving the community is not only serving, it also provides a basis for serving evangelism.

E. ATTRACTING PEOPLE OUTSIDE THE FAITH: SHORT TERM SMALL GROUP EVANGELISM

There are many who believe that there is a God but have little understanding or relationship with him. There are others who don't believe in God but possess some curiosity as to what this God thing is all about. However, most people desire and even long for some kind of personal relationships with others in situations where they don't feel threatened or inept. In addition to equipping our members to engage personal relationship evangelism on an individual basis, it is critical for the church to offer programs, events, worship services which attract people outside the faith to attend.

Short term small groups can play a powerful role in creating comfortable non- threatening environments which arouse interest and attract nonbelievers and skeptics. Such groups lead toward the development of positive relationships both between the newcomers themselves and with church member(s) involved in the small group programming.

The availability of such offerings provides something of interest to which the unchurched person can be invited. This better enables our members to bring such persons into contact with the church. Furthermore, publicity of subjects of interest offered in a non-threatening manner may reach people with whom we would not otherwise come in contact.

The church needs to provide training opportunities and experiences in conducting small groups which attract the unchurched to participate and initiates and foster relationships with a view towards bringing people to Christ and his church. The following approaches have proven to be effective. A variety of such offerings aimed at attracting the unchurched through employing short term small groups include the following.

1. Seeker (Exploring Christianity) Small Groups

Gary Poole, as Director of Evangelism at Willow Creek Community Church, offers his much-acclaimed approach to evangelism based upon seeker small groups. This offers a vital element in the evangelism process. The following discussion draws heavily upon his

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[1184] *Id.* at 149.

book.[1185] Well designed and promoted seeker small groups have proven quite effective in attracting the unbelievers and doubters.

For reasons discussed in PART FIVE Section II.D.3., rather than using the terminology seeker small groups, the terminology e*xploring Christi*anity small groups is preferable. However, because of its common usage due to Poole's book, for the purpose of this discussion the terminology seeker small group will be retained here.

a. General Nature of a Seeker (Exploring Christianity) Small Group

A seeker small group consists of non-Christians who gather regularly with one or two Christians to explore spiritual matters. The leader organizes and facilitates discussions based on the explorers' questions and issues. The purpose of the group sessions is to encourage unbelievers and doubters to embark on a path ultimately leading to their acceptance of Christ as Lord and Savior. This is achieved through a series of small, informal conversational group sessions in a comfortable non-threatening environment (e.g., whether in a home, office, restaurant, church, etc.) enabling persons to freely explore their spiritual questions and issues.

Furthermore, seeker small groups offer opportunities for forming relationships and engaging in spiritual conversations. They are designed to bring people together and develop trust filled relationships in a secure non-threatening environment. They facilitate on-going discussions of spiritual topics including dealing with tough questions. These groups are designed to draw participants into discussion, let them raise their own ideas and issues and then gently lead them toward logical and biblical conclusions.

These groups are premised on the need to afford unbelievers opportunities to investigate the faith at their own pace. They are to be given opportunities to discover biblical truths for themselves and to discern answers to their questions and objections in a non-threatening safe environment. Rational foundations of Christianity need to be explored. Questions and objections need to be encouraged and adequately dealt with. Otherwise, they become roadblocks preventing unbelievers/doubters from coming to Christ. Rather than a formalized class, the basic approach is listening and guiding the discussion in dealing with unbeliever questions and answers to those questions. The discussions are guided by leaders equipped and trained to do so. Furthermore, the conversational informality of the group affords a great opportunity to begin and develop relationships.

The leader's role is to f*acilitate discussion* and c*reate a caring and loving community*, not to lecture or preach. Ask the group questions. Get people talking with one another. Facilitate both social interaction among members of the group and one on one relationships between the leader and group members. As people move toward church involvement, these relationships may gravitate toward small group involvement in the context of the church.

These seeker small group sessions are held on a regular on-going basis, e.g., weekly or twice a month) at the same time and same place (not uncommonly on the church campus following a worship service). There is no finite limit to the number of sessions at which time the

[1185] Gary Poole, *Seeker Small Groups: Engaging Spiritual Seekers in Life-Changing Discussions* (2003).

seeker small group sessions cease. The group will be ever changing as new interested persons come in and current members move on – hopefully toward accepting Christ as Lord and Savior, participating in other activities of our church and/or becoming members of our church. One does not need to attend previous sessions to be welcome, nor is he or she required to commit to continuing to come. Thus, while the typical short term group has a relatively defined term limit, the seeker small group continues on an on-going basis with a changing group of participants over time.

Conducting these sessions on-going basis at a specified time, rather than holding them on an intermittent basis, makes them both predicable and readily available. The format and scheduling are designed to make it as easy and comfortable as possible for a person to participate without forcing any commitments until such person is ready. It will also be suggested that interested participants invite their friends and acquaintances to participate as well.

b. Effectiveness of Seeker (Exploring) Christianity) Small Groups[1186]

Willow Creek has found that seeker small groups have produced remarkable results with most of those who remain in the group(s) ultimately become Christians within a year. The seeker small group personal relationship approach has proved to be one of the most effective approaches for bringing people to Christ. It is one of the most powerful and transformational concepts available to any church.[1187]

Seeker small groups constitute a powerful tool for several reasons.

- *Anyone can form and facilitate an effective seeker small group.* One does not need to be a professional evangelist nor an apologist who has substantial training in defending the faith.

- *Such a group affords a built-in excuse for on-going spiritual conversations.* Seekers come to look forward to interacting with others, especially since the discussion addresses their views and concerns. They also tend to spark conversations and interest outside the group leading to more people desiring to participate.

- *Such groups provide a non-threatening environment for seekers* – a safe/non-threatening place to explore the Christian faith. Although eventually a leader needs to share the gospel, this need not be done initially, First, learn to be a sympathetic listener and earn the right to be heard.

- The seeker small group approach, *fosters a process to assist people to make spiritual discoveries for themselves* – the "aha" experience. Letting and enabling

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[1186] This section draws primarily on Gary Poole, "Outreach Efforts Built Around Seeker Small Groups: A Tool Any Church Can Use," (Willow Creek Association Conference on How to Build a Contagious Church), October. 15-16, 2004.

[1187] Mark Mittelberg, *Building a Contagious Church: Revolutionizing the Way We View and Do Evangelism* 292-93 (2001).

> them articulate their own spiritual development is likely to render the process far more acceptable than some other approaches.[1188]

Usually, a seeker (an unbeliever or skeptic) does not want to experience being thumped over the head with the Bible. He or she wants to be respected, not looked down upon. However, a significant percentage of unbelievers are willing to explore Christianity in the context of small groups. People are hungry for community and relationships. People come to Christ because you care for them, not because you are a great defender of theology. Take time for them and respect them. It has been said that the conversion rate of those seekers who participate in seeker small groups is as high as 80%.[1189]

c. Opportunity of and Training for Leading Seeker (Exploring Christianity) Small Group Groups

Given the potential for attracting the skeptics and unbelievers to seeker small groups and the effectiveness of such groups in leading people to Christ, a church should expend considerable effort to encouraging members of the church to assume group leadership roles. Training materials are available which offer advice and guidance to enable a lay person to lead his or her own seeker group in his or her own setting by providing the nuts and bolts for conducting a group as well as the vision and values that drive them. The basic source for the development of seeker groups is Gary Poole's book, *Seeker Small Groups: Engaging Spiritual Seekers in Life-Changing Discussions* (2013). This book has been described as the missing evangelism tool which churches need to fill the gap between evangelism training and real-life opportunities for church members to engage unbelievers in life-changing spiritual discussions. The book presents a detailed, step-by-step process for launching a seeker small group strategy in a wide variety of settings. Stories and illustrations offer inspiration and encouragement so not only to equip people but also motivate them to launch their own groups.

This book also serves as a basis better enabling a church to urge, motivate and equip persons to lead such groups. Those who have led such groups have experienced an awesome feeling in witnessing the transformation of lives of others. And importantly, leading such groups contributes to a person progressing in his or her own transformation toward a more a more Christ-like life.

2. Q-Place Variant

A variant on the seeker (exploring Christianity) small groups stems from Neighborhood Bible Studies (NBS) which began when Billy Graham crusades awakened people to their need for a relationship with Jesus and to the importance of studying the Bible. NBS mobilized Christians to invite unchurched people to an inductive Bible study for discovering the content of scripture. This ministry was premised on the belief that people would come because they believed the Bible was worth studying. However, times have changed. A large segment of America's population today is no longer inclined to attend church or participate in Bible study.

[1188] Gary Poole, "Outreach Efforts Built Around Seeker Small Groups: A Tool Any Church Can Use," (Willow Creek Association Conference on How to Build a Contagious Church), October. 15-16, 2004.
[1189] *Id.*

So NBS, assumed a new name, Q Place. It has refocused to meet the new challenge of effectively meeting and engaging this new target audience.

People are drawn to groups through an inductive approach to learning which enables them to interact with faith-related topics. This learning approach lends itself to attracting people and engaging in areas where they have doubts or major questions. Q Place discerns three crucial elements underlying an effective environment for inductive learning: (1) time-tested guidelines which keep discussions on track, (2) trained facilitators who cultivate a welcoming environment for discussion and discovery, and (3) inductive resource offering great questions. In a Q Place, people raise their questions and explore topics about God and the Bible. The objective is for them to discover for themselves, after hearing and discussing a variety of viewpoints with others, what the Bible says and evaluate topics about God. In the process, they have the opportunity to identify what they believe and evaluate what they are learning.

There are many who would appreciate the opportunity to interact with questions about God and the Bible if done so in a non-threatening, The mission of Q Place is to mobilize Christians to start groups and equip persons to be excellent facilitators. This, in turn, can lead to persons in a group coming to conclusions at their own pace. Q Place maintains that its staff and volunteers can serve as catalysts by working with a few church leaders as advisers and coaches enabling these leaders to create an effective, self-sustaining ministry.

FRCC should consider the Q Place ministry either integrated with, supplement to, or alternative to the seeker (exploring Christianity) small group approach discussed above.

3. Alpha Program[1190]

a. Nature and Success of Alpha

Alpha is a highly recommended successful program for teaching the basics of the Christian faith. It is also of great value as an outreach/evangelism tool as well as renewing those already in the faith. Alpha is a program which is global in nature. It functions in 169 countries, reaches 23 million guests in 112 languages. In the United States it is utilized in all 50 states, reaches 3+ million guests and 127 denominations.

Alpha teaches is a series of interactive sessions exploring the basics of the Christian faith in a friendly, honest, informal and non-threatening manner. Typically it involves 10 session which include food, a short talk and time for small group discussion where participants can share their thoughts and ask questions. All are welcome to participate regardless of background (religious or not) and viewpoints. Alpha is used by local churches to teach people with the unchanging message of Jesus Christ. It has been highly successful in impacting lives for Christ across cultural, economic and spiritual boundaries because it is relational, engaging and powerful. It usually lasts for 10 weeks at a church, in a home or at some other getaway location. Although it can be conducted in a small group format, it also can occur in a larger gathering which usually breaks up into small groups.

[1190] Description drawn from Alpha brochure entitled: "What Is Alpha."

Drawing people into attending Alpha relies on both the interpersonal, intellectual and invitational styles of evangelism. The interpersonal style provides an environment for the participants to relax and feel at home. Sharing meals with time to enjoy and interact with one-another develops relationships. The intellectual style approach, through a well crafted program and presentation, is employed to explain and defend biblical truth in a manner affording people opportunity to raise questions and discuss the Christian faith in a non-threatening environment.

The meal and discussion phases of Alpha introduce a small group type of experiences. As participants get to know one another, relationships begin to evolve. For those participants who want to continue their small group gathering (often significant bonding occurs during the *Alpha* course), follow-up either short term or relational small group experiences are readily available from Alpha, churches and elsewhere.

b. Reinvigorate Alpha at FRCC

Although Alpha has been very successful worldwide, unfortunately as an outreach effort, it has been less successful here at FRCC. This is primarily attributable to a failure to attract participation by the unchurched. Most of the participants here have been current church members looking for a refresher course on the basics of faith.

Because of *Alpha's* proven worldwide success in exposing people to the faith and ultimately bringing many of them to Christ, it is critical that FRCC reinvigorate our Alpha outreach efforts in four ways.

- All church members need to understand the nature of Alpha; its importance in our church's outreach efforts, and their role communicating Alpha to and inviting those with whom they have some relationship to test drive Alpha.

- Remind those contacted of the time and place and perhaps accompany them for at least the first session (although avoid active and direct participation by sitting in the background).[1191] Then, and most importantly, motivate and support our church members outreach efforts by informing unchurched persons as to the nature of Alpha and inviting them to attend.

- Offer Alpha on a regular basis, i.e., two or three times a year. Experience has demonstrated that a significant number of *Alpha* participants not only ultimately come to the faith, but also a significant number encourage their friends to attend a future program. This multiplying effect does not occur if there is no program in the near future. For *Alpha* to be successful it needs to be repeated on a regular basis with future programs primarily emphasizing outreach to the unchurched rather than primarily as a refresher on basic Christianity for the already believers.

- Improve our publicity efforts.

[1191] Alpha can serve as a refresher program for believers. However, attending believers should remain in the background so as to avoid adversely impacting the questions and discussion of the unbelievers and skeptics.

Effective promotion and implementation of the Alpha program on a regular basis should greatly enhance our evangelism outreach efforts.[1192]

In short, these short term small group efforts (seeker/exploring Christianity, Q-Place and Alpha groups) are primarily aimed at attracting the skeptics and unbelievers into contact with our church. They offer appealing opportunities for our church members to invite these persons to initiate a process which may set them on a path toward their coming to Christ. In addition, importantly those church members who participate in these evangelism efforts (especially group leaders as well as the inviters), by connecting with the unchurched, place themselves in a position for disciple-making experiences in growing into sharing Christ.

F. RELATIONAL SMALL GROUP EVANGELISM

Personal relationship evangelism has been demonstrated to be foundational for successful outreach to those outside the faith. Utilization of relational small groups which have opted to embrace a major focus on outreach takes personal relationship evangelism to the next level. Relational small groups (by this or some other name such as cell groups) have proven to be a major force in churches achieving a high degree of success in bringing people to Christ.

When relational small groups, built on authentic trusting relationships, invest in developing relationships with the unchurched and invite them to participate in the group, the potential for bringing people to and growing in Christ is magnified. Bringing together personal relationship evangelism and the immediately available construct of a relational small group puts into play a powerful force for successful outreach efforts.

Relational small group evangelism involves several elements including the following.[1193]

- *Penetration* – Penetration is living the Christian community where people live, work and play. Penetrate the neighborhood, job site or elsewhere in the area where the group is meeting.

- *Fishing with Nets* – Rather than an individual fishing, net fishing involves a group effort to catch more fish. Relational small group evangelism reaches out and brings people in as the result of group effort. This might involve walking neighborhoods praying for people, greeting people and inviting them to a short term small group program conducted within the relational small group context (e.g., a regular group meeting, outreach events such as barbeques, etc.) There are fitness small groups, neighborhood groups, coffee-break Bible studies small groups, support groups, sport teams where at least half members are skeptics or unbelievers. Whatever the technique, place primary emphasis on developing relationships with the unchurched and eventually invite them into the group.

[1192] Another highly recommend program for small group evangelism is *Christianity Explored.* For description, *see* Christianbook.com and/or amazon.com.

[1193] Draws primarily on Joel Comiskey, *Cell Church Solutions: Transforming the Church in North America* 112–17 (2005).

- *Befriending those Outside the Faith* – Net fishing starts with each member of the group getting to know non-Christians. Before meaningful conversion, there must come communication which requires building relationships. Be intentional in building relationships and planting seeds through servant ministry efforts and various evangelism projects.

- *Being Transparent* – When new people attend a group gathering, start with refreshments and an ice breaker before getting into the lesson. People without Christ look for authenticity and they appreciate when Christians share the same kind of struggles which they experience. Provide a sense of welcoming, acceptance and belonging.

- *Linking* – A member of a relational small group needs to move beyond simply being a friendly and inviting people to church. Group members need to become involved with the people being invited. First those sought must be befriended by a Christian and then linked to small group. Linking and involving the unchurched person demonstrates both the benefits and the challenges of following Christ. With time, encourage and assist the person in becoming more assimilated in other church ministries and activities, especially the worship services, conversion, church membership, etc. and other program areas not experienced within the context of the group itself.

- *Persistence* – To be successful, efforts to evangelize must be persistent despite obstacles and discouragement. – Remember, every "no" may be one step closer to a "yes."

A common objection to small group emphasis on evangelism is that outreaching to others and bringing them in will lessen the ability of the group members to deepen community among themselves, the building of trusting relationships. (This concern is considered in the discussion of closed relational small groups in PART SIX, Section VI.B.3.*b*.(2) below.) However, a countervailing viewpoint suggests that reaching out to the unchurched results in the development of a more biblical community. New people contribute to the growth of the believers in the group by affording them an opportunity to minister and thus grow. When a small group embraces and strives toward a common evangelistic objective, members start working toward creating and/or enhancing unity and camaraderie. All are involved from the person inviting the guest to those providing the refreshments, participating in the conversation and discussions and leading the discussion.[1194]

For those relational small groups wanting to focus on evangelism (an especially likely possibility if the person or persons sought are trusted friends, family members, etc.), the opportunity for doing so should be encouraged and fostered by the church. To enhance a church's effectiveness in growing as a disciple-making church, relational small group evangelism needs to be prioritized, encouraged, promoted, developed and implemented in appropriate circumstances. Not only will this bring new people to Christ, it will also foster the spiritual

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[1194] *Id.* at 108.

growth of not only newcomers, but also the spiritual growth of current members in their Walk with Christ as they carry out this ministry.

G. SUMMARY OF CONTENT OF DISCIPLE-MAKING STAGE: GROWING INTO SHARING CHRIST

As a disciple forming community, our church needs to place major emphasis on Christ's call to "go" out; lead people to accepting Christ as Lord and Savior and becoming part of Christ family. If a church neglects to reach out to and bring in the lost, it disregards Christ's divine mandate. Thus, clearly *evangelism is a foundational element of an effective disciple-making church and must be an intentional prime priority in what a church does.*

This is reflected in the recommended Mission Statement for FRCC which calls for encouraging, equipping and supporting people in growing toward more Christ-like lives in thoughts, feelings and actions through getting connected with people outside the faith through lovingly witnessing the good news of Christ, leading them toward to accepting Christ as Lord and Savior, and bringing them into a community of believers as part of Christ's family (the local church). It is essential that our church's mission be aligned with the Great Commission *and* that we as the church be active in responding to Christ's command. Thus, we need to place priority emphasis on the God's call to share and connect people to Christ (evangelism).

Encouraging, equipping and supporting members of our church in growing into sharing Christ in today's secular world include the following:

- teach church members the biblical and our mission purpose bases for evangelism and the role of the church in advancing its mission,
- communicate understanding and expectation that all church members are anticipated, in some way, to participate in church-wide team evangelism,
- train, equip, foster and offer disciple-making experiences for personal relationship evangelism
- maximize outreach impact through assessing, training and fostering use of members' evangelism personality styles,
- foster short term small group programs aimed at attracting skeptics and unbelievers, and
- foster relational small group evangelism

These elements provide the content for growing people into sharing Christ.

Growing into sharing Christ is an essential disciple-making stage of a person growing more like Christ in one's thoughts, feelings and actions.

> Every opportunity to share our faith with others challenges us to live out what we say we believe. And every time we refuse to shrink away from that responsibility, we are strengthened in our faith and as a witness.[1195]

As a disciple-making church, it is our responsibility to offer and implement disciple-making experiences leading our members in progressing to and within the disciple-making stage of growing into sharing Christ.

X. THE LENS OF DISCIPLE-MAKING: FITTING CONTENT OFFERINGS TO THE DISCIPLE-MAKING PROCESS

Spiritual growth is a process. A person progresses toward a more Christ-like life through learning and practicing spiritual disciplines which lead toward spiritual growth (transformation) by (i) connecting with God through the pursuit of an intimate relationship with him, (ii) connecting with other believers by sharing life with them, (iii) connecting with both believers and nonbelievers through serving their needs, and (iv) connecting with the skeptics and unbelievers through witnessing the good news of Christ and bringing them into congregational life. Learning and practicing the various aspects of these spiritual disciplines as one progresses through the stages of disciple-making are the marks of becoming and growing as a follower of Christ (i.e., a disciple). In doing so, one grows toward a more Christ-like life in his or her thoughts, feelings and actions.

As a disciple-making church, our role is to encourage, equip and support our members (and others) to progress in their spiritual formation. This involves the designing and implementing a process or path encompassing the various stages of disciple-making. We traverse this path to grow in our thoughts, feelings and actions reflecting each of the four connections or marks of discipleship. The recommended stages of discipleship consist of the following.

- conversion
- vital transforming worship
- learning the basics of faith
- learning and practicing spiritual disciplines
- becoming a member of the church member
- assimilating into the church

[1195] Barna *Reviving Evangelism* 29 (2019).

- participating in relational (and perhaps sometimes in short term) small groups
- growing into serving, and
- growing into sharing Christ

To continually grow toward a more Christ-like life, one needs to pursue the four critical connecting relationships by progressing (not necessarily sequentially) to, within and through the stages of discipleship.

As a church whose core mission is disciple-making, how do we encourage, equip and support people to move to and grow within each of the stages of disciple-making? A church does so by offering and attracting people to participate in various disciple-making experiential programs. In this context the term programs is used in a broad sense which - embraces worship, small group activities, outreach events, other ministry activities, etc.

All that we do as a church should be viewed through the lens of disciple-making. That is, when creating, implementing and evaluating offerings of the church, we need to persistently ask whether such contributes to effective disciple-making. This foundational principle of how we go about doing church rests upon at least four bases.[1196]

(1) We are called upon to follow Christ. The core purpose of our church is disciple-making. When we do things not primarily intended or designed to foster the achievement of this fundamental purpose, we are not acting as a disciple-making church.

(2) We have limited resources in terms of time, talent and treasure. To the extent that we apply those resources to activities which do not contribute to effectively making of disciples, such resources are unavailable for those activities which do contribute to disciple-making. This is irresponsible stewardship of the resources which God has provided us.

(3) What constitutes disciple-making encompasses an immense range of possibilities in terms of the content of disciple-making experiences offered as well as the format or manner in which they are offered. Filtering all that we do through the lens of disciple-making does not impose narrow bounds on what we can do.

(4) An essential element of an effective disciple-making church is focus. Lack of focus leads to ineffective, less than vibrant churches.

For programs to be effective in moving people through the disciple-making process, every program needs to fit into the disciple-making process. Don't try to fit the process to existing or new programs. Establish how each program is used to grow people in pursuing the relationships which mark persons as becoming more Christ-like in their thoughts, feelings and

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[1196] Fox River Congregational Church. Minutes of the Disciple-Making Task Force, November 19, 2008.

actions. That is, define and structure each and every program at every stage of the disciple-making process to provide disciple-making experiences in a person's pursuit of intimacy with God, connecting with fellow believers, serving others and/or reaching out to those outside the faith.

In order to do so, the mission of the church and the process to achieve the mission must be clear – easy to grasp. The leaders need to know and communicate the mission and the people need to understand and commit to it. Focus on only those programs, activities, events, church structure, etc. which move people through stages of spiritual growth. Programs should not be conducted simply because of tradition, or because something is needed to fill out the calendar, or because someone has a pet project. Programs and events must be viewed as tools to place people in the path of God's transforming power. Each program at every stage of the process should serve to move people through the stages of disciple-making leading to spiritual transformation. Otherwise, time, talent and financial resources are diverted from our mission purpose of making disciples.

Thus, asking the question how will this activity or program contribute to disciple-making should become part of the genetic makeup of our church. It is this lens that all programs, existing and potential, should be evaluated. Each and every member of our church, in whatever church related activity he or she is involved, should be asking this question. This should become part of our church DNA.

While accepting the premise that everything we do should be viewed through the lens of disciple-making, implementing such principle should not be done in a manner which unduly inhibits people's creativity in ideas for events, projects, etc. This raises a basic question; who determines what program/activity does and does not contribute to disciple-making?

In a non-hierarchical Congregational church, presumably there is no intent that there should be some church person or body who exercises veto authority over everything that we do. We do not want to stifle the interests, passions and creativity of people seeking to do something positive. Who knows how the Holy Spirit might work through people?

Consequently, rather than imposing an overseer approach (which is contrary to our concept of what it means to be a Congregational church), our efforts should focus on inculcating in each and every member of our congregation the habit of looking at and evaluating what we do or contemplate doing through the lens of what contributes toward disciple-making. When someone or somebody suggests some activity, event, program, etc., ask how we might utilize such opportunity to foster some aspect of disciple-making. We should foster the disciple-making perspective in the DNA of not only our professional, lay and team leaders, but also in the DNA of all our church members. It is through this lens that all that we do should be filtered. When our church body is imbued with this perception, only in very rare instances is unlikely that a proposal or activity might warrant some type of overseer veto whether by our pastor, a relevant team or the congregation as a whole.

Developing, offering and conducting efforts to move persons to and through the stages of discipleship, which offer opportunities to be involved in disciple-making experiences, are

critical for an effective disciple-making church. But there is more. People must be motivated to do so. The central work of diligent professional and lay leadership is to move people from "here" to "there." This is primarily a work of stimulating a person's imagination. The role of leadership is to say, "Here's where we are at" and then to ask the question, "Where is 'there'?" The job is to describe this future in such a way that produces passion in people, igniting their enthusiasm to the point where people say, "I no longer want to stay 'here." Church leadership needs to offer people the opportunity to move out of a current reality by understanding the there is a kingdom reality of what heaven is really like right here on earth. Then, the church needs to develop a practical plan and resources that allow people to begin the journey from here to there.[1197]

Here in PART FIVE focus has been on the content and delivery of the stages of disciple-making. In PART SIX the emphasis shifts from content offerings to implementing the vision of disciple-making process for our church.

[1197] Bill Hybels, "The Beauty and the Power of the Local Church," Magazine.com, February 12, 2013.