

SMASHING SILOS AND CREATING SYNERGY
A JOURNEY TOWARD COLLABORATION

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ABSTRACT

SMASHING SILOS AND CREATING SYNERGY

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I want to tell you a story—one that needs to be told, not because we need another tale, but because we need to know that positive change *is* possible, and that there is still such a thing as hope. But, mostly, because we need to be reminded that as God's co-creators, we still have the ability to break down the most ingrained barriers by allowing ourselves to be transformed.

As with most tales, this one has been years in the making. It features a deeply committed but distinctly isolated and departmentally driven group of people who, in response to the congregation's rapid growth, were driven by an expectation of high energy, proficiency, and creativity. Thus, the more each ministry pulled together to satisfy its own requirements, the more departmental isolation became the norm.

With each mounting conflict, it became clear that we could no longer operate in the same siloed mode. This project, then, was designed to foster communication and a re-assembling of those various parts of Christ's body so that our unity might offer a biblical model *and* reenergize all aspects of ministry.

The leading characters in this transformation became intentional conversation and play. While none of us knew what lay ahead, seventeen brave souls embarked on that four-month journey, during which our gatherings included both fun and time to talk.

Quickly an atmosphere of familiarity and open hospitality formed as a distinct willingness to play emerged. Facades were easily abandoned as well-chosen games served as an impetus for talking, laughing, sharing, and self-revelation. Magically, these exercises became segues into conversations that facilitated the identification of opportunities and defining of collaborative creations. A significant turning point emerged when the group requested more—more participants, more opportunities to gather with others, and more intentional times for collaboration.

Will we live happily ever after? That reality remains to be seen. However, there are important signs that we are at least on our way to living in synergy, rather than in silos.

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CHAPTER ONE

SURVEYING THE TERRITORY

*You did not choose me, but I chose **you** and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last...* John 15:6

How Did We Get Here?

As with any story, it's helpful to begin at the beginning. For us, that means journeying back to Dade County, Georgia, and the days of post-Civil War Reconstruction. Following a rather frightening skirmish in their community of Rising Fawn, twelve families and several unattached acquaintances determined to set out for a better life. Thus, in 1871, they piled possessions and people into forty different vehicles, buggies, wagons, and ox carts and headed westward towards Texas. After a journey of a little over three months, tragedy struck the family of S. B. Austin, the leader of this adventuresome band, when his infant daughter tragically died. Once the mourners buried her on the prairie, it was clear to all that her little body must not be abandoned. So, here it was that these pilgrims determined to stay. Encouraged by the 1843 Treaty of Birds Fort, which safely opened the North Texas plains to settlement, Austin purchased the surrounding land and built a home that was large enough to include those who would gather to worship on Sunday mornings as was the custom of the day when logistics made

formal worship impossible. Within the year, however, Austin donated two acres north of his home, and the forty charter members of the Methodist church erected a log building on the property, with the first service being held in February, 1872.¹



Figure 1.1. Little white chapel.



Figure 1.2. Early church building next to cemetery.

The church, initially named Oak Hill Methodist Church South, as a tribute to Austin's Rising Fawn church, was served by a series of circuit-riding Methodist preachers. Although it was the first Methodist body established in an area that would come to be known as Tarrant County, it was by far the smallest on a multiple-point charge and would see the official preacher only several times a year. While the original building burned to the ground and a second was blown down, this faith community remained committed to God, and at some point in time, one of those circuit riders became a more consistent presence among the congregation. In the mode of the day, the little wooden church eventually became known by his name. In the 1980s, with the growth of the area, the establishment and expansion of an international airport, and the tenacity, faith, and outreach of the congregation, this frame chapel began to outgrow its small

¹ White's Chapel United Methodist Church, "Our Story," <http://whiteschapelumc.com/about-wc/our-story/> (accessed June 15, 2013).

wooden structure and a new sanctuary capable of holding three hundred people and eight Sunday school classrooms was dedicated on Easter Sunday, 1988. Yet four years later, as a new senior pastor was appointed, the four-hundred-fifty-person membership was represented by an attendance of only one hundred. This new pastor had been sent to close the “declining” church. But the congregation, its pastor, and God had a decidedly different outcome in mind.

To be sure, the young pastor and his wife, who arrived with two small children in tow, found faithful people who loved the Lord. But they also found a parsonage that was less than ideal and offices that had been carved out of a former home. Some areas of the facility could only be accessed via boards above sewage. And because the parsonage living room doubled as the youth Sunday school classroom, it was not unusual for that congregational shepherd to be vacuuming, teaching, and preaching within the span of a Sunday morning. Although the “new” choir loft would accommodate thirty, there were less than half of that to fill it and musicians were in short supply. However, this congregation and the pastor took seriously Jesus’ call to go and to make disciples. In fact, it became the norm, rather than the exception, to find this husband-and-wife team baking and delivering fresh bread to each new visitor who had worshipped with them that Sunday morning.

At the same time, the surrounding community was emerging into a planned city, complete with infrastructure and the transformation of a two-lane road into a four-lane, well-paved street. Acreage was still available at a reasonable price, and mansions began to spring up in new neighborhoods. The proximity of the airport made the burgeoning

town an ideal location for corporate executives whose travel took them across the country and around the world. Crew members who piloted those flights were also attracted to this growing community. New schools, which met high academic standards and produced championship athletic teams,



Figure 1.3. Expanded campus.

became another drawing card. Thus, the city emerged as a place where old and new came together in a way that was also reflective of the expanding church membership.

However, as the church continued to grow, it also continued to defy all models of giving when compared to similar-sized congregations. While most have large endowments or a consistent handful of “go to” families for budgetary shortfalls, specific project outlays, or capital campaigns, historically we have relied on the faithful giving of each of our members who consistently step out in faith to support the church with their “prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness.”² So, from the beginning of that new 1992 pastorate, the young minister instilled a desire to invest our resources into the development of excellence in worship and programming, rather than the grandeur of facilities or the trappings of “religion.” Volunteers have eagerly been utilized wherever possible not only to enhance their gifts in serving, but also to conserve our monetary resources for areas where there were no other options. Even as the need for staff grew, employee size was always smaller in number than other churches of comparable size. As well, staff members were employed at a significantly lesser rate than could be made in

² *The United Methodist Hymnal: Book of United Methodist Worship* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2001), 48.

the secular world. Yet, there has never been a shortage of gifted people who are eager to contribute their gifts and graces. One of the earliest-and lasting-requirements for anyone who comes on staff is that of an MBA—Mop and Bucket Attitude. To his great credit, it is an attitude that was and is modeled by the senior pastor and one which has been taken up with great conviction and joy by staff and volunteers alike.

Well, once it became obvious that church would *not* be closing, but was, instead, adding almost daily to its numbers, a new vision began to be cast for the church and its mission to the community and beyond. Less than a decade after his appointment, the pastor guided the congregation through a capital campaign that would result in the opening of a new sanctuary space capable of seating 2500 worshipers, a choir of over one hundred, and an orchestra pit that will comfortably accommodate over thirty musicians. With its continued emphasis on worship, programming that positively impact families through adult, student, and children’s offerings, as well as ministries of compassion and service, this has become the church home of eleven thousand members. In the offing is another expansion, which will add a significant amount of fellowship and classroom space, a welcoming book and gift store, as well as a smaller venue for worship, weddings, and funerals which will be located at the site of the older sanctuary.



Figure 1.4. Sanctuary Then.
Photographer unknown



Figure 1.5. And now. Photographer Tommy Green.

But such extravagant and expansive growth has not come without the accompanying growing pains. Early on, one came on staff because they had first volunteered as an active member of the congregation, a ministry area was growing beyond the part-time attention given it, and a budgetary salary amount was approved by both finance and pastor-parish relations committees. So the first staff members were those who had initially been drawn to the church by its ministry and had come to know, work with, and love the pastor. As well, *he* had already formed a relationship with the volunteer and was well aware of their gifts, graces, and compatibility with his theological and philosophical stance on almost any issue. It was a mutually proven relationship long before it became a formalized one. However, in the past ten years this selection method has become almost impossible to continue because there is less time to develop such connections and the required expertise for any given position cannot always be found within the membership. Another complicating factor is that those who may have been well-suited to smaller numbers, less innovation, and a slower pace early on, now struggle with the demands resulting from increased numbers and a culture of rapid change. A third hurdle has been the fact that, in some cases, those who have been a part of the staff have experienced a strong call to their own ordination and have subsequently begun a new leg of their journey without recognizing the ramifications of the shift in their responsibilities.

Unlike the lay staff, clergypersons appointed here might or might not have been a fit for the culture. Those who came with an agenda to change things—especially the mode of operation of the senior pastor—didn't stay long. Some left to pursue a different career; others have exited with a desire to head their own church or at least play a more

prominent role in its ordering. My own appointment to this charge came as the culmination of my ordination journey. And although it was a move across district, economic, and societal lines, some of those prior shifts in staffing, continued growth in programming and membership, as well as an increase in the off-campus responsibilities of the senior pastor, resulted in a change in my role from Executive Pastor for Women to Chief of Staff. Thus, it became my charge to improve communication among the staff and with the senior pastor, but it was also my desire to explore ways of reenergizing all of us.

Where Are We?

By the summer of 2012, this one-hundred-forty-one-year-old church morphed from its original two acres to a twenty-seven-plus-acre campus, with buildings that included a replica of the original chapel, a twenty-five-hundred-seat sanctuary, five-hundred-person-capacity contemporary worship venue, prayer chapel, full kitchen, fellowship hall, and adult, student, and children's education buildings, as well as four portable buildings which had long outlived their permitted status. The staff count of seventy, including eleven full and part-time clergy, has almost doubled the original *membership* count of that little Oak Hill church. The beauty of this assembled staff has been that each takes seriously the call to make disciples. The opportunity hidden there is the fact that there are at least seventy different and individual ideas as to how that might occur. Compounding this confusion has been the leadership style of the senior pastor. Perhaps an excerpt from a Franklin Roosevelt (his hero) biography will best explain this pastor's philosophy on the subject:

...a hallmark of the Roosevelt administration was bureaucratic anarchy. FDR disdained organization charts, created competing offices without warning those running the old offices, and blithely broke the chain of command to deal with whomever he pleased. Responsibilities he assigned were vague and the authority to fulfill them murky. As an observer put it, the President handed one job to several men and several jobs to one man... The shrewder of his associates did not see FDR's style as the mark of a poor administrator, but as a deliberate device for keeping everyone else off balance while he alone maintained control... By forcing people who often held contrary views to work together, FDR ran the short-term risk of causing conflict, confusion, and injured feeling. But over the long term, his dispersal of authority acted as a brake against the commission of major blunders. If FDR's leadership was chaotic, it was inspired chaos.³

Adding to this sense of chaos was the fact that, because of space constraints, the staff found itself scattered across a variety of buildings on its ever-expanding campus. And while this reality of a lack of contiguous space was born out of a physical necessity, it also became one of the unintentionally planted silo seeds. Once planted, this seed was watered by the lack of a common, shared vision as well as a race for resources. As with most organizations, these resources weren't solely limited to finances, although departmental budgets were definitely a source of jockeying. Just as important, however, the competition also included physical space and a struggle for time and attention from the pastoral leadership. The latter took its greatest toll on those who had been at the church the longest, for they were used to working shoulder to shoulder with the one whom could no longer fit them into an increasingly packed schedule. Thus, as he completed two decades of leadership, as one might imagine, while the church grew, so did the distance between the senior pastor and his staff. Typically, time with a particular staff member or department occurred only if 1) there was trouble on the horizon, 2) a new

³ Joseph E. Persico, *Roosevelt's Secret War: FDR and World War II Espionage* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2002), 16-17.

emphasis was being placed on that department, or 3) one was integrally involved with worship.

It is not surprising, then, that the stories the staff tells have shifted over the years. For those who have been here fifteen-plus years, they are stories of struggling *together* to keep the church afloat while providing quality programming that could compete with surrounding, larger churches. They are stories of wading through muck, of avoiding the critters that cohabitated with them, and of fish fries that finally could not keep up with the sheer volume of the participants. They also include tales of recorded doxologies that had to be cued up to play at just the right time, pleas for choir members, and Easter worship under glorious tents when there was no longer room in the sanctuary. But for the “newcomers,” the stories are more about departmental successes, providing cutting-edge programming, increasing the number of participants in missional activities, and securing volunteers for isolated events. Thus, current stories have shifted from the close-knit family of the lean, early days to tales of the larger organization’s challenges as the staff has become more and more caught up in the worlds of their own departments and ministries.

Summer, then, found us in agreement on only a couple of things: First, we each had a heart for the ministry of Jesus Christ through this particular church location, and second, we were at a crossroads of conflict, competition, and chaos. The stories we told ourselves and one another had more to do with scarcity and isolation than abundance and collaboration. And like spoiled children who consider themselves more rivals than siblings, often those stories had an undercurrent of competition and misunderstanding.

Old stories of unresolved conflict began to color the recounting of actual events and certainly squelched the dreaming of imaginative, future scenarios. To be sure, the bus was loaded, primed to move into uncharted territories, but it was as if the toxic exhaust fumes were being pumped back into our little pockets of travelers to such a degree that the entire staff was impacted by the layers of tension and isolation that had been ignored for far too long. We were stuck in neutral by the unrealistic hope that things would simply improve on their own.

As I wandered through the “bus,” sometimes I would hear those stories or their aftermath. Other times I was summoned to referee or to sympathize. Whatever the circumstance, individually and collectively, these conversations served to highlight the opportunity for the creation of a collaborative Christian community in which we had a chance to clear the air by shifting our operative metaphor from the hierarchal nature of *family* to the interdependent image of the *Body of Christ*—a body in which every person on this journey was recognized as having an equal and valuable part to play as well as the resources to make it happen. When we occasionally took the time to step outside of our silos and collaborate on a particular event or program, we saw glimpses of ministry greatness. This made those times of isolation and continuous battles all the more tragic. For example, one particular conflict was even more poignant because it occurred between two pastor-led departments. Tasked with developing a counseling center, the Family Ministries pastor proceeded to do so without enlisting the input or assistance of the Care and Support pastor, even though she was the one who handled the vast majority of counseling appointments. After preliminary decisions and commitments were made

without her consideration, the Care and Support pastor was asked to “bless” the deliberations and choices. Now she feels her input and considerable knowledge of the players and congregational needs, as well as the historical failure of a previous center, have not been valued. Not surprisingly, she expresses her concern about the lack of experience the designated new Director will bring. Additionally, she has been asked to vacate her current offices and meeting spaces to accommodate the personnel for the new Center.

In another area, the Director of Worship is viewed as having permission to move to a different beat, and skip any accountability to the same rules to which other staff members must comply. She is feeling the brunt of attitudes of animosity and judgment from various departments because of their assessment that a disproportionate amount of privilege and resources are given to Worship. “They think I have a full two hours with the pastor each week,” she shares. “But they don’t know that last week, for example, he spent at least an hour and fifteen minutes of that scheduled time dealing with other issues. However, perception becomes reality,” she laments. In a third department, shooting for a time-sensitive video announcement is severely delayed because an ongoing dysfunctional relationship exists between two of the participants. In a fourth scenario, one group of Boy Scouts is denied access to a prime venue for a Court of Honor, while the son of a prominent member is allowed to use the space for his Eagle Ceremony. And most recently, it was Adult Education vs. Missions when the church hosted a nationally known singer for a women’s conference, which included collections for an international outreach

ministry. Upon seeing their display, the Missions Director demanded, “Why are *they* here? That is *not* an outreach we have voted to support!”

As these scenarios suggest, a general feeling of animosity and fatigue, rather than one of energy, anticipation, collaboration, and creativity permeates a significant portion of our work together. The atmosphere can only be classified as one of familial estrangement as a result of such silo mentalities, misperceptions, competition for resources, and fear of stating the obvious.

Where Are We Going?

Have you ever taken the time to stop, look around, and honestly assess what’s happening? Or perhaps you’ve found yourself asking that same question, “Where are we going?” Let me assure you, it can be a scary query, simply because of the potential responses to that basic question. In our particular case, the answer seemed to be that we were moving forward, but our path had the great potential of leading us to Stressed Out City or the Berg of Burnout. So proficient had we become at our exercise of “dance around the elephant in the room,” that there remained little energy for creativity or joy. In our myopic state, the focus was squarely on our own needs and departments. Not surprisingly, the more we retreated into our particular silo, the less we experienced the synergy that comes from collaboration and collegiality. For the most part, motivation levels remained high because of the incredible dedication and passion for Christ that was deep-seated within those who were on board. However, the levels of frustration and emerging anger were just as high. In some cases, apathy cut off accomplishment, and passive-aggressive behavior often characterized relationships between various

departments. We remained proficient at our assigned tasks, yet there was little delight in our evident ingenuity. As the pace began to quicken in our movement toward the marathon of year-end activities, tensions mounted, initiative lagged, and the assessment of business as usual was palpable. The reality is the staff, lay and clergy alike, were on board, but I'm pretty sure the impending destination was not one of God's choosing.

Yet, a way station began to materialize on the horizon as plans were already underway for the completion of a new administrative building. Once completed, for the first time the entire staff would have the opportunity of being housed under one roof. But this had all the potential of a double-edged sword. It seems the proximity might also highlight those conflicts that exist between personalities and departments. No longer could a person simply retreat to his or her side of the campus. Additionally, because the various departments would now have their own office suites, walls and doors could easily serve as that "invisible protective shield," providing a physical barrier to community. Thus, meeting these challenges head-on, before divisive patterns began to form in this new building, also became a very important factor to address. To be sure, our new home was a short trek across a parking lot. But how we made that trek could make the difference between the addition of chaos and the provision for a stepping stone to synergy. For me, the latter outcome would surely mean we had arrived at the promised land.

CHAPTER TWO

EVERY COMPASS POINTS NORTH

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." Genesis 12:1

Traveling Companions

Biblical Travel Tales

From the time of the Garden expulsion, God's people have continuously been on the move, but they have never been alone. God always calls us to a journey that will move us ever closer into a relationship with God and one another. Sometimes, like Abram, we choose to heed that call immediately, leaving behind what is comfortable and familiar in order to move into a place that is unknown, yet chosen by God. Other times, like Jacob, the impetus for our journey is a bit less altruistic because our mindset and actions have compelled us to place ourselves before others. Occasionally, it is the journey itself that brings about a realization that relationship, rather than real estate, is the essential ingredient in a life that is fulfilling and modeled after the example of Christ. Certainly such was the case with Ruth and Naomi.

Unfortunately, there are also lengthy journeys that are continuously marked by misunderstanding, aggression, self-promotion, and dysfunctional relationships. Perhaps they are instigated by the patriarch who has the best of intentions, but unknowingly sets his offspring up for strife and failure. Truly we are unable to delve too far into the stories

of our ancestors in the faith before coming across such a tale as shared in the concluding chapters of Genesis. Jacob's entire family was infected with the disease of jealousy. Although this malady emerged early on, it wasn't contained there, and as Jacob grew, so did the cloud of suspicion and mistrust that surrounded him. Wives and concubines sought out his time. His children grappled for their father's favor while struggling with his inordinate expressions of affection for Joseph. It is an age-old story, no doubt included in the biblical account because it so authentically speaks to our basic human nature. No wonder, then, our staff is impacted by such strong emotions that echo across the centuries, or that they harbor feelings of scarcity and rivalry. As well, the resultant misdeeds that emerge from such emotions should come as no surprise. Like Joseph, is Worship the "golden child" that will continue to foster growth at the church? Has the excessive focus on this department contributed to some of our estrangement? Did Joseph contribute to the hostility within *his* family through an "innocent" delight in the attentions of his father, and can the same be said of any of our departments and their ministries? Are there, in fact, some lessons that can be learned from observing not only the brothers' responses but also Joseph's eventual determination to remain faithful, forgive, and do what was best for his family, utilizing God-given wisdom and encouragement?

Authors Benjamin and Rosamund Stone Zander challenge this mindset of scarcity in their pivotal book on possibilities as they point out the very selective nature of the information that we receive and our learned response of comparison and measuring ourselves against the standard of others. Being aware of this tendency, they contend, enables us to make choices that lead to much more productive and felicitous conclusions.

All the manifestations of the world of measurement—the winning and losing, the gaining of acceptance, and the threatened rejection, the raised hopes and the dash into despair—all are based on a single assumption that is hidden from our awareness...*surviving* in a world of scarcity and peril. Even when life is at its best in the measurement world, this assumption is the backdrop for the play...it keeps the universe of possibility out of view.¹

It's these measurements that draw us into a mentality both of resource deprivation and of hierarchical rankings. In this skewed version of life, if what I have is always limited by what *you* own, true relationships are extremely difficult to forge. But, in Zanders' "Universe of Possibility," life's containers and boundaries are expanded

to include all worlds: infinite, generative, and abundant. Unimpeded on a daily basis by the concern for survival, free from the generalized assumption of scarcity, a person stands in the great space of possibility in a posture of openness, with an unfettered imagination for what can be... We gain our knowledge by invention...the action...may be characterized as generative, or giving, in all senses of that word- producing new life, creating new ideas, consciously endowing with meaning...The relationship *between* people and environments is highlighted, not the people and things themselves. Emotions that are often relegated to the special category of spirituality are abundant here: joy, grace, awe, wholeness, passion, and compassion.²

The authors go on to note what Jesus has known all along, that an attitude of abundance and generosity somehow attracts more abundance. Resources are likely to come to you in greater profusion when you are generous and inclusive and engage people in your passion for life, and with that orientation, you care less about being in control.³

The lesson of Joseph and his family serves to illustrate this paradox. For the brothers who were so focused on their perceived lack that they took matters into their

¹ Rosamund Stone and Benjamin Zander, *The Art of Possibility: Transforming Professional and Personal Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), Kindle 18 of 206.

² Ibid., 19-20 of 206.

³ Ibid., 20 of 206.

own hands in an effort to rid themselves of the source of their perceived scarcity, found themselves in the midst of a great famine. All the while, their brother, Joseph, remained true to his calling as servant, relying on God's provision to carry him through betrayal, false accusations, and imprisonment. Ultimately, even the great distance between Canaan and Egypt was eclipsed by the transformational journey made *within* this family. For we find that the God of possibility uses estrangement, conflict, sorrow, and even famine to bring about reconciliation. When at last Joseph can proclaim "even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good..." (Gen. 50:20 NRSV), we too see the possibilities that can occur when we invite God to accompany us on our journey, whether that journey carries us to foreign lands, across parking lots, or to a new understanding within our own clan.

To be sure, Abram's tribe, Moses' Israelites, and David's family provide significant lessons in the fine art of the journey. Their imperfections give us hope that *our* rough edges, loss of direction, and tongues that can be foreign to kindness, gentleness, and love can somehow be changed with the changing of our hearts. But, it's not always easy! There are times, indeed, when like the Israelites, we would prefer to run back to those things that enslaved us, simply because they are familiar. Occasionally we even allow confusion to work to our advantage because it allows us the allusion of control or fosters a lack of accountability. Yet, "God is not the author of confusion" (1 Cor. 14:33 NRSV), and we've only to look to the Trinity to find an alternative model of operating within our family, whether that family be biological or collegial.

Trinitarian Interdependence

In the Christian understanding of God's triune nature and in our confession of faith as stated in the Apostles' Creed, the unique function of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is a reality. Yet, they continuously draw upon one another to accomplish the purpose of the whole. They work cooperatively to create, redeem, and sustain. Without each of these functions, the Christian life as we know it would cease to exist. This interdependent nature should, at a minimum, give us cause for consideration as to how our earthly relationships ought to operate. As is proclaimed in the first chapter of the Gospel according to John, verses 2-3, "He [the Son] was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made." Yet, in John 5:19, Jesus is clear about his connection to the Father as he asserts, "Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does." Jesus also gives us a clear picture of the Holy Spirit through John 7:13-14 as he declares, "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you." Thus, to achieve the common goal, there is a reciprocal nature found within the interior life of the Trinity. A nature that would surely stand us as a staff in good stead had we the courage to emulate it. Joseph Myers suggests that we would come closer to realizing this reciprocal nature if we were to shift the way we think and talk about the persons of the Trinity. He proposes that the utilization of verbs, as opposed to nouns, highlights the concept of an ongoing

process, which characterizes not only individuals, but the organic nature of people in community. “God describes himself with the verb ‘I am,’” he notes. “The Trinity is not three objects. The Trinity is a dance of three verbs. Three ‘I ams.’”⁴ None of us travels this world in isolation. Yet we can and do limit our interactions and relationships, simply by the way we speak of them. Like the blinders we wear as a result of narrowed possibilities, our stories may be limited to a litany of person, place, or thing. But Myers is convinced that the complexity of life demands the utilization of bold and brazen depictions of development.

How would it affect our theology if we emphasized God-verb in the same ways we have traditionally emphasized God-noun? Even more, God-verb relating with man-verb? Of God as moving, acting, doing, rather than God as sitting, motionless, static-relating to the changes and actions of mankind?...In a verb-centric world, Jesus is expressing relational characteristics experienced as you and he together explore way, truth, and life. In the latter view, way, truth, and life are continuing, ongoing; not final, not concluded.

Organic order is open sourced, less concerned with holding on, more intent with going forward in the messy, relational, living verb of who we are, who God is, and what our life and the lives of those we serve is indeed about.⁵

Paul also has much to say about how we are to interact with one another, most notably in his analogy of the need for diversity as found in I Corinthians 12. Those differences, he notes, are by *God's* design. For this reason alone, it is tremendously important that we recognize the contribution of every individual and the potential that exists within the larger group as a whole. Just as importantly, as members of Christ's body, our call is to glorify that body in every word and action. Our choice to derail others

⁴ Joseph R. Myers, *Organic Community: Creating a Place Where People Naturally Connect* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 152.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 153-156.

by withholding our participation and contributions actually serves to sabotage the Body of Christ. It is crucial that we recognize and acknowledge this reality. Certainly this is true for a congregation, but even more so for those of us who have been called to lead a particular flock. Therefore, if we are to live together in community as a staff in a way that encourages others to grow in Christ's image, it is critical that we are cognizant of our interactions with one another and that we are committed to finding ways of modeling appropriate, useful, and Christ-like behavior.

Of course, we're not the first to experience conflicts that arise within Christian community. The New Testament clearly records the discord between Peter and Paul. Truly, both were disciples, both committed to the cause of Christ, although Paul admittedly came to this position following his persecution of the "followers of the Way." Both were definitely defenders of the faith, willing to give their very lives to advance the Good News. Certainly, each was chosen and sent by God through the power of the Holy Spirit. Yet there was strong disagreement between these two pillars of the faith regarding what was clean and unclean and whether circumcision of the flesh or of the heart was essential. As the result of a God-given trance, in Caesarea Peter was able to respond to Cornelius, a devout non-Jew, and his fellow Gentiles, "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34-35 NRSV). However, the peer pressure emanating from the Jerusalem Jews caused Peter to so waver in his resolve that we hear these words from Paul:

But when Cephas (Peter) came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood self-condemned; for until certain people came from James, he

used to eat with the Gentiles. But after they came, he drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction. And the other Jews joined him in this hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?" (Gal. 2:11-14 NRSV)

Such dissent was public, divisive, and probably quite nasty. John Stott summarizes

Peter's abrupt change by noting:

Only a short while previously...Peter had been granted a direct, special revelation from God that Gentiles who believed must be welcomed into the Christian church. There is no suggestion in Galatians 2 that Peter had changed his mind...

Paul's charge is that Peter and the others acted in insincerity and not from personal conviction...Their withdrawal from table-fellowship with Gentile believers was not prompted by any theological principle, but by craven fear of a small pressure group. The same Peter who had denied his Lord for fear of a maidservant now denied him again for fear of the circumcision group.⁶

Would the believers respond by splitting into factions, possibly forever damaging the effectiveness of their community to witness to Christian love? Or might there be a way that not only resolved this particular issue, but also could serve as a model for resolving opposing understandings of other foundational teachings?

In the Wesleyan tradition, the Quadrilateral of scripture, tradition, reason, and experience is utilized to great benefit when one tackles such thorny theological issues as this early Christian community faced. And one might envision John Wesley drawing on the tenets of events such as the Jerusalem Council for the formulation of these guidelines; for it is scripture, indeed, to which these early Christians turned to discern the foundational path to which they were being called. But that turning only occurred after

⁶ John Stott, *Galatians: Experiencing the Grace of Christ* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 23.

“Paul and Barnabas had no small dissent and debate with them. Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the apostles and the elders” (Acts 15:2-3). Thus it was crucial that everyone had the opportunity to bring their concerns, input, and insight to the table. And ultimately it was through searching the scriptures and listening to the words of the prophets, utilizing the experience of what God was doing among the Gentiles, and reasoning together that a consensus was reached and community was enhanced. Silo smashing of individual ministries gave way to the synergy of enhanced understanding and provided the opportunity for the transformation of the Gentile world. When we limit people’s involvement to only what *we* see, or confine them to using only the methods *we* deem relevant, we pigeonhole them and close ourselves off to a wealth of possibilities. We also imply that we don’t trust them.⁷ God had entrusted the future of Christianity to this small band of believers. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the cause of Christ triumphed through an intentional gathering and decision to trust one another. Stott notes that “if Paul had not taken his stand...either the whole Christian church would have drifted into a Jewish backwater and stagnated, or there would have been a permanent rift between Gentile and Jewish Christendom.”⁸ How critical it is, then, that we begin to learn how to talk to one another in a manner that promotes one’s ability to speak the truth in love. Church consultant and pastor Mike Bonem would see a close correlation to church leadership in

⁷ Myers, *Organic Community: Creating a Place Where People Naturally Connect*, 60.

⁸ Stott, *Galatians: Experiencing the Grace of Christ*, 24.

our day as he recognizes that effective leadership requires particular tools but also skills and understanding beyond the proficient use of such tools. Using the analogy of a large construction project, he reminds his readers that:

...a team of people—architects, construction managers, various trades—bring their expertise together to build something much greater than any could have done individually...the complex, multidimensional task of leadership calls for a team, not just one individual.⁹

It is precisely through diversity, then, that we have the opportunity to enhance the leadership and ministry of the church. In so doing, we also have the prospect of modeling a means of moving through conflict and differences in a way that actually enables us to be co-creators with God, rather than an assortment of demolition experts.

Love—and Conflict—It Does a Body Good

Travels to Corinth

While the admonitions of I Corinthians 13 are often echoed within the marriage ceremony, it is to the Christian community at Corinth that Paul actually pens his reminder. As if he were speaking to *this* staff in *this* age, Paul reminds us that we may have all sorts of amazing and God-given abilities. We may be able to create the absolutely perfect worship experience, most unique Christian education program, vital mission plans, effective evangelism and outreach activities, and permeate the World Wide Web with our presence. But if such creation is not a labor of love, if it isn't done in a way that affirms rather than affronts others, we are simply spinning our wheels. As he clearly defines it, *real* love is patient, kind, not envious, boastful, arrogant, or rude. It

⁹ Mike Bonem, *In Pursuit of Great and Godly Leadership: Tapping the Wisdom of the World for the Kingdom of God* (San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2012), 148.

doesn't insist on its own way, isn't irritable or resentful, and rejoices only in the truth (1 Cor.13:4-6 NRSV).

In declaring to the community at Corinth their status as both the body of Christ and individual members of that body, Paul points out this more “excellent way” of being in relationship with people. It is the way called love. For, truly, love does a body—and *the* body—good. Additionally, it is, in fact, the only constant in this world and the next. It's this kind of agape love that will carry us individually and as a body through the challenges of life and of ministry. In comparing it with *eros* love, Raymond Brown points out that:

Agapē (love), on the other hand, is unmotivated: it confers goodness on the object loved. Thus *agapē* starts with God who needs nothing from creatures but by love brings them into being and ennobles them. In particular, Paul's notion of love is based on the self-giving Christ, who loved us not because we were good but while we were still sinners. The eloquent personification of love in 1 Cor. almost makes love and Christ interchangeable. Given worth by Christ's *agapē*, we become the channel of passing that love on to others...not evaluating their goodness and without motivation.¹⁰

As he continues his correspondence with the faith community in Corinth, Paul encourages that our old way of thinking and acting is made new as we become a part of Christ and that we are called to be messengers of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:19-20). What better image of our reconciliation to God than to be reconciled to those with whom we do ministry? Indeed, Paul's commitment to do everything within his power to see that the community of believers in Corinth would flourish underscores *his* persistence in acting and speaking the truth in love. And he seems well aware of the consequences that a

¹⁰ Raymond E. Brown, S.S., *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 533-4.

failure to live out of Christian love will bring. “Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you,” (2 Cor. 13:11 NRSV) he beseeches the people of Corinth—and of this staff.

As he journeyed, Paul’s call to love wasn’t confined to Corinth. In fact, like the heart of the Good News itself, love is the core ingredient that makes every faith community work, both then and now. In Galatia, he commands the believers to recognize the truth that differences are dissolved when we become a part of Christ’s body, “...for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28b). In Ephesus he reminds the community that Christ has “broken down the dividing wall...the hostility between us” (Ephesians 2:14) so that through Christ we also “are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God” (Ephesians 2:22). Then he pleads, “...lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit” (Ephesians 4:1-3). In Philippi he endeavors to ensure the Christian community is “standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel” (Phil. 1:27b), with that mind being like that of Christ who chose to humble himself, regarding others in the highest esteem, and focusing on those things that are true, honorable, just, pure, commendable, and excellent (Phil 4:8). In Thessalonica he urges the brothers and sisters in Christ, “Be at peace among yourselves,” (1 Thes. 4:13) and, “do not be weary in doing what is right” (2 Thes. 3:13).

Travels to Collosae

However, it is through that letter to the community at Colossae that we have a clearer picture of why and how this thing called a loving community might come to pass. In our humanity and under our own strength, the promotion of self will often eventually contribute to the dissolution of relationships. Yet William Barclay comments that Paul has addressed this very failing in our nature by pointing to its remedy: “Love is the binding power which holds the whole Christian body together. The tendency of any body of people is sooner or later to fly apart; love is the one bond which will hold them together in unbreakable fellowship.”¹¹ Like the community at Colossae, we have allowed our differences and our personal passions to shift our focus from the reason of our calling. “Lead lives worthy of the Lord,” Paul encourages, “fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and grow in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:10). Our purpose as individuals and as a staff is to bear fruit—much fruit—for the cause of Christ. That is, our mission is to be fruit bearers rather than fruit *inspectors* who find fault with the plans, motives, and actions of others. Additionally, we are called to “grow in the knowledge of God.”

Union with Christ is not a static relationship. It is seen in terms of growth, leading to perfection or maturity. Those who are united to Christ have been filled, but the writer can also pray that they may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will. Again there is an “already” and a “not yet” pattern to Christian existence. Believers have been given what is needed, but they must also appropriate this if they are to move toward their fullest potential. They have

¹¹ William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1975), 159.

received Christ Jesus the Lord, but are exhorted to continue to live their lives in him and are warned about the consequences of not continuing and holding fast.¹²

What better place to do that than in the company of other Christians who come together to share their knowledge and wisdom and to collaborate on the discernment of God's will for the direction of our ministry together as did the Jerusalem Council? Paul goes a step farther and describes how that can be accomplished.

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above...Set your minds on things that are above...Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly...now you must get rid of all such things: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its Creator. In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and all! (Col 3:1-11)

As with these early Christians, we must no longer be a variety of departments, ministry areas, or programs with little or no relationship to one another. Rather, because we have each abandoned our old selves through the act of baptism and are being called to subject our baser actions to that same death, we have the opportunity to live in such a way that Christ is visible in us as we interact with one another.

...Paul goes on to lay down a series of ethical principles which make it quite clear that he expects the Christian to go on with the work of this world and to maintain all its normal relationships. But there will be this difference—from now on the Christian will view everything against the background of eternity and no longer live as if this world was all that mattered...Things which the world thought important, he will no longer worry about. Ambitions which dominated the

¹² Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Letter to the Colossians*, vol. 11 of *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 574.

world will be powerless to touch him...He will, for instance, set giving above getting, serving above ruling, forgiving above avenging.¹³

If we can truly move to a place that Christ, through Paul, calls us, our competitive natures might be utilized in a way that begins to solve problems, rather than create them. As the body of Christ, a body with an *eternal* perspective, our potential to worship, teach, and serve in ways that honor Christ and invite others to join in the journey could be realized in powerful ways. What a difference it could make, indeed, if we can come to a place of choosing to wear new attitudes and don new “clothes.”

As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony...And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God...(Col 3:1-17).

Barclay points the reader to the fact that “every one of the graces listed has to do with personal relationships between [hu]man and [hu]man...the great basic Christian virtues are those which govern human relationships. Christianity is community.”¹⁴ To this, Lincoln would add, “Peace, the reconciling activity of Christ...is to be appropriated particularly in the new community and allowed to rule. And what is necessary above all, if this community is to be what it is meant to be, is love.”¹⁵

For all of Paul’s admonitions and calls for unity, however, we still find the reality of human nature within his relationships as he, too, found himself at odds with others. As

¹³ Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, 147.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹⁵ Lincoln, *The Letter to the Colossians*, vol.11 of *The New Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, 575.

noted above, sometimes it was over hard-core theological issues. But, other times, differences seem to have arisen out of personality conflicts. That appears to be the case with his desire to eliminate Mark from his band of travelers as he prepared to return to those Christian communities they had established. “Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. But Paul decided not to take with them one who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not accompanied them in the work” (Acts 15:37-39). We’re not told the cause of the “desertion” or even if that was just Paul’s perspective on what had happened. What we *do* know is that John Mark wasn’t denied the opportunity to witness in other places. Neither was he so ostracized from the community as to be rendered useless. On the contrary, as a result of this “sharp” disagreement, Barnabas and John Mark, instead, set sail for Cyprus, which doubled the evangelistic effort. Thus, rather than derailing the expansion of the Good News, conflict provided the very vehicle by which it might be accomplished. Reunion made that expansion even sweeter.

Colossians 4:10, which assumes the same situation as Philemon...elaborates the picture of this Mark: he is the cousin of Barnabas. I Peter, written from Rome, identifies Mark as Peter’s “son” who is with him there. In II Timothy 4:11, when Paul is purportedly dying in prison, he asks that Mark be brought to him, “for his service is useful to me.” He (John Mark) was known to Peter in Jerusalem; he was subsequently a companion of Paul, but quarreled with him in the 46-50 period; after a few years this Mark was reconciled to the apostle and once more became a companion, ultimately coming to Rome in the 60s where he was useful to both Paul and Peter before their martyrdom.¹⁶

David Sawyer has long sought to understand this reality of conflict within the context of Church. Although his studies have dealt with *congregational* conflict, the

¹⁶ Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 159.

application to church staff is an easy stretch because in both cases people, structure, and stories are key ingredients. In speaking about this “mystery of church conflict,” he writes

...any thinking about church life has to take into account the communal nature of the church and the ways people relate to each other...My hunches about church conflict flow from these theological and theoretical insights. First, I have a hunch that no theory of church [staff] life is sufficient without an understanding of the *interconnectedness* of the various complex factors of a church’s [staff] life. And second, I have a hunch that an adequate approach to church [staff] conflict must account for *change*.¹⁷

He goes on to say that conflict may accompany either the tension brought about by the transformation that is happening or about to happen, or attend a system that needs to change to adapt and survive but that is stuck in its current comfortable ways of functioning.¹⁸ To be sure, the early Church was being transformed day by day as more were added to their numbers. Viewed as an opportunity toward transformation, we, too, as staff leaders may find that God can use the impetus of our turmoil to generate a new kind of interconnectedness that resembles a rainbow rather than a storm cloud. That certainly seems to be the case with Paul and John Mark for we eventually find Paul in Rome languishing in chains, but calling for Timothy to “get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful in my ministry” (2 Tim. 4:11b). Sometimes, we, too, must realize that there will be occasions when it is simply best to agree to disagree. When Christian love is maintained as the basis for our relationships, conflict doesn’t result in the lopping off of a branch. Rather, that branch can be lovingly encouraged to grow in a different

¹⁷ David R. Sawyer, *Hope in Conflict: Discovering Wisdom in Congregational Turmoil* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2007), 22.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 97.

direction, providing balance to the whole of the tree. More importantly, we can celebrate what God is doing in the midst of our faithfulness as God continues to nurture this new growth through love and grace.

There is no practical or compelling reason to leave one's present comfort zone in life.¹⁹ That truth gives us cause to celebrate the very real role that conflict can play in our ability to move beyond our comfort zone and beyond a somewhat peaceful coexistence to a place that more fully resembles what God has in mind for us as the Church. Richard Rohr talks about the necessary crucible where we are *forced* to face the issues of life at a deeper level and then notes, correctly I think, "*before the truth 'sets you free,' it tends to make you miserable.*"²⁰ Such misery lingers within the tension between "wonderful and terrible," yet is necessary if we are to choose a path that leads us closer to Christ. Individually, Rohr proposes that we are both "sent and drawn by the same Force [of] alpha and omega. We are both driven and called forward by a kind of deep homesickness...there is an inherent and *desirous dissatisfaction*...and it comes from our original and radical union with God."²¹ But I believe that this same state of dissatisfaction with where we are as a staff can be utilized to "drive and call" us forward as a staff. If Rohr is correct that "sin is to stay on the *surface* of even holy things," then our recognition of conflict as a catalyst can serve an eternal purpose as long as we

¹⁹ Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* (San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2011), 66.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 74.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 89.

maintain a spirit of love, based on grace not condemnation. The spirit of organic community is grace, not law; “editability,” not accountability.²² But Rohr nails our tendencies when he notes, “We invariably prefer the universal synthesis, the answer that settles all the dust and resolves every question—even when it is not entirely true—over the mercy and grace of God.”²³ What we need, then, is a celebration of the ways *we* have received grace upon grace, individually and within the community of this staff. We will need to be reminded that conflict-driven change, like love, does a body good.

The Call to Community

In our Great Thanksgiving consecration liturgy there is a call to communion, not only with Christ, but with one another. It is a tangible and palpable reminder that we *are* the body of Christ for those of this age. As a prelude to this holy meal, the officiate prays,

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood.

By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory, and we feast at his heavenly banquet...²⁴

Such is our desire to be “one with Christ.” Yet, it becomes impossible when we are estranged from our traveling companions. Jesus even prohibits our approach to the altar to offer our gifts until we have been reconciled with the one who has something

²² Myers, *Organic Community: Creating a Place Where People Naturally Connect*, 138.

²³ Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*, 56.

²⁴ “A Service of Word and Table,” *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2001), 14.

against us (Matthew 5:23-24). Therefore, reconciliation is a key component of this call to community. As well, so is an understanding that we can be unified without the requirement for uniformity. Certainly we can disagree without being disagreeable.

For such is what it means to be a follower of the Way—to travel in the footsteps of the Man who gave up his divine resources in order to show us what a truly human and abundant life might look like. “Those who do not love a brother or sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: Those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also” (1 John 4:20b-21). Yet the reality is, often it’s easier to love at a distance without all the messiness of day-to-day interaction. But Jesus is also clear that it is our love for one another that will serve to delineate us as his disciples (John 13:35).

As recorded in scripture, from the beginning, God moves and creates in the midst of relationship. “Let *us* make humankind in *our* image, according to *our* likeness,” declares God in Genesis 1:26. Thus, being fully human implies the kind of interdependence as experienced in the Trinity, where one’s purpose cannot be fully realized without the complementary activity of the others within the relationship. Furthermore, even a cursory examination of Jesus’ life and ministry reveals a consistent context of community. In the calling of the twelve disciples, the sending out of witnesses two by two, and through the stories of Lazarus and his sisters, Jesus reminds us that we were made for community. In Matthew’s gospel, Jesus expands our understanding of such connections and redefines the concept of family, noting that “whoever does the will of my father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (Matthew 12:50 NIV).

However, as we have clearly seen from Paul's letters to the various Christian communities, we are not called to live in relationships marked by misunderstanding, envy, or conflict. We are not called to be a people living in fear. Yet because of a fear of differences, our staff has begun to focus on avoidance, ignoring the truth that creativity arises, in part, out of chaos and conflict. In so doing, we have turned a blind eye to the fact that good things can happen when we let ideas and perspectives collide, and then choose to collaborate toward resolution, maximizing our creativity. One has only to look at those Pauline letters to be reminded how difficult this calling can be, yet those ancient words still ring true today. As Paul reminds the church at Corinth, "For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ" (I Cor. 12:12 NRSV). Myers might characterize this as "responsible anarchy," which he views as being "about acting for the good of the group. It helps protect against 'group think.' It is an anomaly that is responsible for keeping the group together while at the same time preserving the individuality of each person."²⁵ As he continues to unfold his vision of "organic community," Myers draws from the resource of nature itself, noting the obvious incongruences. Yet even the great scientific minds are baffled that out of so much diversity comes a simplistic order—the order of creation working together. "I'm saying that just as fireflies and galaxies and heartbeats and seasons have organic order, so do we—as beings created by God."²⁶ And as those God-creatures, we, too, have the power to create something unique and precious in God's

²⁵ Myers, *Organic Community: Creating a Place Where People Naturally Connect*, 58-9.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 121.

economy. “Collaboration taps into this spirit of synchronicity,” Myers posits. “Like the organizational tool of growth, collaboration has a generative quality. It generates energy. It generates ideas. It generates power.”²⁷ But the kind of power that is released is not power *over*. Rather, it is one that is focused on serving others in a life-giving, unassuming way. Thus, it will behoove us to remember that our decision to pull together is not an option, just as Paul reminds the church at Philippi:

Therefore, if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others (Phil 2:1-4 NRSV).

When we have the kind of vision that sees others before self, then we have the possibility of realizing “organic community” in which the concept of an end product is supplanted by the “process of belonging” which complements the vision of community that God surely had in mind from the beginning.

The New Testament is filled with stories of the negative consequences that occur when we fail to heed these words. It is replete with the tragedies of lives driven by a mentality of scarcity and individual interest. Undoubtedly, such is the case because these attitudes are so common among us humans, in spite of the fact that they negatively impact the entire community of faith and its mission.

Scarcity is a worldview; it is not necessarily the truth. I’ve known people who have more than enough, yet they live with a worldview of scarcity. I’ve also known people who don’t have enough, yet they live with a spirit of abundancy.

²⁷ Ibid., 123.

We've all seen stingy wealthy persons and generous poor persons. The spirit of scarcity is a personal view of the resources available.²⁸

However, Robert Quinn is correct in his assessment that, “At both individual and organizational levels, we tend to choose slow death over deep change.”²⁹ To move beyond an attitude of scarcity will, indeed, be an indicator of deep change for us. Yet by claiming God’s promise that we weren’t given a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and self-discipline (2 Tim. 1:7 NLT), and by transferring our eyes from ourselves to the possibility of plenty, there is great potential in this journey, as well as the possibility of moving into what Quinn refers to as the “fundamental state” in which we become more purpose-centered, other-focused, and externally open.³⁰ With this change in perspective, we can shift Quinn’s query of “what result do I want to create”³¹ and ask the more encompassing question posed by Peter Block: “what can we create together,” knowing that often these and other questions we will contemplate will be more transformative than the answers.³²

As a counterbalance to such attitudes of scarcity, through parable and personal example, Jesus continues to call us to transformation by grounding our thoughts and

²⁸ Ibid., 161.

²⁹ Robert E. Quinn, *Building The Bridge As You Walk On It: A Guide for Leading Change* (San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2004), 19.

³⁰ Ibid., 21.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2009), 101.

actions in love. Rohr believes this is more likely as we advance chronologically and that “in the second half of life, it is good just to be a part of the general dance.”³³ I have found this to be true. However, I think we can also draw from this same idea with regard to a *spiritual* second half and become the kind of “generative” people who truly desire to “generate life from his or her own abundance and for the benefit of following generations.”³⁴ But we must also take into account Rohr’s warning regarding our shadow self as we as staff leaders begin to gather to consider our stories:

Be especially careful therefore of any idealized role or self-image, like that of minister, mother, doctor, nice person, professor, moral believer, or president of this or that. These are huge personas to live up to, and they trap many people in lifelong delusion... Your persona is what most people want from you and reward you for, and what you choose to identify with, for some reason... once you create a self-justifying story line, your emotional entrapment with it quadruples!³⁵

If, however, we can be more authentic with ourselves and one another and move from a place of suspicion to one of trust, we have the opportunity of becoming that organic community that cuts itself some slack and lives into the possibilities we can create together, for truly “organic order allows a spirit of diversity, individuality, creativity, and wholeness to emerge.”³⁶

For this or any other positive transformation to occur, however, that foundation of trust must be established within the group. As Bonem aptly states:

³³ Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*, 120.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 121.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 128-9.

³⁶ Myers, *Organic Community: Creating a Place Where People Naturally Connect*, 67.

Spiritual leaders often want to pronounce the vision and have everyone fall in line. Broad involvement is unattractive because it takes more time, opens them to more criticism, and means they have less control of the outcome...[but] “leadership begins with listening.” When people in the organization feel their voice has been heard, their buy-in to the vision increases dramatically. When a leader listens to others, he or she will often hear God speaking as well...Spirit-led planning occurs most effectively in the context of trust-based relationships and honest discussion.³⁷

A Hidden Wholeness provides a lengthy strategy for creating those kinds of trust-based relationships. Author Parker Palmer speaks about the generous, wise, hopeful, creative nature of our souls and the *need* to find those places that can facilitate a better awareness of its true nature. His preferred method of achieving this quest is through participation in a facilitated “circle of trust.” And although our anticipated time together will not allow for all of the elements found in this type of coming together, his idea of “weaving community in a wounded world” provides great insight into the means of fostering the trust that will surely be needed if we are to emerge as a community that more closely resembles that depicted by Block and Myers. Perhaps as a foretaste of the obstacles that might lie ahead, Palmer points out that

people who feel at risk of losing touch with their souls will say that they need such a circle [of trust]. Yet they often claim that their fragmented and frenzied lives—the lives that put them at risk—make it impossible for them to join! The very situation that creates our need for safe space seems to prevent us from getting what we need.³⁸

Palmer goes on to reiterate what we’ve heard from Block, that participation must be voluntary and, just as importantly, that the participants must be given the freedom to be

³⁷ Bonem, *In Pursuit of Great AND Godly Leadership*, 55-57.

³⁸ Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward An Undivided Life* (San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2004), 72.

themselves, to bring their ideas and their individuality. He, too, like Block, is particular about the ambiance of the space in which these interactions occur. But Palmer also takes the time to speak clearly about the fallacy of “fixing, saving, advising, and setting each other straight” as he asks:

How can we understand another when instead of listening deeply, we rush to repair that person in order to escape further involvement? The sense of isolation and invisibility that marks so many lives...is due in part to a mode of “helping” that allows us to dismiss each other.

When you speak to me about your deepest questions, you do not want to be fixed or saved: you want to be seen and heard, to have your truth acknowledged and honored.³⁹

Deep-level listening, appropriate space, and a true invitation, will be essential in setting the stage for trust to emerge within this staff community. While it is obvious that this kind of trust won’t emerge on Day One, I believe under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we each can be moved to such a place over the course of our conversations. And it is a place much to be desired, not only in this context, but in all of our relationships. So, if we can get it right here, we can model for others the power of trust which even the secular world recognizes as absolutely essential. Mike Bonem echoes this need as he shares this advice from leading business thinkers:

Kouzes and Posner break the stereotype of the domineering leader by stating, “A leader-constituent relationship that’s characterized by fear and distrust will never, ever produce anything of lasting value. A relationship characterized by mutual respect and confidence will overcome the greatest adversities and leave a legacy of significance.”⁴⁰

³⁹ Ibid., 117.

⁴⁰ Bonem, *In Pursuit of Great AND Godly Leadership*, 81.

Laughing All The Way

When I was growing up, my favorite part of the Reader's Digest was the section entitled "Laughter is the Best Medicine." Little did I know that it was derived from the wisdom of Solomon as he proclaimed "a cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones" (Prov. 17:22 NRSV). And I think that the second half of this proverb is just as instructive as the first, for it is a palpable image of where we find ourselves as a staff—parched and longing for a refreshing that doesn't seem to be on the horizon. In Palmer's experience, it is laughter that can emerge when we explore the human condition so that it actually becomes a form of compassion or "feeling with."⁴¹ He goes even farther in his assessment to say that within his circle of trust, "our laughter helped us hold our concern more lightly, increasing the odds that we would deal with it more lovingly...and that laughter can be as helpful as silence in bringing us closer to the sacred."⁴² Perhaps that is why Jesus calls for the little children and advises his disciples "for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Mat. 9:14 NRSV). Not only is it the innocence of the children that Jesus commends, it is their ability, I believe, to plunge into life with reckless abandon and to laugh in a way that sets their souls free. Surely we are not too old to take a lesson from their ability just to be delighted by life. In play and in the laughter that results from it, dividing walls seem to crumble and our differences somehow become pathways to our connectedness. In fact, entertainer Victor Borge quips that laughter is the shortest distance between two people. However, too often we fail to

⁴¹ Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward An Undivided Life*, 154.

⁴² Ibid.

take the time for play—to become more of who we really are and less distanced from others.

Yet, in the adult world, sometimes play has gotten a bad rap and those who do take the time for it are viewed as being negligent. “The idea of fun is further complicated by getting associated with irresponsible frivolity, destructive behaviors, or self-indulgent hedonism,”⁴³ concludes Dr. Adam Blatner. However, studies have shown when one represses the natural urge for play, it can lead to a variety of forms of behaviors that negatively impact his or her ability to adequately and appropriately function in society. Research aside, the lack of play simply clouds and crowds out one’s sense of adventure and, by extension, one’s creative processes. On the other hand, play through “spontaneity involves a quality of mind, the active opening of which accompanies the thinking of a new idea or trying something a new way. It involves thinking afresh, balancing impulse and restraint, and integrating imagination, intuition, and reason. It is the process by which inspiration enters creativity.”⁴⁴ Spontaneity is diametrically opposed to habit and fosters interaction in the here and now, rather than a passive return to old patterns of being.

Barbara Brannen goes a step farther and simply admonishes “figure out why you are doing it [any chore], get it out of the way, and then make it fun or stop.”⁴⁵ For Brannen, it is play that gives life focus, creates energy, unlocks joy, and allows the heart

⁴³ Dr. Adam and Allee Blatner, *The Art of Play: Helping Adults Reclaim Imagination and Spontaneity* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, Inc., 1997), 6.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁵ Barbara Brannen, *The Gift of Play: Why Adult Women Stop Playing and How to Start Again* (San Jose: Writers Club Press, 2002), Kindle 115 of 147.

to sing. Play is what enables us to move to a position of wealth that has nothing to do with finances. “This feeling of prosperity comes from creating a feeling of wealth with what we have. Appreciating what we have can be found in our play.”⁴⁶ And while her findings indicate that on the whole, men take many more opportunities to play than their responsible female counterparts, within our staff culture both women *and* men devote arduous hours to work because value is placed on accomplishment and a task well done. Interestingly, both are most often measured in terms of their degree of creativity and innovation. It appears that our nose-to-the-grindstone attitudes have not only served to maintain our silos, but may have also stifled the very thing that we value and strive to attain. After all, it’s not too great a stretch to look at some of the flora and fauna God created and believe that there was great play and laughter in the process! But perhaps the greatest call to this idea of play comes from Dr. Stuart Brown, who proclaims, “If we can continue to play together, we will always be able to find emotional closeness, always be able to find novelty and make discoveries not only about those we love, but also about ourselves.”⁴⁷ Almost in the same breath, Brown warns about the downside associated with the failure to play:

When we get play *right*, all areas of our lives go better. When we ignore play, we start having problems. When someone doesn’t keep an element of play in their life, their core being will not be light. Play gives us the irony to deal with

⁴⁶ Ibid., 21 of 147.

⁴⁷ Stuart Brown, M.D and Christopher Vaughn, *Play: How it Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul* (New York: Avery, 2009), Kindle 174 of 218.

paradox, ambiguity, and fatalism. Without that, we are like the Woody Allen character in *Annie Hall*, who says, “What’s the use?”⁴⁸

Truly, the condition described by the writer of Proverbs thousands of years ago, remains our *human* condition. But by adding the element of play, we can move from our heavy, dark, driedup selves and relationships into that kind of community that refuses to take itself so seriously that it snaps like a twig when buffeted about by deadlines or resources or personalities. And as a bonus, Dr. Brown encourages that “fear and play cannot go together.”⁴⁹ So, as we come to our time together, the “nourishing nature” of play can fill us and sustain us just as surely as the meals we will share together. And as we begin, we will have two allies on our hands: perfect love and play!

I Love To Tell the Story

Finally, no story is complete without the stories of its characters. Storytelling has always been at the heart of being human because it serves some of our most basic needs: passing along our traditions, confessing failings, healing wounds, engendering hope, strengthening our sense of community.⁵⁰ There is something in the honest telling of those stories that also helps break down walls as we become vulnerable before one another *and* find common ground. Drawing on the work of Henry Nelson Wieman, David Sawyer identifies four dimensions of health, each of which impacts and colors our version of our

⁴⁸ Ibid., 201 of 218.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 214 of 218.

⁵⁰ Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life*, 122.

own and the greater story. He points to the following as indicators of progress toward transformation:

- Increased knowledge and expanding awareness of truth,
- Increased respect for the dignity of difference among persons.
- Deepening of community among its [staff] members and between members and those outside the system
- Growing ability for [staff] members to take positive mutual action in response to events.⁵¹

But before we can begin to talk about the transforming stories we will tell, we must listen to the ones that are being told in the present and begin to truly hear what is being said behind and beyond the words because “*story* is the measure of community... the universal measurement of life.”⁵² Similarly, Carl Savage and William Presnell remind us that “reality is intentional, relational, and *storied*.”⁵³ By encouraging the telling of our stories, we can find a piece of ourselves in one another because our battle scars *and* our triumphs intersect in ways that we, perhaps, have never noticed or appreciated. We *are* a body that matters, with individual parts that are integral to our wholeness. But it will also be in the telling that we recognize the presence of God in the midst of our stories and our staff leadership community, and I can envision “God-sightings” become commonplace, rather than rare occurrences, as we journey, creating *new* stories together.

⁵¹ Sawyer, *Hope In Conflict: Discovering Wisdom in Congregational Turmoil*, 103.

⁵² Myers, *Organic Community: Creating a Place Where People Naturally Connect*, 79.

⁵³ Carl Savage and William Presnell, *Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Research Approach for Faith Communities* (Louisville: Wayne E. Oates Institute, 2008), 44.

From pastoral care and counseling, I've recognized both the positive and negative power that stories have. Left unexamined or unexpressed, stories have tremendous potential for holding the storyteller hostage, and interpretations and assumed ramifications can escalate, sometimes to the point of rendering the narrator immobile. In fact, in speaking about narrative therapy, Larry Golemon remarks:

First, the narratives we live by, handed down by culture and religious tradition, are so internalized that we may not see an alternative to them, especially when they become dysfunctional or unable to adapt to changing conditions. Second, these internalized narratives can be deconstructed by naming the ways they dominate or control our own lives. Finally, received narratives can be reconstructed or replaced by re-storying our lives according to newfound strengths and capacities for change.⁵⁴

I believe that our shared stories can move us into this place of reconstruction and re-storying so that the negative history of our time together begins to better resemble the blessed "*His-story*" that has always been present. Although he speaks about congregational identity, Gil Rendle's model of powerful stories seems to have direct application for our staff leadership's identity as well. Rendle advises that moving out of these weak, safe, former stories into a bold, better story is not a fabrication, but "an act of leadership because it tells a true story of the people that is different from the safe way in which they choose to tell their own story."⁵⁵ As has been discovered by others, our intentional conversations can serve to provide a means of relabeling those signposts on

⁵⁴ Larry A. Golemon, ed., *Finding Our Story: Narrative Leadership and Congregational Change* (Herndon, Virginia: The Alban Institute, 2010), 11.

⁵⁵ Gil Rendle, "Narrative Leadership and Renewed Congregational Identity," in *Finding Our Story: Narrative Leadership and Congregational Change*, ed. Larry A. Golemon (Herndon, Virginia: The Alban Institute, 2010), 25.

the old roads as well as erecting more positive ones that will point to the trail that lies ahead. Thus, those “problematic” stories of scarcity and mistrust—those limiting tales—can be transformed in the telling and the listening. Synergy can replace anxiety. This is made possible because “when we hold the story that another has shared with us, we hold onto something sacred and holy; sharing your own story and receiving the story of another is an exercise in sacred trust.”⁵⁶

However, like Moses leading his people out of bondage, Joseph longing for a change of heart in his brothers, and Paul bringing the story of a more excellent way of living, the messenger is not always perceived in the most glowing light. For that reason, *how* the telling of our stories is invited and encouraged will be a key factor in the effectiveness of this project. So I take to heart the insights of Richard Hester and Kelli Walker-Jones who share from their experiences:

When you take a not-knowing position, you are recognizing your limits, your finitude. You cannot understand a person, a group, or an institution all on your own. You have to learn from others, and you can only do this if you remain curious... There is a reciprocal relationship between having a curious, not-knowing stance toward others and having such a stance toward yourself. In fact, genuine curiosity toward others’ stories is grounded in curiosity about your own.⁵⁷

My understanding is that such a position also lets others know that *I* know that I’m not the expert, but simply a fellow traveler. I also think that my willingness to be

⁵⁶ Susan Beaumont, “Giants and Grasshoppers: Stories that Frame Congregational Anxiety” in *Finding Our Story: Narrative Leadership and Congregational Change*, ed. Larry A. Golemon (Herndon, Virginia: The Alban Institute, 2010), 102.

⁵⁷ Richard L. Hester and Kelli Walker-Jones, *Know Your Story and Lead with It: The Power of Narrative in Clergy Leadership* (Herndon, Virginia: The Alban Institute, 2009), 52.

vulnerable before others invites that reciprocal vulnerability, which is really the attitude we are called to assume in the first place. This kind of “higher ignorance” leaves us open to the possibilities of new information and new relationships, for “there is always something new and unexpected to be learned⁵⁸ about others—and *ourselves*.

Head ‘Em Up and Move ‘Em Out!

If, truly, we *become* what we tell and thus give a glimpse of what is possible,⁵⁹ then there are exciting paths ahead. What an opportunity our staff has to reframe the way we view our circumstances. By naming each departmental leader’s gifts, identifying how those gifts enhance the whole, providing intentional space for the sharing of stories, remembering the benefits of working together, laughing through play opportunities, and finding common ground, we have the potential of shifting our “family” metaphor to an image which reflects the “body of Christ” in “collaborative, creative community.” Peter Block notes, “To build community, we seek conversations where people show up by invitation rather than mandate, and experience an intimate and authentic relatedness. We have conversations where the focus is on the communal possibility and there is a shift in ownership...”⁶⁰ Through such conversations and shared experiences, possibilities for a community that is diverse, rather than divisive, can be realized as our staff culture is transformed to reflect new, preferred narratives. Will the Holy Spirit be able to work

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁵⁹ Lawrence Peers, “Expeditions into What Is Possible,” in *Finding Our Story: Narrative Leadership and Congregational Change*, ed. Larry A. Golemon (Herndon, Virginia: The Alban Institute, 2010), 43.

⁶⁰ Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, 93.

through me, the lay committee, and our staff leaders to facilitate this leg of the journey so that we begin to move into a place of unity and demonstrated Christian love? Can we start naming those things that hold us hostage and find ways to disagree without being disagreeable? Scripture provides witness to this hope while reminding us that it's not only a requirement, but an example set by others who have trod this road before, leaving a lasting testimony. As those also called to share the gospel, this is the challenge of what is yet to come.

CHAPTER THREE

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT IT

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

Proverbs 3:5-6

Having heard our history and our challenges, perhaps you can imagine that it was with a great sense of responsibility and not a little anticipation, that the Advisory Committee and I began to meet. Each member was intentionally and carefully chosen because he or she also represented a staff perspective. Within this committee of six, we assembled both laity and clergy, younger and older, long-tenured and relative newcomer, as well as support personnel and leads. In fact, in many ways, the committee itself resembled a microcosm of the eventual makeup of the Participant Group.

Essential Travel Gear

As we met throughout the fall, they, too, contributed to the sharing of stories of conflict and disappointment. With tears in her eyes and a trembling voice, one member spoke of not being able to return home for Christmas as anticipated because the rules changed in mid-stream as the call went out for “all hands on deck.” This was particularly troubling because not everyone was required to abide by the mandate. Another described a variety of shifts in job responsibilities based, in part, on the ambitions and comments of

other staff members. As he spoke, it was evident that his feelings of betrayal were profound. Clearly, miscommunication, confusion, and conflict didn't characterize *every* relationship, but it was obvious that these distractions were making a significant impact on our ability to do ministry together well. Yet, even as we shared seemingly negative stories, an underlying tone of hope and an expectation of better things to come was evident as well.

We *knew* we were worth saving and improving and evolving into what God was calling us to be. And over the course of a few months, *our* lines of communication were opened as we found invaluable resources for mapping out our upcoming expedition.

Ethnography

As we seven scouts continued to share our own stories and our observations of staff dynamics, we remained convinced that we had wonderful and dedicated traveling companions. Our challenge was finding ways to invite those companions to travel in the same direction. And for that task, we found Mary Clark Moschella to be invaluable in aiding our understanding of how that might occur. "*Ethnography*," she writes, "is a way of immersing yourself in the life of a people in order to learn something about and from them...[it] involves opening your eyes and ears to understand the ways in which people practice their faith."¹ Certainly, we were already fairly well immersed in the lives of our co-workers, but how often had we taken the time to *really* see what was in their hearts by truly hearing their stories? Moschella didn't offer a panacea. More importantly, she

¹ Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2008), 4.

provided life preservers in the form of practical pastoral leadership. After all, we each have been called to that role, whether labeled “lay” or “clergy,” and her introductory explanation of ethnography seemed to provide the perfect road map for what we were about to embark upon:

Doing ethnography is like studying navigational charts. Leaders who use ethnographic research can come to understand the currents of institutional life and how they can suddenly become treacherous. The forceful water doesn't go away as a result of studying it and being aware of it, but the study can help you learn how to navigate in it.²

Intentional Conversations

To actually seek out and honestly desire to hear those stories that made our staff who they were suddenly began to add new meaning and impetus to our planning meetings. We found that as we began to reveal more of our own journey and its subtle complexities, the more we found common ground and a renewed enthusiasm for the potential that lay ahead. Moschella's observation that “honest and clear communication tends to increase the personal well-being of the members of the group”³ certainly was borne out within our small Advisory Group, and our semi-monthly gatherings became something to look forward to, rather than just one more thing on the daily agenda. In fact, the freedom of expression, creative dreaming about the project's structure, and enhanced sense of being heard and valued was an unanticipated benefit, even before the project's official launch. But, then, discovering God at work in the midst of the mundane is always something to be celebrated!

² Ibid., 7.

³ Ibid., 14.

As we continued to dream and deliberate, we each knew that this was more than an “exercise.” Instead, it became an opportunity to watch what God, through God’s Spirit, would be able to do in and through us, as well as among the Participant Group. We felt strongly that it was important to be able to reframe our existing metaphor from “family,” with all of its garnered negative connotations, to something more theologically affirming. For example, in proclaiming certain days to be about the “family business,” we were asking the staff to actually be absent from *their* families. However, being able to focus on each person’s gifts and graces within the “body of Christ” was not only scriptural, it offered a more eternal perspective for what we were being asked to do. It also provided an opportunity for people to work within their gifting, and experience the pleasure that is derived when one is working within their area of strength. And beyond that, it afforded the opportunity of experiencing tangible ways that individual strengths complemented the whole. Additionally, one member noted that there was a vast difference between knowing *about* each other and actually knowing one another, and we agreed that it takes an investment of time and self to get to that place where we are more than just acquaintances. Thus, shared experiences became an important context for us as we moved closer to our date of departure.

Play

While further exploring former shared experiences, the most memorable ones, we found, were grounded in times of complete abandonment of all protocol and seriousness. Those times that we were simply invited to play were some of the most notable, but they had become fewer and fewer as we became more enmeshed in the business and busy-ness of

our numerical growth. Ultimately, when our improv guru introduced us to some great TED Talks regarding play, we knew that it was one element that had to become an integral part of the Participant Group's time together. What we had learned experientially, Stuart Brown confirmed through extensive story collecting:

What has become clear to me now is how play can become the cornerstone of all personal relationships, from everyday interactions to long-term love. In fact, I would claim that sustained emotional intimacy is impossible without play. This is true not only for married bliss, but for continued vitality in long-term friendships.⁴

In our previous times of play, what we thought we had experienced was a loosening of the lines of demarcation, a blurring of the “us versus them” mentality. But it turns out that that there was much more going on than just that, and it further heightened our desire to include play as a predictor of change among the staff leadership. “What play signals do is invite a safe, emotional connection, if even for an instant. Even in casual interactions [it] opens people up emotionally. It transforms a grim, fearful, and lonely world into a lively one.”⁵ Yeah, that’s what we want— transformation of the lively kind! Instinctively, we knew that it would be a bold move to include this element because play also means that there is a degree of vulnerability in stepping beyond our facades. Yet it also provides a relatively safe way to emulate the Jesus, who was described by the Hymn of Kenosis in Philippians 2. If we could empty ourselves *of* ourselves long enough to lower our defensive walls and engage one another in trivial, but meaningful, moments,

⁴ Stuart Brown, M.D. and Christopher Vaughn, *Play: How it Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul* (New York: Avery, 2009), Kindle e-book, 158 of 218.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 161 of 218.

perhaps we can also find a better course of action when we find ourselves at odds with each other. Brown remarks that “play is the lubrication that allows human society to work and individuals to be close to each other.”⁶ So, we packed a healthy dose of play into our knapsack, believing it *will* lubricate those intentional conversations and give us joy for the journey.

Elements of Direction

Theory U

Thus, an agreement on the utilization of intentional conversation, shared experiences, and play as a means of smashing some of those staff silos came relatively easy. But, how to incorporate those elements into a series of face-to-face events *and* how we would put a name with each of those faces soon became the topic of our next few conversations. As it turns out, our discernment about *their* discernment led us right to C. Otto Scharmer. Although a secular work, Scharmer’s *Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges* was exactly where we found ourselves: on the inverted half of the “U,” unfortunately. You see, it is Scharmer’s belief that all organizations have the capacity or potential for a kind of economic outlook: the “economics of destruction” or the “economics of creation.”⁷ Ironically, this process which Scharmer has formally captured and taught for the benefit of the corporate world plainly mirrors that self-emptying process to which Christ calls us as Christians and, particularly, as Christian leaders. In a 2008 interview,

⁶ Ibid., 163 of 218.

⁷ Otto C. Scharmer, *Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2009), 313.

Scharmer replies to George Hall's query about the "inner gate" found at the bottom of the

U:

To use the words of Brian Arthur, when you approach that threshold, everything that isn't essential must go. That threshold is, I believe, very much related to the essence of leadership...traced back to the word's root – the Indo-European word root of leadership is "Leith." The literal translation of that word is "to go forth across the threshold" or, in a different translation, "to die." In this context, "to die" means that you let go of the world that is known to you...The challenge you meet in the process is the challenge of fear, the fear to let your old self, your old identities, your old context, die in order to move into that which is wanting to emerge through you.⁸

Could it be that our willingness to let go in *all* things better enables us to receive what the Holy Spirit extends to us in terms of God's design, rather than our own? Is it possible that being a "leader" really implies a willingness to *follow*? If we are called to Christian community on Sundays, isn't it likely that *relationship* supersedes silos in *God's* economy for the rest of the week as well? Quickly, the Advisory Group saw the possibilities and we took the plunge for ourselves.

According to Scharmer, if we as a staff continued to live in the regions of "anti-space," we were setting ourselves up for a gap in strategy, structure, and culture, all because of an inward, rigid self-focus.⁹ But through a collective willingness to suspend what has been "known" in favor of a commitment to see with fresh eyes, and sense, and let go *together*, the possibility of connecting to God and one another for the purpose of

⁸ George Hall, "Inside the Theory of U: Interview with Peter M. Senge and Otto Scharmer (Part 2)," *Reflections: The SoL Journal on Knowledge, Learning, and Change* 9, no.1 (Spring 2008), 44.

⁹ Otto C. Scharmer, *Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges*, 313-4.

becoming *co-creators* was both challenging and exciting.¹⁰ Early on, the “U” became a part of our time together as silently we listened for the Spirit to speak and then shared what was heard. Through this process, we found there was wisdom in silence and in sharing. So it became quite natural to add this guide to our cache of ideas for directing our intentional conversations.

Community

Yet, given the history of staff leadership dynamics, it was also clear that Day One would not bring with it an automatic willingness to plunge into any type of self-emptying or mindless submission to silence. Several Advisory Committee members reiterated their stories of broken trust and the reality that our preliminary task would be to establish a context of confidence within the participant group as well as an expectation of confidentiality that promised more than any piece of paper could. It was essential as well that a promise of nonreprisal for the stories they would be willing to share would be given at the very outset. For this aspect of our travels together, the insights of Peter Block were instrumental. For Block, community is about accountability and belonging. It is about questions and transformation. It is about conversation and connection. So simple, yet profound, were Block’s steps to these positive outcomes, we knew that his methods would be an integral part of the way that we even began to invite the Participants to this Great Adventure.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 441.

“The essential challenge is to transform the isolation and self-interest within our communities into connectedness and caring for the whole,”¹¹ Block writes in his introduction. It was as if he *knew* us and our plight, and I was immediately drawn to what else Mr. Block might have to offer. Neither the committee nor I had to wait too long to determine if, indeed, this was going to be another potential device for ordering our times together, because Block continued to speak directly into *our* narratives. So throughout the fall, we put his insights and instruction to work as we continued to define the parameters of the spring’s implementation. His wise teachings, such as “people will be accountable and committed to what they have a hand in creating,”¹² and “transformation hinges on changing the structure of how we engage each other,”¹³ were helpful within our own group as we modeled several of our sessions around these ideas. Of particular value was his chapter on shifting the context. Here he writes:

The small group is the unit of transformation and container for the experience of belonging. Conversations that focus on stories about the past become a limitation to community; ones that are teaching parables and focus on the future restore community...The following are the shift in context that would signal a transformation into authentic community:

- We are a community of possibilities, not a community of problems.
- Community exists for the sake of belonging and takes its identity from the gifts, generosity, and accountability of its citizens. It is not defined by its fears, its isolation, or its penchant for retribution.
- We currently have all the capacity, expertise, programs, leaders, regulations, and wealth required to end unnecessary suffering and create an alternative future.¹⁴

¹¹ Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, 1.

¹² *Ibid.*, 24.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

“What can we create together?” became the watchword of every meeting as we found great hope in the possibilities that lay ahead. The newly energized Advisory Committee was obvious in its enthusiasm as ideas bubbled to the surface. “Is there a common event that might unite us?” one asked. Another was quick to point out the difference between directives and collaboration while expressing the fervent hope that collaboration would become the norm.

At least half of the group lifted the need for a spiritual basis for whatever we decided on, and the balance expressed their concurrence. To achieve that end, it was recommended that prayer partners be established or that each Participant session be opened with a short devotional to set the tone and theme of the day. Once again, God was working through a secular understanding of community to confound and challenge those of us who called ourselves Christians.

Interestingly, even as we continued to meet and design the parameters of the project, the Advisory Committee became increasingly aware of the feelings of those who would *not* be participating in the spring group. So profound had our conversations been about community and gifts and inclusiveness, that the thought of excluding anyone was visibly painful. However, following Block’s lead, we recognized the wisdom of keeping the Participant Group small enough to allow for open interchanges and this anticipated transformation.

Appreciative Inquiry

Although Block clearly speaks about the fallacy of focusing on stories of the past, we continued to draw on the positive past stories as a means of celebrating those times when we as a staff really were quite good together. We felt it was particularly important to remind the Participant Group of the power and passion that were released when we met an especially challenging goal by pooling our resources and working together. Far from being simply a retreat into the “good ol’ days,” these stories again brought us hope and we felt they could do the same for our Participants. Mark Lau Branson calls these kinds of remembrances “appreciative inquiry” and applauds their utilization as a means of eliciting our collective memory about what we do really well. “People have more confidence in the journey to the future when they carry forward parts of the past,” he notes. “Confidence and trust can be built when questions create direct links with the organization’s best and most appreciated narratives.”¹⁵ Like Block, Branson has a strong sense of the power of questions. His call to provoke imaginative, innovative change¹⁶ dovetails nicely with Block’s concept of alternative future. The advantages of appreciative inquiry for our purposes are many, not the least of which is finding common, positive ground for successful stories among the long-tenured staff as well as those who are relative newcomers. Thus, we believed with Branson’s assistance we had found a way of beginning on a positive note by allowing people the time and space to name and celebrate what is good within our community.

¹⁵ Branson, *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change*, 25.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 77-112.

Assessing the Road Map

Who's On Board?

I think each of us had in mind almost from the beginning who would be invited to jump aboard for the next leg of the journey. There was a consensus that we wanted every department to be represented, and we knew that we wanted those representatives to be people who had the authority not only to make decisions about change but also to model within their department the things that were occurring as we met together over the next four months. It was also important that those we were including would be able to attend the majority of the meetings, if they chose to do so. Along with a new set of Participants, three members of the Advisory Committee were drafted to play an integral role as well. One became the videographer while also participating in the group; one brilliantly directed our play time in such a way that there was a natural transition into the day's topic; and the third provided the spiritual undergirding by facilitating our time for silence, meditation, and prayer.

About a month before the official kickoff, I personally invited each of the chosen Participants to become a part of this journey, briefly describing the purpose of our time together and ensuring them that their acceptance was purely voluntary. Following Peter Block's lead, it was vital that they believed that their acceptance—or refusal—would have no bearing on our relationship or their job evaluation. Block notes that “genuine invitation changes our relationship with others, for we come to them as an equal. I must

be willing to take no for an answer...”¹⁷ And so I was. As it turns out, I heard that response only twice: once from a young mother who worked part-time and our meeting date conflicted with established time devoted to her daughter, and once from a staff veteran who said she was too busy. In a follow-up interview, she was a bit more honest and expressed her disbelief that anything could change. Because she also decided not to send a departmental representative, hers was the only area that ended up not being represented. A list of the areas that did participate can be found in Appendix A.

Adding to our sense of embarking upon something new as we moved into the new year was the fact that the staff would make that trek across the parking lot into our new facility in mid-January. We were sure to be on a roll—figuratively *and* literally!

Itinerary

As the year drew to a close, our bags were packed, loaded with insights from our own experiences of a community developed through time spent together in intentional ways. We believed that intentional conversations, shared experiences, and play *would* transform the operative narrative of staff relationships, but we also knew that we had a short period of time to encourage the reframing. We had also recognized the fact that the Easter season, our busiest time of the year, would fall right in the middle of our time frame, so we intentionally scheduled our times together accordingly. “If you want something done, ask a busy person,” the old adage goes. Yet one more “meeting” in an already packed week might serve to derail the opportunity for meaningful conversation. To address this potential, we suspended regular staff meetings and scheduled our gatherings at a time that

¹⁷ Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, 117.

the leadership had already set aside, adding an extra thirty minutes to provide plenty of time for play. It was determined that we would have ten face-to-face gatherings, two totally free weeks, and three weeks where our contact came via the Internet. The first and the final weeks of the project were designated for one-on-one interviews with the Participants. Each Advisory Committee member spent time in open-ended dialogue to hear firsthand the stories that were being told so that they might be compared to any new stories at the conclusion of the project. [Please see Appendix B for a complete listing of designated weeks.] For us, an indication of the transformation we sought would be a shift to stories of abundance, collaboration, and community. As well, proof of our theory would come as there was evidence of the desire and willingness to create things together, rather than in isolation.

While the content would vary from week to week, each meeting was designed to include spiritual preparation, play, and intentional conversations. At least two weeks were designed for off-campus meetings over a meal so that table fellowship could become a part of our shared experience—and because we love to eat! But even then, we didn't abandon our commitment to play. During the weeks that there was preparation for the holidays or recuperation from their aftermath, we moved our conversations on-line as the Participants were asked to comment on their reading of *Building the Bridge As You Walk On It*. While the probing questions asked were thought provoking and called for self-reflection, this format gave the participants the choice of surface, deep, or no answer at all. As importantly, because it was interactive, conversation could be fostered among the participants, while allowing time and space to consider responses.

Ultimately, the Participant Group was composed of three Advisory Committee members, twelve departmental directors, and one administrative assistant. Each was given a list of the meeting dates prior to our first assembly, but their weekly invitation was just that. Always before them was the understanding that attendance and level of participation was their choice. For those who did choose to attend, there was also an invitation to respond to one or several of Block's ambiguous, personal, anxiety-evoking questions:

- What is the commitment you hold that brought you into this room?
- What is the price you or others pay for being here today?
- How valuable do you plan for this effort to be?
- What is the story you keep telling about the problems of this community?
- What are the gifts you hold that haven't been brought fully into this community?
- What is your contribution to the very thing you complain about?¹⁸

Forearmed with the first three questions, we imagined the Participants would first be invited simply to consider what was being asked. In our second meeting, they would have an opportunity to respond in writing, but by the third gathering, open responses would be solicited. It was our feeling that the latter three questions would serve us well in cutting to the heart of the matter where everyone was on equal footing, but would be used only as we progressed through the weeks and a level of trust had been established.

Amid weather, packing, and planning, we turned the page on a new calendar, and found it brought with it the excitement of new opportunities. Fortified with purpose, plans, and prayer, the Advisory Committee and I made our final preparations to set sail into those uncharted waters. Stepping into the unknown, we were undaunted by the

¹⁸ Ibid., 106-7.

potential for treacherous currents because the prospect of effective navigation tools far outweighed any angst. In retrospect, I fully anticipated smooth sailing all the way. But I was in for a few surprises.

CHAPTER FOUR

ROAD TRIP

Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. “Make level paths for your feet,” so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed. Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.

Hebrews 12:12-14

Borrowing from an L.P. Jacks quote, Winston Churchill once proclaimed, “The pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity. The optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.” Armed with great optimism, we set out with the dawning of the newly welcomed year to take full advantage of the opportunity to break down some barriers, smash some silos, and discover what we might create together through collaboration and the unleashing of staff synergy.

Open Roads

Signposts

Clearly, the road lay open before us as we turned the pages of the calendar to reveal the dawning of another year. Already rumblings of mixed signals, lack of communication, and erroneous mandates were in the air as our scheduled move to the new staff facility was delayed. Throughout the fall, the Advisory Committee and I heard various stories which helped us identify the area of opportunity, but now it was time to assess the level

of angst by actually soliciting those stories in a safe, one-on-one setting. Thus, pre-project interview questions and format were designed to provide a neutral setting in which the individual Participant Group members could begin to think about their interactions with other departments. These individual interviews, which were conducted by an assigned Advisory Committee member, gave the Participants an opportunity to ask questions as well as share their experiences in working with other departments. Additionally, because three of the Advisory Committee members were included in the Participant Group, I played the role of interviewer for them. Without exception, these conversations seemed to be comfortable and relaxed interactions. However, upon review of the written and recorded responses, it was clear that some Participants were either less forthcoming in their responses or far more oblivious to the frustrations that existed between their department and others that might be impacted by their relationships and follow-through. But at least we were talking!

In discussing the creation of questionnaires, Mark Lau Branson advises that “the questions are intended to foster conversations, so the interviewer does not need to keep strictly to the wording. You want stories, and you want to learn what made those stories possible.¹ Thus, the Advisory Team and I conferred about the setting and purpose of these interviews, and then each set an appointment with their interviewee for a mutually convenient time. In order to facilitate the storytelling and the listening, the interviewees were asked for permission to record the conversation. Occasionally, a Participant would ask to go off the record and the recording was halted, but for the most part, the stories

¹Mark Lau Branson, *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change*, 72.

seemed to come openly and easily. Without exception, the Participants acknowledged a deep level of commitment and ability within the staff as a whole as well as by each individual employee. But most also noted that the story others tell about staff relationships drastically diverges from their own experience. Obviously weary from the ramifications of building changes and supporting staff, one veteran Participant shared that

People think everything is just rosy—I don't think it is, but others do. What would I go home and tell my spouse? That's a different story. Sometimes the frustration level is so bad that [my spouse] says find another job. I love my job, but the frustration is insane because the expectations are unbelievable. Most people have no idea of what's involved in my job—no idea. It magically happens and when it doesn't, they know my phone number! A whole lot of stuff is being done by a few people. There are little resources. [But] the story I tell about how we work with each other is that they are all well-loved.

A second Participant and relative newcomer felt that working with other departments hadn't been an issue, but believed this was so because of his ability to communicate with them clearly. However, he was also aware that that is not always the case. "Understanding as a whole could be really challenging. There's no solution or formula. There *is* lots of freedom, but sometimes that means things are lost in translation." His take on what others say about staff relationships is that they're strained. "For example, Department A has a history of strain with Department B; there's a lot of irritation/frustration. You're so protective of your square, you don't want to let others in. Then it becomes more about you than it does about the big picture. You know who you have to steer around to get something done, but it's more of a heart issue than a logistic issue." The story that he shares with others is of an incredibly talented staff where everybody would be the rock star somewhere else. He attributes the level of frustration and irritation to the fact that people *do* care so much.

A third, who was a longtime member before coming on staff, talks about the biggest challenge being that people get so involved in their own projects. He sees his department in a task-oriented role that supports creative departments. Thus, goals and performance often clash. However, when the clash comes, there is also a responsibility to go back and repair the damage. “At the core,” he continues, “we love and trust each other, but sometimes the fear is fear to clash. This staff is the biggest collection of smart, caring people I’ve ever seen.”

One of the youngest staff members comments, “There is room for improvement—we’re quick to judge and slower to forgive. And it’s hard when we are working so much with each other if we’re slow to forgive.” “The staff is terrible communicators,” he continues. “I’m not sure where that comes from, but competition is tough for ministry. Over the years we’ve gotten to where we don’t communicate well with each other. This would be the number one thing.” Another who is also on the Advisory Team was quick to express a dislike for the perpetuation of the family metaphor. “It’s often an excuse for putting up with unacceptable behavior.” But he also tells a story of being greatly helped when two of the pastors called him aside for a conversation about a misstep that led to a congregant leaving the church. He felt this exchange was a “hopeful, positive experience.”

Joy *and* frustration were both shared by the director of one of the more visible departments. Expressing delight with collaborating with the Children’s department, the take-away was that they would be invited to pool resources again because they had such great ideas. Yet the ongoing relationship with another department was continually

strained because it felt as if they had “all the control” yet rarely met expectations. However, the story she tells is one of “mutual respect—our hearts are the same; we just lack communication. We should celebrate our differences. Our senior pastor has done a good job of hiring for spirit. People without the right spirit don’t stay long because they get too frustrated because we change too often.” Frequently, those words “frustration” and “communication” were repeated and linked. But we also heard stories that were packed with passion for the “job” and for one another. The following story best sums up why people are willing to endure such inconsistencies and aggravation.

For the most part, others perceive the staff as being relatively cohesive and high functioning. That’s why we always have people wanting to be involved. Overall the picture is good; a tight-knit group of people who are making good things happen. But once on the inside, the story is always a little bit different. [But] we have a lot of good relationships and support methods for people. When [I had a family member who endured health issues] the senior pastor said go home if I needed to, and I did. But I found myself coming back on weekends because a regenerative support mechanism helped me go back and spend time in the hospital. It says a lot for a staff when you can come back to get energized.

In an effort to build on these strengths and improve upon our weaknesses, it was an important part of our project design to establish a regular time and place for our intentional conversations. We also took seriously the consideration of what that place might look like. Drawing on the experiences of author Joseph Myers as expressed in *The Search to Belong* and from Block’s *Community*, we knew that the space would either contribute to our interactions or serve to hamper them. As it turned out, we had the perfect location for facilitating conversation in our student wing. Over the course of the next four months, we fully utilized its open worship space for viewing and playing, the sofa-laden gathering place for conversations and brainstorming, individual classrooms for

breakout groups, and ping-pong surfaces for serving an occasional meal. The wing's relative isolation from all other areas of activity also set it apart for the many phases through which we would walk during our time together.

A buzz had been created, but there was still a great lack of clarity in the minds of the Participants as to what in the world they were doing in this group. So as we gathered for our first intentional time together, I started the ball rolling by sharing with them some of *my* journey, the stories that *I* had heard and the kinds of stories that were shared during the initial interviews. I was also clear about my dream for the places that we could go together. We talked about the calendar and their ability to opt out of any of our meetings, as well as the necessity of monitoring their level of commitment when they did choose to attend. And while they were curious, this was pretty dry stuff. So out came the TED Talk by Tim Brown, which pointed out the amazing correlation between play and creativity. Brown, CEO of the “innovation and design” firm IDEO, learned firsthand the value of play, including playful exploration, playful building, and role-play. This particular Talk, entitled “Tales of Creativity and Play,”² gave us just the right encouragement, that not only could we have fun together, we could also create something as a body that none of us could imagine alone. Yet, one can only glean so much information from simply *watching* a TED Talk, so when Brown's audience engaged in playful activities, we did too! In our last half hour together, we drew quick pictures of one another, made some outrageous additions to thirty harmless-looking circles, and engaged in a little target

² Talks, TED Partner Series, Tim Brown, *Tales of Creativity and Play*, Serious Play Conference, May 2008, http://www.ted.com/talks/tim_brown_on_creativity_and_play.html (accessed January 21, 2013).

practice with our foam finger blasters. After all, why should the people on the screen be the only ones having all the fun?

Children at Play

Citing the likes of IDEO, Pixar, and Google, Tim Brown makes a convincing argument for the value of play in the workplace. And as authors Zander, Blatner, Brannen, and Stuart Brown have emphasized, play should not be confined to children because as we get older, we tend to self-edit as ideas spring to mind and we become more concerned with what others might think. Tim Brown offers a myriad of tales pointing to positive outcomes when this self-editing tendency is removed through the utilization of playful exploration—focusing on the quantity of ideas over their quality, playful building—thinking with our hands, and role play—creating experiences. In these ways, the fear of judgment from our peers, which causes us to be more conservative in our thinking, is either eliminated altogether or at least minimized.³ It is play, he contends, that leads to friendship and friendship gives us a sense of trust.⁴ Through play, then, we have a much better opportunity to develop the trust level that will be needed as we proceed on this journey together. Fortunately, our team was well equipped with a gifted young man who knew what to do with us and with this invitation to play.

Tommy (not his real name) has been a child of this church and returned to it following his graduation from college. He is one of the first persons I was partnered with even before officially coming aboard at the church and we've had an easy friendship in

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

spite of the considerable gap in our ages. Although he has some stories of his own with regard to staff relationships, Tommy has always weathered the storms with a smile on his face and a desire in his heart to make things better because of who we represent.

Coincidentally, he is a brilliant improv specialist and made the perfect “game host” as we moved into our weekly sessions. Because of that gift and the fact that he fully understood the rationale for this project, whatever topic or type of conversation the day was slated to cover, Tommy had just the right play planned for us.

Each week, following our opening devotional time, play became the number one priority on the agenda. Our second week together, Tommy also threw in a video that only lasted a little over two minutes but brought home the purpose of our conversations in a light-hearted but convicting way. “Stop being boring...If life is a game, aren’t we all on the same team—let’s act like it! What will you create to make the world awesome?”⁵ These are the piercing observations of ten-year-old Robby Novak, whose own personal health struggles give him a unique take on how we spend our time and interact with one another. This delightful video served to put a smile on everyone’s face as we moved into a time of cooperative play. But what developed over the course of our time together during the next four months through play was nothing short of miraculous as we witnessed introverts (myself included) stepping out of their shells to laugh with others and respond to challenges in some pretty interesting ways. We also found that those who were task oriented (me, again) became very adept in laying aside the “business” of the day in order to join in the monkey business of the hour. We were compliant with

⁵ Robby Novak, SoulPancake, “A Pep Talk from Kid President to You,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-gQLqv9f4o> (accessed January 27, 2013).

Tommy's every suggestion, some of us taking longer to catch on to a particular game than others, but always willing to suspend that fear so easily associated with peer judgment. "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven," proclaims Jesus in Matthew 18:3, and we soon found the advantages to heeding his word. Quickly, our play and our laughter became the heart and soul of our time together. When we brought in some additional help for our planning in the very late stages of the project and invited them to join in all the phases of our meeting, it was easy to see how far we had come as a Participant Group in this knack and in the enjoyment of play. Clearly, play became the key that unlocked our willingness to move into a new phase of relationship with one another. Surreptitiously, it also provided fabulous tools for listening to one another! [See Appendix C for a listing of games.]

Parker Palmer describes a meeting of one of his trust groups in which the conversation turned somewhat dismal. In response to the gloom, one of the participants solemnly shared an excerpt from a book of wise counsel for just such occasions. But the shared "teaching" from the pages was more tongue-in-cheek than wise proclamation and it brought the group to a place of uproarious laughter. Palmer shared that story as a means of highlighting the important role that laughter plays in all relationships as he continued:

We were not laughing *at* anyone; we were laughing *with* each other about our shared condition. Our laughter helped us hold our concern more lightly, increasing the odds that we would deal with it more lovingly...Laughter can be as helpful as silence in bringing us closer to the sacred...When we adults stifle laughter to maintain a mask of sobriety, we may well stifle the soul, as one public teacher learned...At home, with her family and friends, she was a person who loved to laugh. But the moment she entered the classroom, she put on her professional face, speaking and acting with teacherly reserve, exactly as she had been trained to do. After many years of teaching, she had begun to burn out...Humor, she began to understand, was a vital feature of her true self, and she

resolved to try being as true with her students as she was with her family and friends. As she rejoined soul and role, she recovered her joy in teaching. And her students—who now felt safer with a teacher who was more authentic and less forbidding—became more engaged with learning.⁶

Laughing *with* became the glue that held our experiences together. It also caused us to linger over those experiences and call them to mind as we returned to our departmental duties, for the laughter helped lighten the day's lengthy to-do list, but it also reminded us that we were, after all, on the same team. I believed it also kept us mindful of our humanity and our ability to be real before one another as we found surprising and inconsequential things that linked us together. In requesting “seven favorite places to go with your grandchild,” the inquisitor was not only acknowledging their awareness of the importance of that grandchild, we also all got to affirm that grandparent as the mere mention of a location obviously brought to mind great memories. Similarly, being asked to name my seven favorite pairs of footwear was not a condemnation of my shoe fetish, but a good-natured recognition of the fact that the “stern supervisor” has a frivolous side as well. Even though participation was optional, none held back. It was good to play again.

Share the Road

And it was also good to remember those things that we had already done well together, so our second meeting time was a great occasion to do just that. I was grateful that although some folks were still unpacking (and some still looking for much needed furniture and

⁶ Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward An Undivided Life*, 154-5.

supplies), most of the Team showed up for this confab. If we truly were to become a body that was available to hear the good *and* the bad, I could think of no better time than the present to set aside some time for sharing the realization of dreams as well as the experience of nightmares associated with our trek across the parking lot. While it wasn't a time for problem solving, it was a most appropriate time and space to let off steam and receive some clarification on how we would operate going forward. Perhaps they were already getting this idea of "one body," or maybe I had just worn them down, but the input was constructive, moderate, and realistic. We commiserated over our frustration with the on again/off again scheduling of the move and for the delayed arrival of the moving company. We talked about the "new normal" by which some people were giving up a great deal to move into community while others now not only had officemates, but a real office as well. The story attached to the senior pastor was that he was giddy with joy, eagerly escorting board members and conference officials through the new space. The flexibility *and* inflexibility with which people made the transition did not go unnoticed, and we recognized that we now had the choice and the opportunity to be even more departmentally isolated or to begin to emerge from our silos and collaborate. Even among those who had great joy over their new surroundings, there was an experience of loss, so we took the time to name it, to celebrate what had been, and then to look toward the future.

Mark Lau Branson notes, "When cultural and societal stories overshadow stories of God's initiatives and a church's narratives of faithfulness and fruitfulness, identity is at

risk and priorities are skewed.”⁷ Remembering ways that God had been visibly active and the staff both faithful *and* fruitful became the preferred way of turning our attention from loss to celebration. In popcorn response fashion, we shared the successes of the recent past, with one memory sparking another until our white board was filled with remembrances and our faces with smiles. Branson believes that “change always requires information,”⁸ and here we were simply loaded with positive information about things we had done as a community of believers. And because some of those on the Participant Team came after those special events, we got to tell the story all over again. It was impossible to simply list our Christmas outdoor projection event. We *had* to elaborate about the cold nights that some people endured with little help, the young man who worked one of the cameras and then brought his family for our Christmas Eve services—all six carloads of them. We heard how the YouTube video of the event took on a life of its own so that the amazing show was shared, literally, around the world. We shared how children’s faces glowed and lives were changed in the midst of the wonder of colored lights and modern technology. After listing times where departments worked together, events in which the congregation was integrally involved, and programming that emerged out of a community tragedy, we easily identified the work of the Holy Spirit and the power that is released when God’s people work in harmony. What made the difference in the telling was that these stories “*had* been lost in the hurts, discouragement, and

⁷ Branson, *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change*, 54.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

weariness of recent years”⁹ but now they were being shared in the light of day, and with enthusiasm.

From those stories, we were easily able to name gifts of the staff, which included optimism, passion, presence of the Holy Spirit, being risk-takers and dreamers, the fact that the pastors lead by example, and that the finance team has our back. We rejoiced in our rich history and our futuristic outlook, and gave thanks that our congregation is so involved in the ministry and mission of the church. Out of the stories of so many successes, we were also able to identify the reality that we are at our best when we are working on a really big church or community-wide event. It is then that our communication is maximized and we pull together to attain success in the form of radical hospitality and excellence in collaboration and outcomes. We also recognized that whether it was a single death or community tragedy, we, as a team, responded in ways that were loving, helpful, and memorable. “Locate themes that appear in the stories, create shared images for a preferred future, and find innovative ways to create that future,” Branson encourages.¹⁰ Now, through appreciative inquiry, we had been able to complete that first step with the Participant Team’s eager response to the invitation to name those stories. With the creation of a healthy opening for the discussion and the honoring of all those contributions from even the most introverted staff member, it seemed as if we, too, were poised to set the stage for a positive future.¹¹

⁹ Ibid., 76.

¹⁰ Ibid., 77.

¹¹ Ibid., 98.

U Turn

For the next leg of the journey, it was time to apply a little Theory U and determine how we might move those celebratory discoveries to the next level. In his discussion on dialogue, Otto Scharmer perfectly describes what had been occurring in many cases with our staff. Often, people weren't openly hostile or confrontational, they simply weren't present to one another. At other times, an imbalance of power within or between departments resulted in the silencing of opposing viewpoints. To a lesser degree, finger-pointing was utilized to save face. Scharmer designates each of these modes of relating as the "economies of destruction"¹² This pathway to destruction eventually culminates in "collective collapse," the final step in the destruction of relational structures.¹³ We've all seen this kind of deterioration occur in businesses and families, but it should never happen in the body of Christ! Scharmer acknowledges that most of us truly *want* to operate in a place of creative emergence, but we end up working in the toxic atmosphere instead, seemingly unable to break old patterns of behavior. He points out the limitations of this pattern: It prevents individual participants from accessing their deeper levels of being and consciousness, and it prevents collective institutions from co-evolving with their environments by accessing the deeper streams of collective emergence.¹⁴

¹² C. Otto Scharmer, *Theory U: Leading from the Future as it Emerges* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2009), 268.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 286.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 287.

Fortunately, it wasn't too late to take the alternative route with its potential of leading us beyond dysfunction into a preferred destiny.

Thus, beginning with our third intentional meeting, we began to utilize Scharmer's movements toward creating something new together. Certainly, Tim Brown's take on creativity and the origin of ideas works well with Scharmer's belief that all great ideas are triggered by something.¹⁵ Our opening time of play served us well in allowing space for those types of promptings. Listening to ourselves and one another became an important vehicle for meaningful dialogue and we had the luxury of enough time to break into small groups for both silent discernment and open dialogue. The smaller groups added an extra layer of safety for our more timid folks as providing input was encouraged but not forced. Having begun each meeting time with the reality check of how effective *we* planned for our time together to be, individually and as a group, our presence and active participation was often at a decidedly high level. In fact, some weeks into our meeting together, we all seemed to recognize the fact that cell phones were always put away, even without it being requested. That was a first for our crew of busy texters!

Scharmer's idea of utilizing a diverse group to co-initiate¹⁶ this creation of ours proved to be right on target as our Participants became used to the idea that *they* were the ones in charge of brainstorming, sharing experiences, and delivering forth seemingly preposterous plans. In one session alone, we considered taking the entire staff to South America for a week of working with a community in church building, worship planning,

¹⁵ Ibid., 379.

¹⁶ Ibid., 384.

and children's activities. The practicality of the burgeoning stream of thought was never questioned as input poured forth for almost everything but the specific date and airline charter! The energy was electric as one idea sparked another. The more we tossed a variety of other ideas out, the more buy-in was evident. The fact that no one felt slighted when yet another area of adventure was mentioned seemed to indicate that we were ready to move down the left side of the U to places of more (realistic) potential by taking a closer look at what was always right before our eyes. Where were the gaps in communication? What were evidences of positive and negative relationships? What stories were the staff telling others and themselves? What were the differences in the successes and failures of classes, projects, and events? What were the insights that were emerging? In many cases, just the fact that we were being deliberate about asking the questions and meeting together intentionally heightened our observational powers as we not only considered alternatives but were encouraged to think outside the box in our dreaming. Almost imperceptibly, we moved into a place that Scharmer designates as "presencing." With the practice of "yes/and," we found a kind of synergy and a permission to dream big. With Scharmer, we could concede "there was no such thing as a single point of origin."¹⁷ Rather, without regard to their position, length of tenure, gender, or unofficial status, each person contributed to the creation of this entirely "new thing." In relating his sudden awareness of this concept of presencing, Scharmer shares his experience as he sought out the origin of a stream:

¹⁷ Ibid., 165.

Metaphorically speaking, presencing is the capacity that allows us to operate from this extended notion of the source, to function as a watershed by sensing what wants to come forth and then allowing it to come into being. In other words, by bringing the water from the surrounding waterfalls to a single point, the pond fills and spills into the river, bringing it into being.¹⁸

Like those waterfalls, we had finally filled and spilled over in a way that built up, rather than tore down. Although it took several weeks to come to the place of “presencing,” it seemed to be evident to the entire group when we arrived at the “co-creating” outpost. Our time spent together in deeper listening had been time well spent, although very much out of the norm. But beneficially, we utilized our smaller groups for those places of silence together and with little instruction, simply provided the time and space to be still and open to the Spirit’s leading. As those small group insights were shared within the greater group, commonalities became more pronounced. The Participant Group bond was strengthened simply in the discovery that *they* had the power to make the future better by working together. “Can we have an *additional* meeting to plan our upcoming event?” one department head queried. And in what was music to my ears, another chimed in, “Yeah, and can we invite some of the people who will also be affected by what we decide?” Not only had they gotten it, we were now rapidly moving up the *right* side of the U towards a prototyping session that would be utilized in the weeks ahead to alleviate the old feelings of neglect, apathy, intentional withholding of information, and intense frustration.

¹⁸ Ibid., 166.

Pit Stops

It has been said that an army travels on its stomach, and our particular staff proves over and over again that the same is true for the “army of the Lord”! Aside from the obvious physical nourishment (or lack thereof) that we receive, there is a strong element of “soul” food that is derived from table fellowship as well. It was important, then, to provide occasions away from our regular meeting place where we could continue to consider our opportunities, but also just plain pig out! For these meetings, we skipped our weekly all-staff lunch in favor of a private room at a local restaurant. The Participant Group’s responsibility was to choose the venue and mine was to treat them to a meal.

Our first stop which occurred the fourth week of the project was at the Wildwood Grill, a casual dining spot which offers a fairly wide range of menu choices, including salads and lighter fare for those in the group who considered themselves to be healthy eaters. We were provided with a long dining table that accommodated the entire group and made conversation easy. Because we ordered after our arrival, there was considerable time to spend in idle conversation and occasional uproarious laughter. Not neglecting our commitment to play, we also had plenty of time to experience a couple of rounds of the old standard game of “gossip,” with a new twist of one conversation starting clockwise and another counter clockwise. The object lesson of the necessity for clear communication was not lost on any of us. Following our meal, we also considered areas of opportunity and their related stories. Appropriately, we also talked about the level of input the department leads felt they had. “Who is at the table?” someone asked. “Who has a voice?” another echoed. And, “What are the implications of Leadership vs. Boss?”

Would we have been as prone to ask such honest questions back in our campus setting? Perhaps the meal served as more than the simple satiation of an empty stomach.

Although the established schedule designated only two shared meals, once the group decided to invite other “experts” to our meeting in order to work out the logistics of our Palm Sunday services, it was decided that they should have the full experience as well—table fellowship and play included. However, to maximize our time together, lunch was served buffet style as “regulars” and “guests” had a chance to interact in a relaxed setting. This venue was quite different from ordinary planning meetings. As anticipated, the natural flow of the conversation over this shared meal led to an easy exchange of ideas once we began to prepare for the upcoming crunch known as Palm Sunday. The newcomers were also invited to play along as we gathered for our “Yes, AND” warm-up game. As noted above, it was interesting to observe the hesitancy with which those unfamiliar with our free-wheeling fun time approached this game. However, finding safety in the silliness, most of them were willing to wade into the waters of abandoned decorum.

Our third adventure in dining together was a scant three weeks prior to the roll-out of our grand creation. Again, the Participant Group chose the location. This time, we were off to a local Italian establishment where we had a special room that included a circular-shaped seating arrangement, a revolving table top for meal sharing—and a bust of Pope Benedict XVI. We needed little more encouragement than that to know that this meal was going to be fun, even if we didn’t get to play official games! But it was also a great time to utilize our powers of observation, even in this most unlikely of settings. As

it turns out, there is a lot to be learned from the operation of a restaurant when it comes to planning, teamwork, and effective hospitality. So as we waited for our meal, we took the opportunity to observe, observe, observe, noting the methods of communication between wait staff, kitchen,



Figure 4.1. The Pope table.

manager, and receptionist. Because one of our team had previously owned a restaurant, he shared how invaluable the upfront planning *and* training of the staff could be. Those words of experience and wisdom were not lost on me as I recognized how delinquent we had been in transmitting our expectations and offering training to help our staff be successful in their duties.

And still, there was time for play, as once again we were reminded of the value of effective communication when an entire stream of conversation was eliminated during the game of “gossip,” and a second sentence became hopelessly intertwined with a third, completely changing the meaning. Perhaps our listening skills were waning due to severe hunger. But if that was the case, the meal served to prime the pump for after-lunch conversation, which not only turned blunt but might have caused the group to scurry back to square one had we not come such a long way in the areas of trust in sharing our stories.

Road Bumps

Yet, getting to that place of trust was a rocky journey in itself, particularly for those departmental leads who were used to being self-sufficient. In fact, while all of the

Participants assented to the viability of our planned meetings and interaction, it often seemed as if intentions and actions were so disconnected that they might never be reunited. Paul's lament, "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do," (Romans 7:15) was never far from my thoughts.

Storm Warnings

First of all, our territorial skirmishes were given food for fodder as the plans for our move to the new building progressed. Although well-intentioned, most of the ammunition evolved out of a "father knows best" approach to the design and furnishing of the new office space. Some departments that had well utilized an open bull-pen-type area now found themselves boxed in with cubicles that hindered rather than facilitated interaction. Others gave up storage space, while a few found themselves with a configuration they could only have dreamed about. One department "refused" to move from its existing space and was granted permission to remain in place. In retrospect, it was a decidedly wise and appropriate decision. However, it served to challenge the hard-and-fast rule that every department would be under the same roof. Unfortunately, the physical move in itself induced frustrations as people scrambled to retrieve their items that had been in storage for six months, and work around phone systems, time-sensitive door locks, and regulated air flow. Finding space within our second meeting time to allow the Participants to let off steam, then, was a well-intentioned part of that day's agenda. And, interestingly, just being able to voice questions such as, "Where do we park?" "When will the computers be up and running?" or "Where is everyone now located?" served to diffuse a great deal of the anxiety the entire staff seemed to be feeling.

Yet, after our initial two meetings, one of the department heads decided to opt out of the entire project. “I’m just too busy,” this veteran lead offered in asking to be excused. “I can probably return once I complete this immediate task at hand.” But, of course, that didn’t happen until the latter part of our intentional meeting days when an extended number of “experts” were invited in for planning. Later, in a moment of honesty, there was a more forthcoming response: “I know that things will never change.” This person could have been integral in championing that change, but my original invitation stood—you may participate or not as a matter of choice, and no one will be penalized or judged because of a decision either way. When I asked that a substitute participate and the offer was declined, I resigned myself to the loss of that department’s input and influence.

Blowouts

Perhaps those earlier storm warnings should have created a greater awareness in me of things to come. But there were obviously road hazards ahead that certainly escaped my notice at the time. The resulting blowouts were plentiful, and occurred between Participants themselves as well as Participants and other staff members. In these instances, the conflicts had little to do with our new physical space, but everything to do with communication.

The first happened as the result of a new hire. One of the Participants who served in multiple roles had long emphasized their overload of duties within the department. Suddenly, permission was given to hire some assistance, but when that new hire exhibited expertise in one of the Participant’s areas of responsibility, there was a shift in

titles as some duties were removed from the Participant. Because the two had offices in the same area, it was impossible for the Participant not to hear the new employee gather additional vendors and question prior decisions. Yet, rather than initiate a dialogue with a supervisor or the new employee, the Participant simply—and without notice—relocated to a remote part of the old facility. Isolation, rather than conversation, was doing little to change the culture or chip away at those silo walls.

Next, a triangulated mess developed in which two Participants were at odds with one another. One, desiring to expand the scope of an established event, met with the other, who was in charge of the event, in order to solicit buy-in for a new venue. While the event owner appeared to be enthusiastic about the expansion, the senior pastor was sought out to intervene and prevent the change. Caught off guard by being called into the office of the senior pastor to discuss alternatives, the initiating Participant was stunned. “I felt ambushed,” he shared, “and felt that if I responded with my side of the story, it would make the other person and that department look bad.” So, he endured being asked, “Why are you making that face at me?” yet he clearly felt the effects of a blocked line of communication. A willingness to be open with one another, even when it means opposing ideas, had been the center of our conversations within the Participant Group time together. How, then, did this situation escalate even beyond the department lead’s supervisor without an intentional attempt at resolution, and why wasn’t the issue allowed to deescalated by inviting both to sit down with the immediate supervisors? Are we only good with communication in theory? If nothing else, this blowout serves to reinforce the great need for our ability to create something together.

Then came the “Participant One vs. Participant Two plus one” round in which expenditures and promises lay at the heart of the conflict. Like a well-worn tire, this blowout was months in the making. Although frustrations had been escalating on both sides, the ultimate explosion was nothing that should ever occur in a place where love of neighbor, self, and enemy is to be the watchword. Accusations and threats were hurled, tears of anger flowed as persecution and power were wielded as if one’s very life depended upon it. But the interaction was life-stealing, not life-giving as humiliation and intimidation were utilized like a battering ram.

Were the wheels coming completely off the bus before we ever had a chance to get much beyond the starting gate? Certainly, it would take more than polite gatherings to encourage people to begin trusting the process—and one another. A scant four weeks into the intentional face-to-face meetings and, almost in spite of the fun that began each of them, it seemed as if we were simply stuck in our long-reinforced patterns of thinking and reacting. In *The Power of Habit*, Charles Duhigg argues that understanding how habits work is essential to changing them. Following an engaging story of how Coach Tony Dungy’s Indianapolis Colts finally attained Super Bowl status by changing their playing habits, Duhigg summarizes:

We know that a habit cannot be eradicated—it must, instead, be replaced. And we know that habits are most malleable when the Golden Rule of habit change is applied: If we keep the same cue and the same reward, a new routine can be inserted...But that’s not enough. For a habit to stay changed, people must believe change is possible.¹⁹

¹⁹ Charles Duhigg, *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business* (New York: Random House, 2012), 92.

Certainly, we could replace a spirit of isolation with one of openness and invitation, if for no other reason than that is what God calls us to do. In order to do that, however, we had to get to know ourselves better, and we had to begin to identify those triggers and rewards that moved us into destructive conflict, competition, and silo building. We also had to believe that change was possible. Already we lost one Participant because of their inability to believe that it was true. Would others drop out for the same reason? Would apathy overtake our resolve to make a difference? What would enable us to finally sit together in a room and honestly name the elephant(s) that filled it?

Building a Bridge

When the initial meeting schedule was created in conjunction with the Advisory Team, we were well aware of the rigors the spring semester would bring. Particularly in our culture, the season of Lent was filled with opportunities to open the doors of the church to those who are not normally a part of our activities or worship services. Our pageantry during Palm Sunday and Holy Week is extraordinary, with each successive year outdistancing the last. Pressure builds, and in this crucible we have the opportunity to experience ever greater fragmentation or come together to be formed into one body—the body of Christ. In the planning stages, time off from our meetings was established in order to be mindful of those pressures. But in retrospect, that wisdom was also guided by the Holy Spirit. On those off weeks, the Participant Group was instructed that we would not come together physically, but would connect via an Internet blog provided by WordPress. Each was given a leadership book entitled *Building the Bridge As You Walk On It* and asked to read designated selections, posting their response to related questions

three times a week. Additionally, they were invited to comment on one another's posts. During our interspersed five weeks of freedom, three were designated for this guided blogging and the remaining two, Holy Week and the week after Easter, were given off entirely.

I don't know if our success emerged out of this time apart, a shift in how we "talked" with one another, the ability to think before "speaking," or simply space in which the Holy Spirit could work, but this change in pace worked well for us. The Participants were faithful in reading the chapters requested, and even the original Participant who asked to be excused from the group inquired about a copy of the book. (The book was provided but blog access was not). Robert Quinn is a no-holds-barred author who is forthright in his assessment of leadership and asks his readers to respond in like manner. Like Scharmer, he believes that self-awareness lies at the heart of that ability to lead into and through change. However, Quinn goes a step further by providing probing, reflective questions as well as suggestions for "self-improvement," utilizing stories to get at the heart of his teaching. As well, the reader has the opportunity to post and/or read postings on his Deep Change website. In an intriguing way, he compelled us to consider aspects of "the fundamental state of leadership" in a way that was both challenging and hope-giving. Quinn acknowledges that when people are called into transformation or "deep change," there is resistance.²⁰ Somehow, that acknowledgement

²⁰ Robert E. Quinn, *Building the Bridge As You Walk On It: A Guide for Leading Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 6.

in itself encouraged us to breathe a little easier, knowing our natural responses were normalized.

In the first half of his book, Quinn provides a solid foundation for bridge building and notes that increased personal and collective integrity is the source of life for individuals and groups.²¹ It is out of this core of integrity, that interdependence, appreciative inquiry, authentic engagement, tough love, adaptive confidence, grounded vision, reflective action, and responsible freedom emerge.²² In one simple diagram, we held the key to basic concepts that could serve as “habit changers.” So, for those three weeks designated as “blog weeks,” we dug deeply into the ideas of the fundamental state of leadership, reflective action, authentic engagement, and adaptive confidence. Based on their posts, the Participants took their assignments seriously and revealed aspects of themselves that were deep and personal and transparent. Taking the time for contemplation proved to be a bold and effective step that few had been challenged to enter into before. Quinn supplied the thought-provoking questions, and the BlogSpot served as a safe venue for response.

When we take the time to integrate action and reflection, we begin to behave differently...As we become more purpose-centered, internally driven, other-focused, and externally open, we more fully integrate who we are with what we are doing. At this point, what we are doing enlarges our best self, and our best self enlarges what we are doing.²³

²¹ Ibid., 91.

²² Ibid., 90.

²³ Ibid., 97.

We *were* taking the time, and we *did* begin to behave differently, even after the very first blog week. From my perspective, it was not a moment too soon, because I was beginning to abandon all hope that we were doing anything but going through the motions.

During that first blog week, Participants shared the best and the most challenging thing that had happened to them during the past month. With answers ranging from jubilant to poignant, a plateau of honesty was “instantly” reached. In fact, we could have passed each other in the hall every day and offered the polite “how are you?” without ever evoking the responses that were collected in that initial blog. The balance of the week, we completed a self-assessment to ascertain our existing fundamental state. What was most helpful about that assessment scale was that it pointed out with graphic clarity the fact that a “positive” characteristic can head south rapidly if it is overutilized. Instead, it is the *integration* of reflection and action that yields a much greater score. With this baseline in mind, we then utilized Quinn’s “helpful hints” to develop a strategy for moving into that integrative phase of reflective action.

The second set of blogs began with reading more closely about Quinn’s concept of the Fundamental State of Leadership and its four quadrants: externally open, purpose-centered, internally directed, other-focused. Once again, Participants were invited to assess where they were and how things might be different if various areas increased. We then delved into Quinn’s discussion of authentic engagement. As with the first week, the responses were forthright, insightful, and fostered conversation among the group. I attribute this high level of participation to the neutral setting, common ground, time to

reflect, *and* the fact that the readings and questions weren't in response to some immediate crisis or conflict.

The final blog week occurred during spring break. Yet, thirteen of our seventeen responded as we moved into the topic of adaptive confidence. Quinn identifies this practice as being “willing to enter uncertain situations because we have a higher purpose and we are confident that we can learn and adapt as we move forward.”²⁴ “Finally, a chapter to which I can totally relate; any upwardly mobile person experiences adaptive confidence all the time or they would never move upward,” chimed in our introvert and the one who usually chose flight over fight. It was here that the group had a chance to remember the ways that had succeeded, even when there seemed to be no pathway toward success. But it also reminded each of us that we *can* move beyond our state of panic when we realize we are no longer in control. And, in fact, that impetus can be used to move us toward closing the gap between the values we hold and the way we actually live. In response, another Participant posted the following:

A quote from page 152 grabs me. “Unconditional confidence increases as our integrity increases and that we increase integrity by constantly monitoring our lack of integrity....We have enormously powerful mechanisms for denial.” I would substitute “commitment to follow Christ” for the word “integrity” in that quotation. When I accepted my job here, I became convinced that in order to ask anyone to tithe a minimum of 10% of their income, then my family must follow the same discipline. We did that and the results in deepening of [our] faith for us both has been amazing.

Our intentional conversations moved into another venue. Would our study of and response to Quinn's book make a difference as we alternated blogging with face-to-face meetings? Happily, the answer was a resounding “yes”! In fact, following the initial week

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 151.

of reading, reflecting, and posting, we convened once again in that comfy upper room. Beginning with our routine of Myer's reality-check questions and a time of play, we separated into our small-group gatherings. Prior to the meeting, we were primed with the question, "What story best illustrates one really difficult thing about staff relationships in your experience?" This time, as we moved from small groups back into the full group setting, polite responses gave way to open, heart-felt conversation. Guards were dropped, and the walls tumbled just enough to finally reveal the obvious. Now in the open light of day, we spoke without fear of reprisal; we shared our realities and our responses to them; anger and frustration were released, but not swept under the rug. And as we talked about the part we played in the thing we found to be difficult, the power to change things was suddenly envisioned to be within our grasp. That's not to say all issues suddenly disappeared, but in the naming of our conflicts and the recognition that we were not as innocent as we would like to think, hope began to emerge as we found common ground and recognized both our connectedness and our need for one another. To be sure, we had miles to go before we concluded this leg of the journey, but we were on our way—and we were traveling in the same direction! Indeed, we had begun to construct the necessary bridges even as we traveled upon them—together.

Circle Up the Wagons

Following that mid-February breakthrough meeting, there was a subtle but perceptible shift in the feel of subsequent meetings. We were less guarded and more willing to challenge the status quo. It truly felt as if we *could* create something together in order to enhance staff relationships. Although it was never spoken aloud, I believe we

each realized that it was essential that we begin to intentionally choose not to be offended when real and imagined slights occurred. Rather than only seeing things from our personal perspective, there was a dawning realization that other viewpoints were valid as well. Letting go of “my way or the highway” attitudes became easier in light of what we were learning about each other. Thus, we experienced value in releasing our tightly held biases and entitlement as we opened ourselves to new ways of stimulating unique thought processes through collaboration. As we continued to inch our way up the right side of that “U,” we realized that this improved mode of communication was absolutely essential. In fact, we came to recognize that as we would move into the heart of many of those skirmishes, estrangements, and perceived inequities, some aspect of miscommunication could be identified in almost every case. More importantly, we discovered that all too often, simply taking the time to consider who else in other departments might benefit from the knowledge a single department or person possessed could alleviate this communication gap. As we sat together in early March, after a particularly rousing time of play, one idea sparked another until a new catch phrase emerged from the collective wisdom of the group. “Who Else Needs To Know?” was an instant hit as we busily considered ways to launch this slogan among the entire staff. But taking it to heart ourselves, it seemed fitting that we ask that question of our upcoming Palm Sunday planning. It was here that the request emerged to include others in our development time. And what a wise request that turned out to be!

One of the exciting things about this simple shift in our coming together was the fact that it added an extra meeting to our schedule—and no one complained! As noted

above, however, it wasn't just "another" meeting. We went all out to ensure that the newly invited "experts" had the full treatment of a meal and a time of play before we ever got down to any conversation regarding plans for Palm Sunday. And within the first five minutes of that segment, we discovered what could have been a huge stumbling block for us as the result of one simple change: our musicians had to be in place half an hour earlier than previously planned. As it turned out, this seemingly insignificant shift had ramifications far beyond the rehearsal hall, for it also impacted the start time for our brunch, bus service, and parking attendant assignments. Disaster and starving artists had been averted! Almost as critical was the planning for the Triumphal Entry with its myriads of live chickens, lambs, and goats, as well as Ginny, the donkey. Because the dramatic entry is timed to coincide with a particular point in the sermon, it is essential that children, adults, critters, and Jesus move into the sanctuary at just the right time. But as the meeting progressed, it was clear that more than one person envisioned the leadership and cueing roles to be their own. If nothing else, we were alerted to this reality. A third result was a completely unanticipated crisis (created by a non-Participant) that involved the location of the annually constructed tomb. In this particular case, had this crisis not erupted on Monday, a great deal of work would have been scrapped and hours upon hours of valuable staff time would have been squandered. Amidst all this revelation, as we closed out our time together, it was evident that there were mixed reviews, so I invited the Participant Group to share their feelings while it was fresh on their minds. Representative comments are located in Appendix D.

While there was still much to improve, we had made a start, and the benefits became more and more apparent. Palm Sunday, with its increased member, visitor, and diner numbers was historically the most hassle free. Thus, building on this success, the following Monday we invited the entire staff to a Palm Sunday debriefing and Holy Week planning meeting. Here, we constricted the meeting to include only the week's planning and specific assignments. The diminished energy was noticeable, but assignments were quickly clarified and we gained the benefit of input from those who hadn't been at the previous expanded gathering.

Becoming the Body

Then, with Easter behind us, we moved with full vigor into our final planning stages for that composite creation. An all-staff retreat was unanimously agreed upon as we sat around the table together. At that final lunch meeting, however, there was great passion about the importance of the full participation of the senior pastor. As well, it was essential for the group that we would emerge with a way of measuring whether this year had been a success or not. Without that common vision, it was entirely likely that we would continue to go our own way, with each department pursuing the direction that seemed best. On the other hand, with the senior pastor casting that vision, interdepartmental planning and cooperation could be greatly facilitated. So, one caveat in setting the retreat date was that the leader of the flock also had to be available. A second was that a portion of our time together be used to cast that vision and establish success benchmarks. The rest was up to us! "We're Methodists, so there's got to be food!" offered one with great enthusiasm. "And everyone has to have a chance to play," chimed

in another. Little by little, together we crafted elements of play, conversation, sight, and sound, which would also enable the entire staff to create something together. Help from the senior pastor was solicited and secured. The staff was invited and responded with mixed levels of enthusiasm. The fork in the road was in sight.

It was also important that each member of the Participant Team be actively involved in the planning and execution of the staff retreat, so responsibilities were divvied up based on skills, gifts, and areas of interest. We created the morning's agenda together, and together, like a wonderful culinary delight, we blended our particular gifts to create a delectable concoction of vision, movement, laughter, surprises, and passion. As with our venture into inviting others into our planning session, we wanted to give the entire staff a taste of what we had been experiencing over the past three-plus months. Tommy was our obvious tour guide for the section designated as a time of fun, although we were determined to sprinkle elements of play throughout the day's experience. Five different Participants were given the task of becoming the master of ceremonies, two were in charge of planning the food, one covered lights, sound, and ambiance, the musically gifted were dispersed among the group to assist with presentations, and the introverts were called to lead the table talk. Some of us were stretched beyond our comfort zone, but the enthusiasm generated during our planning session led us to believe we were invincible.

Certainly, we felt improved communication was a key goal to be attained by the retreat, so we also looked at various ways to facilitate a shift in how information was transmitted. Our twenty-second century thinker introduced us to a new program,

Basecamp, which seemed to have the elements we were looking for, so we added that to the agenda as well. Although we had planned to roll out a new logo for the “Who Else Needs to Know?” campaign, suddenly we realized that if the staff had a hand in creating that logo, it would have much more meaning. Thus, we added construction paper, crayons, straws, cotton balls and various other arts-and-crafts gear to our shopping list and a logo-creating segment was also added to the day’s activities.

We were feeling good about what we had already created, and then reality reared its ugly head. The first piece of news to sideswipe our plans was that the staff golf outing was rescheduled for the afternoon of our retreat. While it was a treat for our golfers to spend that time on the links with the senior pastor, we saw it as a divisive element because not everyone golfs and few were content to simply serve as the gallery. Well, at least we have everyone for the morning, was the thought with which we consoled ourselves. Then the other shoe dropped. Because the retreat fell at the end of the month, the majority of the Finance department was unable to come out and play since they had to prepare payroll. Even tempting them with food was to no avail. Although our ideal scenario was fading, we were determined to make a success of the realities we had been given.

All Aboard

Retreat day came and it proved to be a perfect blend of sun and blue skies. The tables were set, the food was plentiful, and little by little our staff began to gather at their appointed time. As promised, the senior pastor joined us, and without saying a word, the message that this was a sanctioned and important event was transmitted in an instant.

Everyone was welcomed and presented with an overview of the day, which included a choice of afternoon outings. To set the tone and beautifully illustrate the reason for our time together, once again we enlisted the help of that Kid President video. The effect was just what we were hoping for. But, after all, don't we *all* need both a Pep Talk and a reminder that we're awesome?

The decision to put play near the top of our list was intentional, and play we did. But for the moment, it was focused and purposeful. Circling up, in the open space of our expansive room, we were invited to share our name and something descriptive about ourselves. Then, as a group, we repeated the name and the descriptor, moving then to the next person in line and adding their name to the growing repertoire. Since there were a few new people on staff, this was a helpful exercise. More importantly, it also brought forth a kind of playfulness as well as some memorable names! Then, a good old-fashioned game of rock, paper, scissors provided the perfect setting for cheering on teammates as the most unlikely contestants advanced to the next level. One winner eventually emerged, but paradoxically, there were no losers.

Our next stop was to hear from our lead pastors, who rolled out a revised organizational chart, which also had been requested to clarify staff roles. We now had a concrete starting point for identifying a "chain of command," but more importantly, the staff had a better understanding of what was expected of them. Then, clearly and concisely, our shepherd shared his vision and the reasons behind it. In three simple bullet points, we had our marching orders for the balance of the year. Programs could be planned, joint efforts could be executed, we could actually measure *our* direction against

the compass points set forth. The shared vision was freeing, and empowering, and laid the foundation for common ground among us.

Our leader had given us a glimpse of the future, but we also looked at the past to remind ourselves just how amazing we were. It's been said that a picture is worth a thousand words, so we let giant screen pictures of our recently concluded Holy Week and Easter events do the talking—at least initially, for quickly we shifted into our table groups to talk about the victories of 2013. Even though we only had four months under our belts, those victories were considerable. From an international missional impact on two continents, to the outreach of our recently completed indoor playground, we saw and celebrated what we were *already* doing together to make Christ known.

But we also acknowledged that it would be preferable if each new leg of the journey was improved as we made our move toward perfection. So we asked the questions: How can we make it even better? How can better communication make our jobs easier? How can shared information simplify our tasks, both perceived and real? What tools are available to us already? And then we provided a single answer in the form of an introduction to Basecamp, which can be accessed via computer or smart phone.

Next, it was the staff's opportunity to be turned loose with all those art supplies and come up with a logo for our "Who Else Needs to Know?" communication prompter. Consternation filled the faces of those who considered themselves less than artistic, but chatter, punctuated with bursts of laughter, permeated the room as each table group grappled with this newly presented concept. We might not have created masterpieces, but we certainly cleared an opening for interchange, questions, and synergy. However we

weren't finished yet. Each group was now tasked with presenting their creative endeavors, and that gave us another occasion to cheer them on. Clearly, some seemed to understand the concept and the task better than others, but that only served to emphasize our need to ascertain if we were really tracking with one another or simply assumed we were communicating because *we* knew what we meant. Others chose a more humorous twist to the given question by posting a familiar sounding WWJT—Who Would Jesus Tell? However, when all nine presentations were completed, our similarities were obvious in the utilization of an owl as a way of expressing the “who” question. [To view all the responses, please see Appendix E.]

New Pathways

We had been given a pep talk and a vision, celebrated our successes, and considered how we might make communications better. Now it was time to create something awesome together and in a way not previously employed. In the previous activities people had chosen with whom they would sit, but it was time to mix things up. So, in order to remove our tendency to silo ourselves off by departments even during retreat hours, we divided the staff into red, yellow, blue, orange, and purple teams. Each team consisted of one person from each department and one musician. With the theme of “What We Could Be,” each team was challenged to create something awesome, utilizing the principle of “yes/and.” Within a span of fifteen minutes, they had to create an entirely new product from an ordinary object, then give it a television spokesperson, a jingle, and a slogan. Of course, the product then had to be presented to the other teams. The sky was the limit, and the creative juices were overflowing! In an amazingly short period of time, the

Purple Team was set to go with their Remote Control, Traveling Life-Size Jesus. “Virtual Jesus—Take Jesus Anywhere,” they proclaimed. Ah, but the All Ball from the Orange Team quickly followed. Created from Silly Putty, the All Ball was capable of baby-and dog-sitting (due to its sticky properties), cleaning the house, and tasting great. It offered even more promise with its slogan: “It Can Do Anything, But You Know It Ain’t Free!”

The Red Team promised to make our lives easier with its Yippee Zippee Personal Zip Line, which would allow us to move freely throughout the campus. As a bonus, on hot days the Yippee Zippee would have an extended reach to our local lake. Justin Timberlake led the chorus line of Yippee Zippee enthusiasts who exited stage left with the tag line “XYZ—Examine Your Zipper.” Hands down, the crowd favorite product and jingle was brought to us by the Yellow Team’s Wayne Brady. The voice command TNT (Touch No Toilet) promised to revolutionize the building industry and simplify life considerably. But the multi-flavored Dreamsicle was the most coveted product of the day.

As a spin-off from our Dream Campaign to raise funds for capital improvements, the Dreamsicle not only tasted good, it was also the one product that promised a full head of hair, height enhancement, or instant slimming. The before-and-after live models were proof of the product’s validity and when Fabio crooned, “The Dreamsicle: Just Eat It Up,” we *all* knew we could no longer live without one! In these outrageous demonstrations, the power of “yes/and” was clearly evident and dynamically experienced together.

While the sky had been the limit for our products, now it was time to set our sights on new pathways that we could more realistically travel. But we didn’t want to

give up the concept of building on one another's ideas—ideas that kept us outside the box. So this time our teams were challenged to choose one new “thing” for the church. It could be a ministry area, program, curriculum, event, etc., but it had to be BIG. To simplify things, the announcement of each idea was streamlined without the requirement of song and slogan. Although the presentations were simple and straightforward, several of the ideas remained outside of the box. First up was the Great Co-Mission in which we would live out being the body of Christ for a given Sunday. On that designated day, the plan was to come together for a short worship service and then scatter into the community to serve in a variety of capacities, working in Jesus' name for the entire day as families, friends, and brothers and sisters in Christ. Reconvening for a celebration supper, we would then share in a “gia-normous” evening worship service. “Life is Better Together” would be used for promotional purposes for this event.

A second idea addressed the church's need for additional parking in a creative way that introduced a valet parking service. The donations accepted from those who availed themselves of this Sunday and Wednesday amenity would then be utilized as seed money for the construction of a new parking garage.

The third new “thing” for consideration was the “Church in the Dirt,” an outreach to families who chose sports over worship on Sunday mornings. This plan called for representatives of the church to be dispersed to local ballparks and soccer fields to provide abbreviated worship as well as practical items such as an air pump, bottled water, sunscreen, and cold towels for the athletes. It was hoped that through these connections, a common bond would be recognized and built upon as the athletes and their families

began to realize that the Church is composed of folks whose children play on the same fields and diamonds, go to the same schools, and dream the same dreams.

Next up was a plan to take the focus away from our “Charlie Brown” Christmas tree in a way that would draw the community and beyond to our campus during Advent. Drawing on a laser light show many of us witnessed in the Holy Land, this team explored the possibility of water projection at our pond. Expanding on that idea, the project then moved to a floating globe upon which the Christmas story might be told through lights and sound. While cost might prove to be a factor, today was not the day for that kind of analysis or limited thinking.

Our final idea was captioned “I Heart _ _ _ 9 2” and was dedicated to exploring ways of improving this zip code and making it a better place. This presenter confessed that for a class project he had been asked to create a plan to help people within our zip code but was at a loss of what to do because of the extreme affluence of the area. He was stunned when his professor revealed the results of her search, noting that seventeen percent of our students are on lunch assistance. Do we have more latchkey kids than we thought? Are single moms struggling to maintain their homes? What are the realities of this town that we thought we knew so well, and how can we address the needs we discover? “How can we love the people of this zip code in Jesus’ name?” he challenged.

Going from stuck to stupendous, within the span of fifteen minutes, we created five new ministry ideas because we did it in community, gaining energy and encouragement from one another. Every idea was cheered on, rather than being assailed by naysayers. Full attention was given to each presentation and echoes of “cool,”

“amazing,” “way to go” could be heard throughout. The bonus factor: People began to plan how the events/programs could be initiated and when!

Conversation continued throughout our cleanup time as we reset the room for its next scheduled event. Again, we proved the power of working as a unit in solidarity as we put away our tables and toys and turned a task that would ordinarily take the setup crew an hour into a five-minute flip. Our morning’s grand finale was entitled the “Greater Staff Ensemble” and we gathered by department in a circle so large that it encompassed the newly opened-up space. Each department received a special prop unique to its area as boas, noisemakers, squirt guns, etc., were handed out. Receiving new lyrics to the tune of *The Twelve Days of Christmas*, we began to delight one another not only with our musical abilities, but also with our props and improvised moves. Unfortunately, the pastoral crew, of which I was a member, was located immediately to the left of the squirt-gun-toting communications department, so we were also “baptized” as a bonus of the morning’s events.

Although our all-staff camaraderie concluded on this upbeat note, there was still more to come. The golfers quickly departed for their afternoon on the links, including a burger basket on the way to their shotgun start. The rest of us carpooled to a favorite Mexican restaurant, where we were whisked beyond a line that would have taken at least an hour to negotiate. Dining al fresco, we enjoyed idle conversation and got to know one another better. It was the perfect day for being outdoors and for lingering over such great fare graciously provided by the church. Then it was on to the botanical gardens to work off some of those tortilla chips. Again, we lost some of our numbers because of

obligations back at home base that couldn't be postponed or worked around. Yet we twenty-five hearty souls who refused to stop playing found our way through portions of the one-hundred-ten-acre site to discover reflection ponds, historical and memorial markers, and *some* of the twenty-five-hundred species of natural and exotic plants. It was a beautiful visual reminder of the way our differences can be melded together so that a gorgeous tapestry of color and dimension emerges. As well, the barren places already parched by the sun, yet giving way to bursts of color and lush greenery, served as a reminder that our paths will most certainly contain rocky, unfertile places, but if we continue to persevere, walking and working through our differences, there *is* beauty ahead and a God who walks beside. As we closed out our retreat time and returned to our routine, it was clear that the gardens perfectly summed up this day and its experiences as the body of Christ: Together we *are* better!

CHAPTER FIVE

UNPACKING THE BAGGAGE

That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. Ephesians 4:20-25

As we embarked upon this journey of intentional conversations and play, it was fully anticipated that what we did together would make a difference. What was uncertain was exactly *when* that difference would occur. I realized, of course, that our condition was the result of years of polite interactions and stuffed feelings, but I also knew that this was not the way we wanted things to be. There was an innate desire on the part of each of the Participants to make things better so that life together would be energized, rather than oppressive or frustrating. This motivation brought an element to the project that definitely made a difference in the team's presence and participation. But from the vantage point of a few miles down the road, it was, indeed, those shared experiences and the element of fun that have made a significant impact on how we are becoming a distinct and recognizable body of Christ.

Traveling Together—From Caravan to Bus Load

In those first few weeks as we began to gather, it was clear that the Participants thought of themselves as *departmental* members and representatives. For the most part, their vision was narrowly focused and their perceptions were colored by what they had experienced individually or departmentally. In essence, the sense of a common purpose or bond was almost non-existent. Certainly, they could more easily identify what was lacking within their realm of resources, than expound on the positives. The physical move to our new facilities had been disruptive and, for some, disconcerting. Many were uprooted for the first time in years, and all of us, to one degree or another, were experiencing both a sense of loss and of anxiety about the unknown. Yet, the commonality had not been perceived. So at the very outset, just having a safe place to let off steam, voice concerns, and ask practical, logistical questions set the stage for our movement toward abandoning our individual vehicles in favor of hopping aboard a new mode of transportation that was big enough to hold us all. It would require our relinquishing the steering wheel, of course, but it would also ensure that we would be traveling in the same direction. It also meant that we would have the opportunity to collaboratively shape the design of the next path we might travel.

Our initial conversations helped us see that we were more alike than we might have imagined. Several departments were struggling with the fact that they now had rather restrictive workstations plopped down in the middle of their space and some took the time to talk about the alternatives of either dealing with the disrupted flow or reconfiguring and/or eliminating stations. As Participants discovered they weren't the

only ones asking questions, a sense of camaraderie began to creep into the conversation. It was, however, a fine line to walk between helping them build on this initial bond and maintaining an air of positivity. Certainly, we were hoping to foster the body, not shred it to pieces over relatively insignificant events. Common misery was not the glue that we sought to hold this body together!

Appreciative inquiry became the adhesive of choice and did a wonderful job of reminding us how good we were when we worked together for a common purpose. The excitement was palpable as we recalled the many ways that the seemingly impossible had been accomplished, not only when we executed a plan together, but also when we took the time to seek input and draw from one another's experiences and vision. In taking the time to remember and to celebrate, we also opened our arms and our walls to include those who hadn't been there for some of those milestone events. This celebration helped diminish barriers between the veterans and relative newcomers. One team member summed up his positive experience by saying, "The lesson I learned was to bring as many voices as possible to the table." And from this, a vision was cast for what we could be if we judiciously took the time to apply this idea of appreciative inquiry to more than just big events.

Another unanticipated benefit also came out of our exploration into appreciative inquiry. Because the mood was such a positive one, an unspoken air of safety also emerged as people began to feel free to speak openly about the positives *and* the challenges. Never before had I heard some of the deep-seated emotions that were associated with several of these events that to the outside world appeared flawless.

“There were commitments of participation that were made, but for the most part it was one other staff member and myself most nights,” one said of an event that actually received international notoriety. In his willingness to open up about his disappointment, two things happened that would eventually move us to a more honest way of speaking. First, negative aspects of a job or event were allowed to be acknowledged without fear of judgment or reprisal. Secondly, his department, which seemed to have all the favor and resources, began to be recognized as one that didn’t necessarily have smooth sailing perpetually. As well, the freedom that some imagined that department had in terms of hours on campus was instantly put into check as the reality of his nightly vigil for the three-week event was revealed. This was some pretty good stuff, particularly in light of the fact that it was only the second week of our gathering.

However, the reality is that it took *several* weeks and a variety of methods before we truly began to have the desire to park our departmental vehicles and step aboard a common one. In retrospect, the thing that made the difference, freed us from our self-consciousness, and allowed us to relinquish our bent towards control was the gift of play. Who would have thought that taking thirty minutes to “gossip,” or “become an expert,” or simply list our seven favorite things would have been the key to unlocking personalities and joy and creativity! In those four to five weeks when closed lips and closed minds held to the status quo, it was play that provided us with a glimpse of how things could be. Deadlines, structure—and in some cases, rules—were forsaken for the innocuous moments of complete abandonment of pretense or perfection. In our concluding interview, the leader of this merriment noted that he was

“...skeptical going in, but felt supported all along; we [as individuals] felt the vulnerability but were supported by all the groups. For the past nine years, this has been my extended family. I’ve known some people in particular, but I know this group better now. Who would have known that Sally (not her real name) was funny?”

The fact that our vulnerability was mitigated by our communal laughter *with* one another week after week undergirded the feeling of a secure space where people were free to be more of themselves than previously allowed. Without this foundation, the shift that occurred in relationships would have been even slower or possibly not accomplished at all.

For me, the weeks seemed to drag on where we would enjoy a time of play and laughter, only to tread water as we moved back into the conversation portion of the day. Indeed, for several weeks, we found ourselves perched precariously at the very tiptop of Scharmer’s “U,” as we considered, in a variety of ways, the most significant issues that plagued our staff. But outside our meetings, there were still skirmishes, misunderstandings, and a tendency to draw back into one’s well-fortified silo. The following captures my thoughts as we moved into the second month of our process:

People have to recognize honestly their part in the culture/dysfunction before they can contribute to the solution. I don’t feel what I am doing is making a difference. There is little transfer from conversation to implementation as I have witnessed the giant conflict between two departmental leads, been in the midst of a battleground over furnishings and utilization of a newly constructed space, and am saddened by the unwillingness of a Participant to even try to see a new way of being together as demonstrated in her withdrawal from the project.

But the majority of us refused to give up and the Holy Spirit continued to work through our determination as we waited to see what could emerge. While I never questioned the ability of those intentional conversations and play to transform our relationships, there was significant doubt as to whether or not I was the right person to

facilitate that transformation. However, following the week of individual reflective action in which we dove into *Building the Bridge As You Walk on It* and posted some pretty revealing responses, we came together for a fifth time of meeting face to face and it was as if, collectively, we had amassed the courage to let down our guard, become more real with one another, and express our true feelings. We named the elephants of mistrust, bullying, and the sliding scale of apathy, which was significantly tied to tenure. And we began to recognize that many of those elephants were borne out of the lack of clarity in communication and/or a total lack of understanding how important effective intra-staff communication was. At last, we had an alternative story that we could tell about one another, and this one was much closer to reality. We could no longer attribute ulterior or dark motives to another department or even the head leadership's failure to communicate, because *we* now had the power to make those gaps known and to create something together that would help alleviate them. Knowledge *is* power and we began to recognize the part that we had played in hoarding various pieces of knowledge—sometimes intentionally, but more often than not, simply because we hadn't thought beyond our immediate responsibility or department. I knew we were thinking beyond our individual boxes when several of the Participants clamored for others to join us a scant three weeks later as we planned our next all-staff/all-church event.

In the next few weeks, I saw a significant shift in the focus of the Participants. No longer were they exclusively concerned about their own department. Instead, among the Participants, there was a new openness in the hallways and an intentional quest for ways departments could work together. Decidedly, this openness also went beyond an eye

toward any finished product. It also began to manifest itself in the way people wanted to protect the feelings of others. As we talked about the need for clarification of roles, I shared that a new organizational chart would soon be announced by the senior pastor. Immediately, several people voiced their concern that any organizational changes would be announced in front of the larger group, creating the opportunity for significant embarrassment and confusion on the part of one who had been “demoted” or made to change departments without their prior knowledge. Since most of those voicing their concerns knew that they wouldn’t be the ones shifting positions, it seemed to me a giant step toward their wanting to guard the dignity of *all* staff members, whether they were in that Participant’s concentration area or not. Our humanity and compassion were being unveiled as our insulation gave way to a willingness to speak up on behalf of others.

This recognition of interconnectedness continued to increase as we moved from discerning *what* to create together into the specifics of that creation which we defined as an all-staff retreat. I was encouraged that the Participants wanted the remainder of the staff to experience what they had, even if it was only a mini version. For me, this signaled that they had found value in each of the phases of our project and benefit from intentionally creating groupings where members of various departments could spend time with one another. In fact, the group experienced a significant disappointment when it was learned that the retreat’s afternoon agenda would not include a time of united community because a golf outing had already been arranged by a non-Participant. However, unlike former days, those who felt most passionately about this loss of community time expressed their frustration openly and then quickly moved to find ways of enhancing the

time we *did* have together. Ultimately, that somewhat compressed timeframe was well used because we took the time to speak into the group the things that we believed were important components of the day and of our life together. Of primary importance was the receipt of a definitive vision from the senior leadership. So the Participant Group asked that this be a key component of the retreat. Now hearing their concern for clarity of what would constitute a successful year in the eyes of the senior pastor, he immediately responded to the Participant Group. As importantly, the goals were established at the retreat by the senior pastor himself so there was no mistaking his intent. In fact, he did a beautiful job of engaging the entire staff as he not only shared those goals but the logic behind them. Thus, as we began to plan for activities and programming for summer, fall and winter, we could intentionally incorporate and measure against the year's standards.

A second element of the retreat was never in question. As it had with the small group, an incorporated time of play gave us all permission to step outside of our established roles and leveled the field for intergenerational interaction. Within that realm of play, there were cheers for those that we might not normally encounter in the course of the week; there were groans of mock dismay when one of the esteemed leaders was outpaced; there was uproarious laughter at self-effacing remarks. But above all, there was a strong bond of community that was palpable throughout the morning's activities. Ultimately, I think everyone was surprised at the creativity that materialized right before our very eyes. With less than thirty minutes to create a crazy "product" from something ordinary, the ideas and presentations were as vast and as varied as a "Dreamcicle" physical enhancer and a life-sized personal spiritual companion. That fast-paced exercise

told us we had imagination and ingenuity, and it was tangible proof that we are much better together than we are apart. As one staff member put it, “When we went through that exercise, I recognized this is different; it’s surprising. And it tells me that it’s more work to get outside people involved, but this exercise validates the reality that it’s worthwhile. And I believe that is a shared feeling.”¹

The concluding question of the post-project interviews prompted the Participant Group to share what, if anything, changed for them with regard to relationships over the course of the four months. Without exception, the feedback for this group indicated a definite positive shift from isolation and surface connections to a greater comfort with and better understanding of co-workers. “The primary achievement in this entire process was the momentum that was realized in the way the Participant Group grew from a limited understanding of each other to a much better grasp of how individual members thought, worked, and view their unique job responsibilities,”² noted a member who routinely meets with all departments on a weekly basis. One of the behind-the-scenes directors stated that he now “feels more comfortable approaching people. For example, before the project, I just talked business with Frank, now I feel closer to him; there’s more connectedness.”³ “Since January, we’re more isolated as departments by the nature of our setup,” said another. “But I see the departments becoming more creative and

¹ The names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement, interview by Joe Grazer, Southlake, TX, May 1, 2013.

² Ibid.

³ The names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement, interview by Dorothea Christ, Southlake, TX, May 2, 2013.

somewhat more camaraderie. Most have taken relationships to the next level. There's a better working relationship with a broader view."⁴ Another noted that the play was an important component and appreciated the willingness of the Participants to engage in each of the activities, particularly the worship staff. One of the newer staff members who had a very negative experience with departmental partnering expressed hope in her response that this process would lead to a greater knowledge of how things *really* worked and who she could turn to when things fall through the cracks. "The Participant Group has become much more familiar with each other and has gained an understanding of how they might better interact in executing their job responsibilities,"⁵ she states. And another participant, who is a department of one, noted, "Because of this project, I've gotten to know staff people that I didn't know before. We laughed together and shared ideas together. The playtime and deep questions help you grasp the like-mindedness of the staff."⁶ And our extreme introvert shared, "Just making the effort to improve has made me feel better!"⁷ One of the most visible staff leads believed:

...there was definitely a feeling of increased cooperation and trust within the group, but I don't think that feeling made it outside the group to those not participating. I definitely understand some of the people and departments better. I

⁴ The names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement, interview by author, Southlake, TX, April 30, 2013.

⁵ The names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement, interview by Joe Grazer, Southlake, TX, April 30, 2013.

⁶ The names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement, interview by Dorothea Christ, Southlake, TX, May 2, 2013.

⁷ The names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement, interview by Kyle Austin, Southlake, TX, May 2, 2013.

think we have more respect for each other in the group. Personally, this has given me the opportunity to see where another person is coming from and how/why they make their decisions. It is an increased awareness as to who people are, what they are doing, and what they are bringing to the table and being able to respect that more. When you know someone more, it brings more understanding as to why someone does something and I think that has been the biggest thing I have taken away from this project.⁸

And an image that serves as a beautiful summary of what most experienced was shared by a long-time member-turned-staff-person, “Sometimes we can put up walls due to past experiences, but now it seems to be more like latticework. I think we have a great base or spark to get this fire burning with our entire staff. We have to remain intentional about meeting together and touch base with each other.”⁹

To be sure, the walls weren’t erected in a day and would not be easily shattered, but our Participant Group worked intentionally and tirelessly to make significant chinks in those ugly walls so that the appealing latticework of open spaces and opportunities might emerge. Relationships were being transformed and new respect and understanding were being fostered through intentional conversations, play, and creativity in shared experiences. If the balance of the staff was unable to move around and through those openings, at least they, too, were capable of seeing the shift that was occurring. We had set the stage for their invitation into those deeper conversations and moments of innovation. With the culmination of the all-staff retreat, the Participant Group scrambled

⁸ The names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement, interview by Mary Ann Zrake, Southlake, TX, May 6, 2013.

⁹ The names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement, interview by Mary Ann Zrake, Southlake, TX, May 1, 2013.

aboard that community bus and eagerly anticipated the arrival of those who would also join us in continuing conversations.

New Navigation

Recalibrating the GPS

Along with the transformation of our relationships, it was determined early on that we had to change the way we communicated with one another. The ability to smash out of our silos was greatly facilitated by another form of intentionality—the determination that we would ask the question “Who Else Needs to Know?” The benefits of asking that simple question were clearly demonstrated when we began to plan for Palm Sunday and quickly recognized a continuing benefit, not only to large events, but in our day-to-day life together as well. Because the slogan was used in an integral way during our retreat, almost every member of the staff heard, focused on, and created something around that five-simple-worded query. We were charged with using it whenever we discussed, developed, created, or altered a program or event. Thus, even those who were not a part of the Participant Group are now actively engaged in its utilization. Our former tendency towards silence and secrecy—whether deliberate or not—has been challenged in a lighthearted and memorable way.

Not wanting to let the memory or image of that slogan disappear, I took the liberty of posting our masterpieces around the Administration Building immediately after our retreat. The two-fold result was that people were reminded of the shared experiences of the retreat itself, and they were subtly challenged to recognize that this was not just a

one-day quest. Rather, “Who Else Needs to Know” served as a call to expand our sphere of influence by sharing our load and our dreams. Quickly, emails began to appear with that phrase in the subject line as our staff became more thoughtful in keeping others notified. Sometimes the sender wasn’t sure of the answer to that question, so the emails allowed for related parties to weigh in or join a particular effort. Expanding on that question, for the first time that I could recall, we met together at a “calendar party” to plan our summer and fall events so that everyone would not only know what departments were doing, but could also see where there were commonalities that would enable ministries to partner up. Utilizing our proven format, following a meal together and play, we efficiently compiled a staff calendar from our individual plans and visions. Another benefit to this shattered isolation was the ability for people to either combine activities or book around them, rather than over each other’s events. This was a tremendous step in preventing a resource battle or the perception of favoritism. An added bonus was that additional time was created for collaboration and dreaming bigger because we were looking forward several months instead of waiting until the last minute to throw something on the calendar.

Following the initial calendaring meeting, each staff member received a 4 x10 magnetic dry erase board for their office or workstation, complete with the three



Figure 5.1. Fun with names.

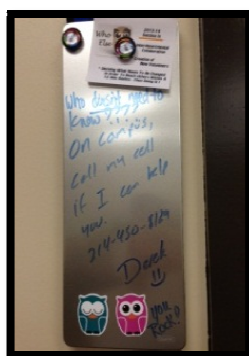


Figure 5.2. Sharing info.



Figure 5.3 Encourager.

goals for the year and two magnetic owls as a reminder to ask the “who” question. While the boards were meant for a practical two-way communication tool, it has been delightful to see the creativity that has arisen, both in what the owner has created and what others have contributed to the boards. Words of affirmation, humorous responses, and witty additions have kept a spirit of fun circulating throughout the building, even as we are enhancing our communication efforts.

Cruising Cyberspace

Not all of our Participant Group dreams have been fully realized, however. In some cases, that has simply been a function of time. In others, the reality of expense has caused popular new ideas to be moved to the back burner while we explore alternatives or seek a champion to underwrite the concept. More frequently, what has been left undone has lacked an owner to organize and follow through on implementation. One such communication tool is the utilization of the “Q” to invite, plot, and track participation in larger events. Technical delays as well as serious health issues in the family of the original “owner” have significantly impacted the implementation of this tool. While the full staff has been training on its utilization, no one individual or department has made the leap to actually initiating its use by inviting others to participate in a project or event. A recent conversation between two non-Participant staff members probably best sums up the attitude toward the “Q” and, to a larger degree, toward any new tool that is introduced. “I’ll bet you we stop using the Q within six months,” commented one who is at the hub of our church-wide communication efforts. “I’ll take that bet,” replied a longtime staff member. “I’ve seen how beneficial ‘Who Else Needs to Know’ has been. It

makes a difference in how I think.” Thus, it seems that we will continue to search for ways to enhance and enable communication among our staff members as we foster face-to-face as well as cyberspace intentional conversations. A comment from a member of the Participant Group probably best captures the reality of the effectiveness of any instrument we might choose:

While software tools, like project management and task management, are helpful, the real benefits lie in keeping this [Participant] group together, ie, meeting, and talking, and working from here on out. Otherwise the gains will slowly deteriorate over time and software is not going to keep this going.¹⁰

And another echoed this sentiment in speaking about the value of consistent face-to-face opportunities. “Even the little things can be important. Assumptions get you into trouble and staff meetings help keep the lines of communication open and help everyone determine what affects them.”¹¹

And The Journey Goes On...

At the outset of this journey, I predicted that our siloed status could be positively impacted by intentional conversations, shared experiences, and play. These various facets, did indeed lead to relationships that were transformed in large and small ways. In fact, in many cases, the transformation has moved like an ever-increasing network beyond the Participant Group to impact the staff, senior pastors, and in some cases, the congregation. The stories we tell ourselves about others and their motives have not only

¹⁰ The names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement, interview by Joe Grazer, Southlake, TX, April 30, 2013.

¹¹ The names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement, interview by Dorothea Christ, Southlake, TX, May 2, 2013.

been moderated, but also show signs of expressing respect and admiration for what individuals and departments are able to accomplish—in large part because now they know!

In *The Power of Habit*, a brilliant analysis of why we do what we do, author Charles Duhigg uses Tony Dungy’s coaching strategy to explain the “golden rule of habit change.” In quoting one of Dungy’s players, Duhigg describes what I believe we experienced as well: “Most football teams aren’t really teams. They’re just guys who work together. But we became a *team*.”¹² For us, one of the keys to the difference between just talking about becoming the body of Christ (team) and actually moving into that reality, can be found in Duhigg’s caveat for change: “...we do know that for habits to permanently change, people must believe that change is feasible.”¹³ Once trust was built and the facades were allowed to fall away, our habits of huddling within our departments did begin to change. We were willing to become vulnerable before one another and proved the truth of Matthew 10:39 that losing ourselves for the sake of the Body enabled us to find ourselves in a more profound way. As we gathered for our all-staff retreat, it was exciting to see the spark of spontaneity that rapidly spread from the Participant group to the balance of the staff who had chosen to gather. That spark has not yet been extinguished and is, in fact, visible in a variety of ways. By way of explanation, Duhigg

¹² Charles Duhigg, *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business*, 88.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 89.

quotes psychologist Todd Heatherton regarding change, “Change occurs among other people. It seems real when we can see it in other people’s eyes.”¹⁴

Transformation *was* occurring and it was contagious. Finding great value in the element of play, the worship director borrowed our improvisational guru for a departmental retreat. Per her report, they spent the first few hours off-site simply playing and then had the most productive and creative planning session in their history of working together. Departments are finding opportunity and energy in crafting ministries together and continue to look for ways to enhance one another’s efforts. In fact, under their own initiative, the departmental leads that had been locked in conflict for the past year began to meet on a weekly basis to map their processes in an effort to determine a more efficient way of working. What the offended department discovered was that the other director was actually doing a herculean task on Sunday mornings and was not nearly as nonresponsive as they had imagined. Amid these intradepartmental conversations, an unexpected victory was experienced by the Participant Group when the senior pastor endorsed and implemented the group’s request to match fall curriculum with the sermon series. Hence, when the pastors were preaching on “The Gospel According to Legos,” the Family and the Children’s Ministries partnered to collect and place Legos in the Commons area so that children, teens, and parents could play with them prior to and following Sunday worship. And let me assure you, there was an uproar when the series was concluded and those Legos disappeared!

¹⁴ Ibid.

Along the way, evidently the senior pastor was also receiving positive feedback from various members of the Participant Group because he was more than willing to be an active member of our project's final creation. To the delight of all who were there, he not only shared his vision of what success would look like, he also heartily participated in our games and creative challenges. In fact, his cameo appearance as the "before" evidence of the Dreamcicle's effectiveness is epic. Certainly, the introduction of any new church "product" will pale in comparison! Critically, the senior pastor also began to acknowledge the importance of community and the significant role his presence plays in its formation. Here is how a member of the Advisory Committee summed things up:

Through her [Judy's] project with the focus on the importance of enhancing the staff's communication and sense of community, she has influenced our lead Senior Pastor to examine his role in helping to enhance communication and community. The Senior Pastor told some of the staff that he has been "checked out" for a while dealing with some personal issues, but that he was sorry and that he's back and ready to be involved. This statement was very encouraging to our staff.¹⁵

Our project has impacted the senior pastor in others ways as well. Some months after its conclusion, a decision was made to eliminate the children's programming during Sunday's eleven o'clock worship hour so that children and teens could worship with their parents. At the inception of this significant change, the senior pastor expanded our worship design table to include both the Children's Director and the Director of On-line Ministries. He is not only allowing but eagerly soliciting advice from those who are closest to the family and on-line "consumer." This important input from those who are in tune with today's culture and media is transforming our entire worship experience into

¹⁵ Dorothea Christ, "Project Site Review Form," Southlake, TX, May 7, 2013.

one that is fresh and energizing. The result has been a revitalized worship experience for those who lead, for families, and for the individuals who view us via streaming. Our newly named co-pastor is catching the vision of collaboration as well. Having been approached by a member of the congregation regarding a valuable ministry effort beyond our immediate community, he collected four different departmental heads to explore how we might envision taking this opportunity to the next level. At the conclusion of our meeting, he remarked with a wink, “This was good stuff; there really *is* something to this ‘Who Else Needs to Know?’ thing!”

As implied above, our congregation has also benefitted from the newly implemented collaboration among our staff. In working together to plan worship and offer ancillary activities that enhance and reinforce the worship experience, we have found new ways to provide intergenerational opportunities for Christ to be better known. Parents are intrigued and children are engaged as the weekly message has moved beyond the worship space into the lives of members and guests. Similarly, the joint efforts of various departments to plan summer and fall activities provided a depth of experience not previously offered in singularly focused ministry areas. And because there is a greater sharing of information, those not directly involved in a particular activity or event still have enough knowledge that they can promote and support what is occurring. As an Advisory Committee member noted about our Easter’s success, “We could answer more questions; we were more conversant to the congregation because we knew the whole story.”¹⁶ In addition to those day-to-day efforts to communicate with our congregation,

¹⁶ Ibid.

we are also always seeking effective ways to keep in touch during holidays or periods of extended time when families might be away from the church. Maintaining contact with our congregants during the summer months is always a tricky topic because they tend to be engaged in summer athletics as well as nonstop travel plans. But an unanticipated benefit of the project was realized when several departments got together to brainstorm a solution for this ongoing dilemma. Known as “Wesley on a Stick,” it was determined that fan-style pictures of our church’s English bulldog mascot, Wesley, would be made available to the entire congregation. They were instructed to take Wesley along wherever they went, snap a picture of him on location, and post it to our website. Everyone, from child to senior, was caught up in the whimsy of the opportunity for such a delightful traveling companion. Wesley must have been exhausted by the time school started



Figure 5.4. Wesley at the zoo.

because he was spotted on almost every continent and state, including next to Lassie’s star in Hollywood, the San Diego zoo, and John Wesley’s birthplace in England.



Figure 5.5. Wesley in Hollywood.

When I spoke with one of our executive pastors who is a department lead but was not a part of the project, he readily shared the following:

During the [all staff] retreat we did some dreaming and visioning. We did that thing where we created a new product and created a new ministry we’d like to see. That was awesome. Doing that is what gave me the idea of getting people together – actually Sarah and Janie and Sam, and Jake and myself and Kathryn

[departmental leaders some of whom were also Participants] to sit down and say, ‘we have these sermon series coming up is there anything fun we can do to supplement what’s going to be happening in the sanctuary to enhance them?’ That’s where Wesley on a Stick came up which is probably the biggest thing we’ve done all summer. It’s been highly successful and is really just beginning. So that really came out of the idea that we can really do this. That’s one of our three goals is to cross-pollinate. So I guess for me, personally, that has had some very practical applications.¹⁷

Of course, it would be wonderful to be able to say that the silos have been totally eradicated, but the reality is we still have a long way to go. Even though that executive pastor did note more of a willingness to move toward collaboration among ministry areas, he also spoke about the wide variety of personalities. “The retreat did create a fun atmosphere and memories that resulted in people, at least, thinking of working with others,”¹⁸ he noted. Yet, he also recognized a kind of “jadedness” on the part of some staff members who have been here longer and felt that they believed the effort toward smashing these silos is “just a lost cause.” On the other hand, this pastor was able to name several of the Participants who were positive about our attempts.

What you’re doing needs to be done. I think with a staff like this—with the quality of people we have—this is worthy enough to keep doing. Our work that we do here together is going to be two steps forward and one step back and there are going to be things that happen that make me question the motives of whoever and then we’ll be fine for a while. I think things like this will help facilitate these steps. We all want to trust each other and work with each other. Some departments *have* to work together but there seems to be more baggage than synergy.¹⁹

¹⁷ The names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement, interview by author, Southlake, TX, July 16, 2013.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

On a more positive note, from all accounts, we have not regressed to our pre-project state. Conversations are more open and more people are being invited into them. We are being more intentional about working together both to solve problems and to eliminate them in the first place. Additionally, we have become more proactive in sharing a need for improved systems with congregational volunteers who assist with areas such as decorating, serving communion, and mission projects. In fact, as a Participant Group *and* as a staff, we are discovering that our ability to effectively share information must continue to improve as well as move beyond the immediate staff setting. Another Advisory Committee member weighs in on the value of our time together with these words:

This is a very important and timely project. The issue of communication and department isolation has long been an issue. As we have such a large campus, multiple departments with numerous full- and part-time employees, it seemed too big of a challenge to even attempt a resolution. Recognizing and defining a problem is the beginning of working toward a solution. The visualization of “smashing silos” gave us a starting place. We instantly grasped the concept as we had not previously had the appropriate term to define what we had become: a campus of silos.²⁰

With conviction, she shares that in place of those silos she is seeing and experiencing hope—a hope that was not previously there.²¹ Perhaps, as Todd Heatherton notes, it is the ability to see the change in other people’s eyes that continues to foster that hope. Maybe it is the realization that others do truly care and that, to some extent, they have traveled a similar road. Always, when we set out to draw closer to God and to one another—when

²⁰ Mary Ann Zrake, “Project Site Review Report Form,” Southlake, TX, May 7, 2013.

²¹ Mary Ann Zrake, interview by Chris Hammon and Vicki Hollon, via Skype, May 9, 2013.

we seek to become the body of Christ that we are called to be—the Spirit moves among us in powerful ways. Surely, we have known our times of struggle and adversity, but Scripture has spoken into our midst: “Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (Romans 5:3-5).

Intentional conversations, play, and shared experiences have served us well as the vehicles by which this staff has been able to move into a new phase of relationship. As we have experienced success in ministry collaboration and asking “Who Else Needs to Know?” we have been encouraged to also ask “Who Else Can Help?” and then seek out staff *and* congregants who provide expertise and fresh perspective. In many cases, we have become cheerleaders, rather than whistle-blowers, or even horn-tooters. Thus, the project has provided a “very definite and immediate impact, moving the group to a higher level of understanding of each other and their overall responsibilities and creating a sense of shared ownership of the church’s mission to make disciples for Jesus Christ.”²² As the Participants began to recognize in one another great heart, commitment, and value, each is becoming more of who they were created to be. Light is being released and in that light the darkness of mistrust, competition, and isolation are being revealed and overcome by a newfound sense of community and collaboration. To be sure, our journey has not come to an end, but as we travel on, we do so with renewed energy and a spirit of joy and expectation for the ways God will use these members of the body to God’s glory!

²² Joe Grazer, “Project Site Review Report Form,” Southlake, TX, May 7, 2013.

CHAPTER SIX

IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR

In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 1:4-6

I am an introvert. According to a Strengths Finders inventory, my top five strengths are Learner, Achiever, Includer, Positivity, and Connectedness. A Birkman assessment declares that I enjoy creative tasks and am more drawn to ideas than tangible matters. It also finds that I'm team-focused, preferring to direct others using suggestions and low-key discussions rather than being authoritarian. When a situation arises that calls for fight or flight, I'm the first one out the door, whether physically or mentally. Conflict has not been my friend and, in fact War's *Why Can't We Be Friends?* could easily be my theme song. However, through the inception, development, and execution of this project, God has been at work pointing me toward new ways of looking at staff dynamics and also at myself.

Reflections from a Driver

Beyond Hitchhiking

Although I've held the position of Chief of Staff for three years, early on my role was more one of information disseminator. Organizing or overseeing staff relationships was

not a part of the original job description. Although skirmish resolutions were sometimes brought to my office, most deep-seated conflicts were rarely spoken of during polite daily conversation or midterm reviews. At that point in time, I was simply making my way down the road. Going with the flow seemed to ensure a relatively smooth trip. Yet, during our time of discernment, the Advisory Committee began to share more and more information about staff dynamics. And with each sharing, it became clearer and clearer that we were shortchanging God and God's mission for this church. Leading with my "includer" and "positivity" strengths, I felt certain that we could, indeed, become that body of Christ with each of us pulling in the same direction rather than being drawn and quartered to everyone's detriment. However, as we finally rounded the corner of the new year and the project was actually under way, my take on things began to fall short of that "positivity" column. The following is an excerpt from a mid-January reflection:

I come to this project having experienced polar opposites of the death spectrum, each being borne out of tragedy. My best friend from grade school committed suicide five days ago and I am just returning from her funeral. On the other end, I've been asked to pray for a former parishioner who is battling a rare form of cancer. Last night there was a prayer vigil for him at the church where he faithfully served for many years. There's a strange sadness with one who wants so badly to live and one who could no longer cope with this world's battles. Given these two circumstances, it seems ironic that *we* battle over territory and resources. If we could only see with God's eyes how very fleeting our days are and how our time is wasted when we struggle against one another. This is the prayer with which I go into this project. For too long, conflict has gone on without being addressed, leaving in its wake hurt feelings. But more importantly, ministry has not been lived out to its fullest because energies were directed into other avenues. It is my prayer that through our time together we will be able to see that we are not called to be a family with its dysfunctions but the body of Christ, recognizing the gift that each of us holds and the ministry to which each of us is called. I look forward to a time when amazing things can be accomplished when we work together to accomplish God's purposes. The setting around campus is fraught with potential conflict as we are ready to move into the new building. Already, certain ministry areas are babbling about the configuration of their

space. For all of us, there is going to be a sense of loss, going from life as we knew it into the unknown. It is almost like the Exodus and there are bound to be times when people will long to return to their “homeland.”

Like Bartimaeus, I felt like a blind beggar sitting beside the road, waiting for the Lord to speak to me while I clamored for sight. Perhaps, the response was not the immediate presence of Jesus in human form, but I did feel the strong guidance of his Spirit as I began to flesh out the ways we could utilize intentional conversations and play to move into a new form of relationship. I also heard loud and clear that I would have to get over myself, move beyond my introversion, stop sitting beside the road, and *join* the surrounding crowd. As with Bartimaeus, my cry of, “Lord, I want to see” (Mark 10:51), was answered in the gift of insights from experts such as Peter Block, Otto Scharmer, David Sawyer, and those masters of play, Brannen, Brown, Johnson, and Kid President.

In these early weeks of implementation, the Advisory Committee once again proved to be invaluable, for it was they who encouraged me to keep going as they shared little tidbits of positive feedback and suggested various authors who would help bolster the spiritual aspect of our community formation. Naturally, it would have been my desire to have everyone simply lay out their complaints within the first couple of meetings. But one Committee member’s wise words kept reminding me that the vital component of trust had to be reestablished. Scharmer’s U was not to be navigated in a few simple gatherings, and Peter Block’s word that “we choose depth over speed...depth takes time and the willingness to engage”¹ was most instructive. Out of these reminders came an understanding that if I expected the Participants to be real with me and one another, I had

¹ Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, 47.

to be open and honest with them. Block notes that “restoration is created by the kinds of conversations we initiate with each other,”² and it was my belief that those conversations had to acknowledge both the negatives and the positives of the stories of our life together. However, they also had to leave room for us to move into a *future* story that would acknowledge our abundance of gifts as well as our ability to utilize our variety of gifts to create something as a body. For me, the offering of those initial, nonjudgmental moments for reflecting on the way we each were entering our weekly conversations, afforded every Participant the opportunity to honestly assess his or her willingness to take ownership in this process of community creating.

I found the first six weeks to be the most difficult because it seemed as if we were stuck in the same old rut, playing the same old tapes. However, in rereading Block’s instruction that “the leader’s task is to structure the place and experience of these occasions to move the culture toward shared ownership,”³ I came to see my role, not as “savior” or “reformer,” but as one who simply provided the time and space for the community to form as co-owners, to recognize their accountability for what they had and would create, and to refocus their attention from the person in authority to those who held the true power.⁴ Whether it was this relaxing into the process, the open time we would have between weeks five and seven to evaluate the status of our individual reflective action, the “fullness of time,” the movement of the Holy Spirit, or a combination thereof,

² Ibid., 75.

³ Ibid., 87.

⁴ Ibid., 69.

I am still not certain. But I do know that once we were affirmed in our ability to “speak the truth in love,” a sense of community and of hope began to emerge. I am also absolutely convinced that getting to this point would have been even more delayed—or perhaps would not have come at all—had we not inserted the element of play into every gathering. Personally, it not only gave me permission to leave my prim and proper by-the-book façade on the sidelines, it also facilitated my entry into the community as a fellow traveler. My willingness to forgo all propriety and throw myself fully into each game was a gift I gave myself, but the benefits extended to the Participants as well.

Taking Time to Refuel

Any great musical composition contains a time of rest. Initially, that was not a part of my rationale in creating our spring meeting schedule. But in my desire to be sensitive to staff needs and their increased duties associated with our Lenten season, ample time for reflection was inadvertently created. As it turned out, the schedule was well received, and the Participants chose whether or not they would comply with the request to read and post on the community blog during the weeks we didn’t meet together. If I were to do this project again, I would definitely use this same spring time frame because it is much less disjointed than summer or fall on our campus. I would also include days which were designated as nonmeeting days because there was something about that time apart that allowed for the pondering and marinating of what had been shared within the gathering times. Ideally, we would meet as a group for three weeks in a row and then take a week off to process. I also found those meetings that included meals to be helpful because they

provided an even more relaxed atmosphere where the Participants had an opportunity to visit with those with whom they might not ordinarily interact. I think that the restaurant has to be chosen with care so that actual conversations are possible and not drowned out by ancillary noise. A private area or room worked well for us and reinforced that special sense of community. I chose to pay for the meals so that no one felt as if it were an outing they couldn't afford to attend. Where this is not practical, however, everyone could chip in for pizza or subs, which could be consumed on site so that a common meal might be enjoyed. Another alternative would be to have a pot luck meal where everyone provided an item to be shared by all. Whatever the venue, there is definitely something about a communal meal and table fellowship that enabled our group to set aside their barriers.

As noted above, time for reflection was also an important element. In fact, that was a key learning for me because prior to the project, it was not a part of my ordinary routine. Whether it was during our weeks of meeting or those without a formal gathering, however, I found myself replaying conversations and their underlying emotions and motivations. During this time, too, it was extremely helpful for me to have the input of the Advisory Committee members who were also serving on the Participant team. They brought a male perspective to my analysis, as well as generational and theological insights to what we were experiencing. As a part of my desire to better understand the group dynamics and where we were heading, I found it imperative to “move to the balcony”⁵ in order to gain a better perspective on what was actually occurring and why.

⁵ Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, Marty Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009).

After a few weeks of utilizing that “balcony view,” I discovered it was an invaluable tool even in the midst of conversations or gatherings, and slowly but surely I learned to step outside the apathy or heat of the moment to better assess and respond to immediate circumstances.

In *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* the authors devote an entire chapter to the idea of “purpose.” Noting that adaptive challenges can be hazardous to one’s career, they warn:

The only reason we can imagine you would want to do this kind of work [taking on adaptive challenges] is to serve purposes that matter to you deeply. Identifying your higher purpose—figuring out what is so important to you that you would be willing to put yourself in peril—is a key element in the process of understanding yourself as a system. When you understand your orienting purpose, you can understand and make day-to-day decisions in that larger context, and you can make the tough decisions to subordinate other important purposes to that one... Your purposes help you allocate your time.⁶

In those soul-searching, reflective moments, this project helped me clarify the purposes for which God has called me to the ministry in general and this church in particular. In many ways, this staff *was* my flock, and for them and for their formation into the body of Christ, I *was* willing to abandon my old habits of isolation and withdrawal in the face of conflict. That knowledge, indeed, raised the stakes for me but also added an element of passion that had not been present in my ministry purview before.

Another important refueling station for me was *Building the Bridge As You Walk On It*. Although my intent in its use was to help the staff leaders better define and enhance *their* leadership role, as I entered into dialogue with the book and with them, I

⁶ Ibid., 221.

found *I* was the one who had a much better picture of who I was, how I related to both the Participant Group and staff as a whole, and how revitalization might occur for me and for us. Describing the “fundamental state of leadership,” Robert Quinn points to the benefits of becoming more externally open, purpose-centered, internally directed, and other-focused.⁷ Just becoming aware of the little things I could change in order to move more closely into this preferred state was extremely helpful in my quest to increase my vulnerability and authenticity. As well, the book’s neutral position provided instruction and motivation without finger-pointing. Thus, the Participant Group members could focus on areas *they* determined would be helpful in enhancing their leadership positions. Through their willingness to post to the Participant Group blog, I gained greater insight into where they were coming from, and we enjoyed some humorous exchanges as well as heartfelt encouragement and affirmations. In line with Heifetz and his co-authors, Quinn stresses the significance of purpose, particularly as it enables us to move beyond our comfort zone into uncharted territory. “The challenge is to be both adaptive and confident,” he says, and then continues:

The practice of adaptive confidence means that we are willing to enter uncertain situations because we have a higher purpose and we are confident that we can learn and adapt as we move forward...being flexible means being open to learning and change...the most powerful learning is found in improvisation...taking initiative while remaining open to feedback and learning while they move.⁸

⁷ Robert E. Quinn, *Building the Bridge As You Walk On It: A Guide for Leading Change*, 22.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 151-2.

While I am certain his reference to improvisation was more in keeping with stepping out to invent new ways of problem solving or addressing issues, I found an unanticipated link to the play we had experienced together at the beginning of each meeting, and I experienced great affirmation that the improv aspect of our playtime could lead to this adaptive and confident response to issues that were sure to arise in the course of our “work” time.

Under Construction

Health comes from the center of an organization—by the healthy practices of the staff and volunteers who sit in the central positions of leaders. Staff and volunteer leaders actually model and mentor the rest of the congregation in appropriate ways of relating to one another, talking with one another, making decisions with each other, and a host of other critical but hidden norms that guide the life of the congregation.⁹

In this simple statement, the authors point to the critical need for healthy and functional relationships between staff members. If we are the “models” and “mentors” for the entire congregation, it is imperative that we reflect a godly image. A part of that reflection must include interdependence as demonstrated in the relationship of the Holy Trinity. To be the body of Christ means that we work together, offering our strengths, and drawing on the strengths of others to accomplish God’s purposes for God’s church. During the course of this project, I came to better understand this metaphor of “the body,” and realized, as never before, that operating in isolation was not an option for any of us.

⁹ Gil Rendle and Susan Beaumont, *When Moses Meets Aaron: Staffing and Supervision in Large Congregations* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2007), 195.

Road Crew

Rendle and Beaumont flesh out the Apostle Paul’s “body” analogy by pointing out that his “arguments strengthen the conviction that the leader must not see himself or herself as the whole with subordinate helpers...the leader is himself or herself a part of the greater whole in service to God.”¹⁰ What a great reminder that I don’t have—or have to have—all the answers. In this or any body, there can be only one head, and that place is reserved for Christ. Acknowledging and living into this truth certainly helped me take a different approach to my relationship with my Advisory Committee and Participant Group. From the outset, we recognized that our conversations, deliberation, and discernment were much better when all participated. The Advisory Committee took an active part in shaping the design of the project and eagerly agreed to do the pre and post interviews with the Participant Group. As well, half of the Advisory Committee lent their expertise to the weekly Participant Group meetings, without overshadowing anything the other members had to offer, yet fully participating. It was a new experience for me to so fully rely on other people, and at every single juncture they affirmed my decision to let go of the reins. Within our planning time we worked the U together in preparation for its rollout with the Participants. In addition to that, the resources, insights, and encouragement that poured forth were amazing. Because of *their* affirmations and follow-through, I was much more willing and able to be collegial in my efforts to draw out collegiality among the staff leaders. As well, it has been a lesson that has carried me well beyond the project phase. While I often still feel like a “slacker” at the outset of a new

¹⁰ Ibid., 18.

event when I invite others to help, always what our team creates together is so much better than what I could have done on my own. It's then that I can envision a wink from the body's head and a gentle "I told you so!"

To be sure, this idea of sharing the load was a tremendous learning for me. Yet, it's a decision that has been affirmed; and in a variety of ways, I have experienced the fruits of that choice to let others "in." Perhaps the most succinct acknowledgement came in the form of a summary from one of my Lay Committee members:

In a past conversation with Rev. Judy (before her doctoral program started), I had heard her say that in her role ("Chief of Staff") she saw herself as an advocate for the staff. That was quite shocking to hear, as my perception of the presentation of her placement in the newly created position of Chief of Staff had been presented as more of a "managing" of the staff (and all of the problems that went with them). But with her project choice and throughout the project implementation, it has become clear to myself (Committee member) and the staff that Rev. Judy clearly has a heart for our staff. Through her goal of a collaborative community and her emphasis on "yes, and," her project has helped to foster respect and trust within the participant team and others.¹¹

Narrow Lanes

One of the benefits of the latitude offered by the project is its ability to be adapted to almost any venue. While we had seventeen Participants (myself included), the size of a Participant Group can certainly vary. However, it should be at least three in order to promote representation for a smaller church or ministry group, but no more than eighteen in order to assure that Participants are engaged and the size is not too unwieldy. Block

¹¹ Dorothea Christ, "Project Site Review Form," Southlake, TX, May 7, 2013.

notes, “It is in groups of 3 to 12 that intimacy is created.”¹² Nevertheless, I found with the utilization of play and of subgroups, not to mention the fact that not every Participant was there every week, a decided intimacy emerged even within a group that numbered more than twelve. Certainly, any play activities can be adapted to best mesh with whatever aspect is being focused on during each particular gathering. However, if the benefits are to be truly realized, it is important to monitor how issues are being addressed. I found that appreciative inquiry was a valuable tool for pointing to a preferred future without wearing rose-colored glasses while considering the present. I can see where a group could go far afield if the boundaries weren’t firmly set in the mind (and actions) of the facilitator. As well, while I did not provide my senior pastor with the specifics of each week, I did give him a general idea of the direction in which we were heading. Yet, confidentiality remained of prime importance because the Participant Group had to know that their ideas, opinions, and experiences could be shared openly, without fear of divulgence or reprisal.

I also discovered that our setting helped establish the tone of each meeting. Here, Block was very helpful in shaping my understanding of the importance of space.

“Community is built when we sit in circles, when there are windows and the walls have signs of life, when every voice can be equally heard and amplified, when we all are on one level—and the chairs have wheels and swivel.”¹³ We didn’t have swivels or wheels, but we did utilize a neutral, open, flexible space with couches that promoted eye-to-eye

¹² Block, 95.

¹³ Ibid., 131.

conversation. The informality of the space made it feel like we were sitting in someone's den so that just coming into the room had the impression of community. This feel was totally different from our usual auditorium-style gathering space, an aspect that was so significant that many of the Participants asked if this might be designated as the official place for all future staff meetings. Unfortunately, the practicality of that request was proven to be very problematic during one of our expanded sessions because of a larger attendance. Yet it confirmed that I was not the only one experiencing this shift in "communal consciousness." In fact, one member went so far as to say, "We may have to restructure the way we meet. Just sitting in a room to meet for an hour doesn't seem as effective as what we created for the past few months."

In addition to consideration given to the *way* issues are addressed and the physical space in which that is done, in my estimation, a greater benefit could have been achieved with the formation of additional groups. So if I were to do this project again, I would create other small communities composed of those who weren't in an "official" leadership role so that they might also experience having a voice in the development of our preferred future. While it would mean either utilizing additional facilitators or meeting with the additional groups at a different time, I think the conversations that would be generated post meeting would energize the entire staff. It would also eliminate the assumption that information would be carried back to departmental teams or that they would simply catch the spark by osmosis. Were an expanded number of staff to be involved, I could envision the division of the groups being different as well, with department leads not being segregated into their own grouping. Additionally, whether it

was the single Participant Group or the entire staff, the momentum that is gained within a given time frame can't be allowed to fade through inactivity, whether it is unintentional or not. In an effort to keep that initial impetus moving forward, in the months since the conclusion of the project, I have found at least four opportunities for us to assemble as an entire staff and engage not only in dreaming but also in play. Thus, we continue to be intentional about shared experiences. However, I have not yet tasked the group or any portion of it to move into the next level of intentional conversations. On the other hand, our last all-staff play date was designed and executed in conjunction with the Participant who chose to drop out of our original group. I found this an encouraging sign and the great success of the event seemed to serve as a catalyst for her reentry into community with the leadership group.

Last but certainly not least, the element of play as noted throughout this unfolding story was certainly a key component in turning the tide of our perceptions. It was play that allowed us to laugh and create together—play that served as a prototype of what we could *be* together. But like our intentional conversations, great care should be taken in determining *what* games are played. The return on any period of fun will be diminished if there are “winners” and “losers.” And never should laughter be at the expense of a member or group of members. Maintaining the games at a level where all could play *and* be successful was imperative, and games that furthered the topic of the day greatly enhanced what we were later able to do together. One of the simplest games not only offered instant affirmation but also has come to be a code word as we dream together across a variety of departments. That game is “Yes/And.” It blows limiting and censoring

thinking out of the water, and I have since found it to be an excellent icebreaker and enthusiasm generator for almost any setting.

Open Highway

As we move beyond the confines of the project and hit the open roads that lead to the future, I realize that I am a different person for having taken the time to lower the walls of my own silo. And although there is a definite air of increased synergy among the majority of members of the entire staff, the envisioned future doesn't always materialize in ways that we would anticipate.

Curves Ahead

One of the things I had counted on was the Participant Group members returning to their respective areas with a newfound inclination toward collaboration. But within three months of the project's conclusion, two of the eight departments represented had lost their director and a third director changed departments, moving from Students to On-Line ministry. This reinforced my desire to move beyond the director level if the project were to be repeated! Fortunately, a Participant Group member stepped in to lead two of those departments, so there was some sense of continuity with the project. But this turn of events definitely got me to thinking about the need to continue helping us be intentional about how we spend our time. An additional nudge came in the form of an unanticipated encounter. Following his move to another church, one of the Participants stopped by for a visit and I happened to see him in the parking lot. Unsolicited, he challenged me with "Since I'm no longer on staff, this is now a nonpaid comment. I hope you will continue

with what you started with your project. What you are doing is really important. Keep it up!” And, indeed, we must continue to find ways to tell our stories and to celebrate how God is utilizing us as God’s body to draw others to Christ. Together we are definitely better, but we need reminders of the many ways that truth plays out, both in the difficult times and in the victorious ones as well. The lessons learned in our project time will be valuable tools to utilize when life throws us those curve balls that are bound to be a part of our future, regardless of how carefully we address it.

Speed Limits

I love the summation one Participant/Advisory Committee member offered when asked what he learned. “I learned I didn’t know very much,” he says with a twinkle in his eye. “I thought I knew most people and the roles attached to those people, but diving into intentional conversation, it’s changed everything. I found out that things about people I had assumed to be true, in fact, were just the opposite.”¹⁴ For those discoveries to be made, he had to take the time to get to know those people in a way that casual conversation and perpetual motion does not allow. Several of the authors pointed out the necessity of taking the time to let things unfold. But I believe that we also needed time for the Holy Spirit to move through us individually and then through this representative staff body. So, I will need to remember to slow down, not get in a hurry, and to move beyond being task-oriented to a realm of people orientation. As an introvert, this is difficult, but having seen the benefits, I am determined to be more like the One who sat

¹⁴ Kyle Austin, interview by Chris Hammon and Vicki Hollon, via Skype, May 9, 2013.

by the well, throwing wide open the opportunity for an encounter. While I'm not one for small talk, I did find myself being able to do this "intentional loafing" during the latter stages of the project by simply sitting in the hallway or reception area and engaging those who would walk by. Sometimes the conversation would be brief, but even in those snippets, I got to know about spouses, children, and life outside of work. Sometimes our duo would morph into a small gathering where we all took time out from the tasks at hand and routine of the day. These times were special.

One of my favorite scriptures is "in the fullness of time God sent his Son..." (Galatians 4:4). In the fullness of time, God also sends me wisdom and deepened relationships when I am willing to slow down and forsake efficiency for the enduring bonds of community. Therefore, I am doing a better job of sending emails or purposely seeking out staff that I don't ordinarily encounter in the course of the day or the week, and soliciting ideas and opinions as well as just building relationships. To my delight, I find that this movement toward extroversion is extending beyond the staff, into the congregation and the community as well. With my brother in ministry, I will be the first to confess that a large part of my learning was that "I didn't know very much." To go even farther, I didn't know that I didn't know. However, as this staff and I continue our travels together, I'm finding increased opportunities to become better acquainted with myself and my traveling companions. So, as I look into the rearview mirror, what I really see is an invaluable series of shared experiences that have led to revelatory gifts of companionship, collegiality, and community.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ON THE ROAD AGAIN

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Philosopher John of Salisbury is quoted as saying, “Bernard of Chartres used to say that we are like dwarfs on the shoulders of giants, so that we can see more than them, and things at a greater distance, not by virtue of any sharpness of sight on our part, or any physical distinction, but because we are carried high and raised up by their giant size.”¹ In more recent times, former player and sports analyst Gil McGregor put the same thought in more colorful words: "People of true greatness are always lifting others up and letting them stand tall on their own shoulders. They don't care who gets the credit. They don't mind if their own shoulders get dirty." Certainly, this project would not have been nearly as effective had it not been for the guidance of professors and authors of gigantic proportions. In the gathering, blending, and utilization of a wide variety of academic, business, and theological material, I have been able to formulate an effective design for facilitating the demise of barriers between departments and the people who staff them. It

¹ Wikipedia, “Standing on the Shoulders of Giants”
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Standing_on_the_shoulders_of_giants (accessed November 11, 2013).

is my hope that my experience will be utilized by others who will modify it for their own setting so that we as believers can continue to better resemble the body of Christ in the way we work, play, and do life together.

Travel Tips

Within the first month of my time together with the Participant Group, I became a firm believer in the power of play. In fact, if we had done nothing more than spend an hour each week engaging one another in noncompetitive games, I believe the creativity of this group still would have been enhanced and relationships would have taken on a new dimension. Since those early days, I have become a strong proponent for laughter at the outset of almost any staff gathering. But I am convinced that opportunities for that laughter must be well planned so that they don't come at the expense of any individual or group. Fortunately, there are a variety of games that can be utilized as icebreakers at almost any type of gathering which serve to foster a sense of community as well as to release the creative spark that lies within each of us. I've had an occasion to share this finding with my District Superintendent, who seems interested in incorporating a version of play into one of our district clergy meetings. It will be interesting to see whether he will take that giant step or not. I hope he does, because I think it would be an advantageous move toward making our connectional system more a reality than a memory.

I have had the opportunity, to spend some time with one of our parishioners who works in the Human Resources department of a rapidly growing technology firm. She has worked in the field of leadership and organizational development for twenty years,

including a stint at Florida's Disney World. When someone told her about my project, she asked if we could visit about my findings. I was thrilled because I was not only eager to share the results of what our taking time to play had meant, but also looked forward to picking *her* brain about what she had experienced in the corporate world. We had such a delightful morning of sharing information that we went over our allotted time and I think I caused her to be late to work! However, she was enthralled by the utilization of the Pep Talk video and the specifics of the games we had played. As she was currently tasked with leading an upcoming executive retreat in order to bring their top-level team closer together, she was particularly interested in the "Yes/And" game. My new friend is now armed with links to pertinent TED Talks, the complete project bibliography, and an invitation to borrow any books that might be applicable to her setting.

A second critical learning from the project is intentionality. In part because of the extensive use of social media, but particularly in light of the hectic pace of this twenty-first century, people are simply not taking the time for face-to-face encounters. Thus, whether it is with staff or congregants, our *desire* to communicate and build relationships doesn't always line up with our actual practice. That is why any effort toward creating synergy within a group must include intentionality. One that takes into account all aspects of both scheduling and venue. Early on, with an established schedule, Participants were able to block out the dates and times of our meetings. Although this might be a given in some organizations, in our culture it is rare that we know a meeting has been called more than an hour or two in advance. The published schedule, however, sent a message that the Participants were respected and it was understood that their time was valuable. This sign

of respect was a subtle building block for establishing trust. There was also intentionality in designing *how* each meeting would look. Although my particular group is not always comfortable when they don't know all that a meeting entails, I seldom published an actual agenda because often there was no way to capture what we were going to be about in a simple listing of activities. This does not mean, however, that the segments of our meeting weren't carefully thought out to maximize the effect of each activity. Yet, the nonpublished agenda contributed to my ability to follow the prompting of the Holy Spirit and eliminated any pressure on the group to perform or speak out just because there was an arbitrary entry on a sheet of paper. In our setting, I think reliance upon the flow was another factor that contributed to trust building. Additionally, the look and feel of our meetings were significantly impacted by Peter Block's *Community* and his understanding of the utilization of space. This deliberate setting definitely facilitated conversation among us. And as difficult or awkward as it may have been initially, asking the question of how effectively each person planned for the meeting to be proved to be a viable way of giving ownership to every participant and of inviting them to truly engage in a reality check on their own emotions and agenda.

It seems to me that the more proficient and intentional we become in calling these types of gatherings, whether they be standing meetings or ones that address a particular issue, the more likely we are to begin to utilize this type of format in various other settings. As we delved into the project, it became clear that many of the underlying conflicts between departments had very deep roots, simply because they hadn't been addressed at the outset. As well, much of the conflict arose out of misunderstanding or

misperception. Having a forum, then, where emotions can be minimized and collaboration maximized can serve to transform the energy of conflict into creativity, but such a forum can't be left to chance.

A third travel tip is celebration—celebration of what has been good and productive and relationally edifying. This definitely includes a celebration of how and where God has been among us and where God has been working even the seemingly negative things together for good. Through appreciative inquiry, when folks are given the chance to remember, looking back to track their journey, there is something wonderful that emerges far beyond a melancholy or longing for the “good old days.” We can see evidence of succeeding against all odds and of joy in the journey. What we discovered also was that as we began to conclude our celebrations, we were better able to move into a discussion of those things that were not so helpful. Yet, given some distance from the occurrence, others could feel the disappointment or pain of the one who suffered, without having an accusing finger being pointed at them. They were given a new perspective and that second set of eyes helped them better understand one another as well as develop a desire not to repeat actions that might create a hardship for others. On the other hand, it is important that the appreciative inquiry period not devolve into a gripe session or the rattling of old skeletons. Therefore, the facilitator must be prepared to gently guide the group back to the core of appreciation if they began to digress.

The fourth guide is the development of a willingness to lower one's *own* defenses. “Be the change you want to see in the world,” encouraged Mahatma Gandhi. On a less global scale, we are called to be the change we want to see in our own little sphere of

influence. We don't have sincerity meters on our campus, but rarely are any needed. What *is* essential is a willingness *not* to be the expert or the savior. Rather, to be vulnerable and trustworthy so that others are encouraged to assume the same posture. In his Sermon on Mount, Jesus challenged those gathered: "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" (Matthew 5:14-16). It's this call to allow Christ's humble light to illumine the darkness of mistrust or confusion or conflict that enables us to set aside our personal agendas and biases in favor of walking humbly into a place of "not knowing" that leads to collaborative resolution and restoration.

When combined, these travel tips work together to create positive and memorable shared experiences. It is those shared experiences that help us see one another with greater clarity and remind us that we really are in this together. Somehow, when we got to know one another on a more personal level, it was much more difficult to attribute negative or caustic stories to them. Recognizing their importance, one Participant described the effects of those shared experiences this way: "The value of a shared experience is almost immeasurable. Our staff contains people from all walks, but we don't know each other. One way to get to know one another is through shared experiences so we can grow and have a bond. When we have to be silly or watch something together, that grows that bond. This shared experience is invaluable for what it

did for our staff. We made connections with people that we would never have tried to get to know.”

The Road Less Traveled

When the Advisory Committee and I sat together during the planning stages of the project, we all agreed that many of our communication complications emerged from the fast-paced nature of our church culture. Often, people weren't being secretive, they simply were working on the fly. Ours was not a staff that slowed down long enough to analyze the last conversation, gathering, or project before we were off to work on the next task or brain child. Training occasions were few and far between, and often there was little opportunity or incentive to utilize what had been taught. The vehicle that was most operative over the past fifteen years and brought us to our unforeseen growth spurt was sheer commitment. Thus, rather than an established infrastructure that promoted a sharing of information, isolation grew out of the reality that a particular individual or department was accustomed to taking the ball and running with. In most cases, that seemed to be the most expedient way to meet deadlines and ever-shifting targets. Self-analysis, leadership guidance, and being present to one another were all foreign terms to us prior to the project. Yet, in retrospect, those times we took the time to be “stopping by the woods” were some of the most foundational for the success we experienced. To be sure, we had places to go, things to do, and promises to keep, but during those brief, weekly times of collective discernment, we had permission to become more fully ourselves. “When you start to suspend your habitual ways of operating and your attention is grabbed by something that surprises or interests you...you begin to access your open

mind...you must let go,”² Otto Scharmer instructs. And sounding more like a theologian than a corporate leadership trainer, Scharmer describes the necessity of surrendering all that is nonessential in order to view oneself and the world through a revitalized lens. We needed to do this, and I suspect any group that has been together for a period of time needs to do it as well. The simplicity of it all was beautiful. When we were able to sit with one another, to be silent in the presence of each other, and to allow the Spirit to guide our thoughts and open our minds, we traveled from a place of polite non-commitment, into one that was so integrated that it fostered a new *desire* for community and creativity. In giving up our “right” to be set apart, distant, or self-focused, we stepped onto a new path that was right and innovative and life-giving.

In addition to our communal time of “open minds, open hearts, and open wills (how Methodist that is), there was also time for honest self-reflection as we worked through Quinn’s engaging book on leading change. To be sure, each of us had been a change agent in one way or another, but Quinn helped us recognize where that had been a positive or negative experience for the ones who were being impacted by the changes. In my six years at the church, I can’t recall a single teaching on leadership skills. Yet, Quinn’s material was far more about overcoming our leadership fears and transforming ourselves than it is a litany of “how to” change someone else. For this group, simply asking people to read the book would have resulted in a minimal percentage of compliance. But by using technology to promote community, the Participants were not

² C. Otto Scharmer, *Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges*, 184.

only engaged in reading but also in analyzing and sharing their strengths and their struggles.

Perhaps our church setting is unique in its training deficiency, and there are others that are more focused on giving their staff important tools for succeeding in flock guidance. However, I have served three other churches and none of them addressed the question of leadership at any level. Unfortunately, neither does the typical seminary education. Therefore, if one goes from college to seminary to a local congregation, there is little opportunity for learning vital skills such as those offered by Scharmer and Quinn. It's difficult to imagine any scenario where the application of either of these practices would *not* be beneficial.

As I commented in an earlier chapter, since the conclusion of the project, two of our Participants have moved to other church settings. About a month after the project's conclusion, I asked one of them who is moving into a ministry position if there was anything that came out of the project that he felt was useful as he moved into his new role. His reply was a validation of our progress and the material and methods used as he writes:

Yes, absolutely there was. Primarily, I learned the impact that leadership has on staff morale, development, attitude, etc. Some people, for real or perceived reasons, felt free to take risks and try new things, others did not. Many times those feelings were rooted in previous experiences with leaders. Now as a leader, I need to be very aware of the feedback and example I give others; if I want my staff to be confident, sharing, humble, and open with each other, I need to be the primary model and champion of that attitude and behavior.

Second was the embracing of the attitude of "building the bridge while you're walking on it." That has new church planting written all over it. Because my bridge will literally unfold beneath me right before my foot hits the ground, I can't guide my actions based on "what work is there to do in front of me." Instead, I have to outline vision and core strategies and pursue those. In leading

through change, I have to use the uncertainty of the moment as a blank slate, not as a dense fog.

Third, I feel empowered by our group to try to create the kind of work environment I would most like to be a part of. Since all cultures are created as a shared experience of the people in them, why not try to create one that is nurturing, engaging, and fits the vision of the organization? A culture will form regardless, so I will put time and energy into trying to make it a great one.

Last, our group experience did strengthen my feeling of what I am called to and not called to. I feel called to be a preacher, a teacher, a minister to the needy, an evangelist for Jesus. I don't feel called to be a staff organizer, a manager, an accountant, an office worker, etc. When the time is right, I hope to find people who have those passions and gifts so I can focus on mine. Instead of being threatened by relinquishing those responsibilities, I think I will feel liberated.³

King of the Road

At the very core of all the play, intentionality, celebration, humility, surrender, silence, and skill sharpening, there must be a faith that God *will* work all things together for good, that Christ calls us to be his body, and that the Holy Spirit will take even our most feeble efforts and transform us *and* our relationships. We have become living proof that we are better together than in walled-off domains. The beneficiaries of this discovery are the staff itself, our congregation, those whom the church has touched beyond its walls, and the Lord himself, for he has been glorified as we have replaced suspicion, animosity, and a sense of scarcity with trust, *koinonia*, and an attitude of gratitude.

“Submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and God will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded,” commands the author of James (4:7-8). Submit, draw near, cleanse hands, and purify hearts—these became mile markers along the way and each time we

³ The names of Participants are withheld by mutual agreement, Facebook post on June 6, 2013.

reached one, our armor became a little thinner and our walls a little shorter. Every time we acknowledged Christ as the head of this particular body, we began to think and act as a body—one that recognized the strength and necessity of each of its parts. Thus, ours is not the greatest story ever told, but it *is* one that needs to be communicated because within this story of transformation lies the truth that positive change *is* possible. It's a story that needs to be shared so that others will know that even in this day and age there is still such a thing as hope. But mostly it's a story that must be told because sometimes we need to be reminded that Jesus Christ is just as relevant in today's world as he was two thousand years ago. And that his command to love—in as many varieties and forms as there are people—is capable of breaking down the most ingrained barriers and creating a true body of believers who, together, *can* be transformed, and in response, *will* offer new salt and light to this tasteless, darkened world.

Is there a “best” part of the story you may ask? In reply, I would *have* to respond that the best part is that this is *not* its end. You see, I believe that when it comes to the synergy released within our staff, the best is yet to come. So, for now, I'll just answer that within our church, this story of transformation, hope, and community...is to be continued!

APPENDIX A
PARTICIPATING DEPARTMENTS

DEPARTMENT	POSITION
Finance	Executive Director
Students/On-Line Ministries	Executive Director (Pastor)
Young Adult Ministries	Executive Director (Pastor)
Care & Support/Spiritual Formation	Executive Assistant
Music & Worship	Executive Director
Missions & Outreach	Executive Director (Pastor)
Children's Ministries	Executive Director
Communications	Executive Director
Evangelism	Executive Director
Productions	Executive Director
Creative Arts	Director
Praise & Worship	Director
IT & Operations	Director
Worship & Children's	Lay Advisory Committee
Pastor & Missional Wisdom Foundation	Lay Advisory Committee
Operations & Videographer	Lay Advisory Committee

APPENDIX B

MEETING COMMITMENT

MONDAYS, 1:00 – 2:30 P.M.

DATE	FOCUS
Week of 1/7	Participants meet individually with Judy of Lay Advisory team member.
Week of 1/14	Introduction and explanation.
Week of 1/21	*This week only – move to mutually agreeable date because of MLK holiday. Appreciative Inquiry
Week of 1/28	Begin project determination (utilize Pep Talk video)
Week of 2/4	Meet off-site for a shared meal and continue narrowing the focus of project.
Week of 2/11	No meetings – beginning of Lent. Participant group will keep in touch via Internet. (Reflective Action)
Week of 2/18	Continue project determination.
Week of 2/25	No meetings. Participants will provide input via Internet. (Adaptive Confidence/Authentic Engagement)
Week of 3/4	Finalize project focus.
Week of 3/11	No meetings – Spring Break
Week of 3/18	Define roles and resources
Week of 3/25	No meetings – Holy Week
Week of 4/1	No meetings. Participants will provide input via Internet.
Week of 4/8	Shared meal and project conversation.
Week of 4/15	Design of promotional and invitational aspects of the project.
Week of 4/22	Finalize resource needs.

Day of 4/29	Execution of project. All-staff retreat.
4/29 – 5/2	Participants meet individually with Judy or Lay Advisory team member.

APPENDIX C

GAMES PLAYED

Seven Things	<p>A game of support and affirmation. Two groups form a circle. The first person is asked to name seven favorite _____. After each thing is named, the rest of the circle gives a rousing “YES”! When the seventh thing is named, a group cheer is emitted. The person who has been affirmed, then turns to the next person and asks them to name seven favorite _____.</p> <p>The game helps move beyond a single solution and promotes the understanding of “yes” “AND.”</p>
Jacob’s Ladder	<p>Group divides into two circles of even numbers. A topic is given and the first person speaks about the topic, beginning with “Fortunately,” The next person in line picks up on the direction of the conversation, but speaks from a position of “Unfortunately,”</p> <p>The conversation continues around the circle with alternating highs and lows.</p>
Expert	<p>One person is designated as the “expert.” They move to the middle of the circle and a topic on which they are an expert is chosen. Members of the circle take turns asking questions about the particular topic. The “expert” may offer rational answers or make them up as they choose. Once everyone in the circle has asked a question, the “expert” chooses a successor.</p>
Pass the Thing	<p>One person begins by passing to the next an imaginary object with a short phrase about what it is. The next person is to repeat what they saw and heard as the pass the object to the next one in line.</p> <p>It is a great test of observation and reminder that we don’t always appear to others the way we think we do.</p>
Alphabet Game	<p>Group is asked to close their eyes. Object of the game is to have alternating participants speak the letters of the alphabet without two members speaking at the same time. Just getting the first “A” out without several people speaking it at the same time is a challenge! If two people speak at the same time, the group starts back at “A.”</p> <p>Object of the game is to develop a sense of the entire group and its rhythm. It also promotes a slower pace of response and group listening.</p>

Imitation	One person is chosen and secretly given the name of another in the group. That person then takes on the persona of the person named. The group has to guess who they are imitating.
Gossip	The classic game where one person whispers a phrase or sentence to the next. It is then repeated around the circle until it comes back to the originator. Comparison is made between the two. In a twist, we also started one phrase to the right and another to the left, adding further confusion and opportunity for mis-statements. This game is excellent for pointing out the need for focused communication and can be played in almost any space.
Dodge the Rocket	The group is divided into two sides. Foam rockets are placed on the middle line. At the “go” signal, participants race to the middle line, grab a rocket, and attempt to “tag” a person from the other side. Once a person is hit with the rocket, they are out of the game. Often, the winning side then continues to battle until only one person remains untagged.

APPENDIX D

PALM SUNDAY PLANNING REPRESENTATIVE COMMENTS

Process as I observed it:

Start with regular ministry roles, determine how PS is different.

Discuss PS specific events: who is in charge of what?

Cross-department feedback: what have we missed?

Overall I think the meeting was a success. I know my department is aware of things we weren't previously aware of, and we have additional responsibilities we will fulfill that will better serve the church this weekend. I think the biggest area for improvement is for the culture of that meeting to mature into something that is more focused on execution, not design, of worship. Debating what could take place in worship opens the door to re-debate decisions that have already been deliberated. This week-of meeting might be more useful if it is focused entirely on how to implement decisions that have already been made.

Yesterday's exercise was an example of peer-to-peer communication. All of the interested parties were brought together in a single space and all of the information was made available to everyone. Each person was left to filter out the points of information which were salient to their particular area of responsibility.

The benefit of peer-to-peer communication is that all of the information is available, so not only are people able to access information that directly affects them, they are able to hear the delivery of the information firsthand, which allows them to glean information from delivery and nuance. That "between the lines" information can be very important to their full understanding of the tasks expected of them.

The downside is that peer-to-peer is very inefficient. In order to be effective, all the peers need to be present all of the time, and each peer must expend the energy to distill the data that is important to them from the entire torrent of data. When there are multiple tasks in process, the data stream can quickly become overwhelming.

Peer-to-peer communication can be very effective for a single event, as it was in Palm Sunday planning. It becomes much more cumbersome for week in week out routine communication.

[We] have been in crisis mode from massive changes to Holy Week. I don't think any of us will make the deadline.

Judy, yesterday's meeting started a crisis that has us in emergency mode. I will not be able to respond in a timely manner.

Attached is what I prepared for [my department's] Lenten/Easter duties. Perhaps something similar could be done for all groups. Or Microsoft Project would be a good tool.
Also, perhaps a Portal web space could be created for internal use only.

From yesterday:

We warmed up our juices and got everyone smiling and ready to participate. It seems like we all started on the same page. After that we jumped into Palm Sunday and the planning/review part. I like the sheets. Very simple, very straightforward. started out with children and I thought it started smoothly. There was a shift when Jessica (not her real name) started talking. To be honest, I would say that a majority of the meeting was everyone trying to figure out what Jessica was doing. I don't want to sound like a jerk, but I know to call a spade a spade when I see one. Earlier we spoke at lunch and she was telling me about her new responsibilities, so I know I was confused regarding her new role here. I digress.

As the meeting went on there remained a sense of stiffness, but the overall spirit was great. I think we got a lot done, and I enjoyed watching some of the "new people" and "old people" interact. It might have been a tad bit large of a group...although I think that's just a product of the system.

Overall rating from me: B++

Process as I saw it:
Food/icebreaker
Play/creativity stimulator/breaking down guards
Working through checklist

Chaotic new business with no moderation
Dismissal

I wasn't really sure what process we were supposed to use.

My thoughts on what happened yesterday:

-I still think the playtime helps/works.

-I think the run-through of the checklist was fine, but got out of hand when certain people's views got left unchecked. We started politely and ended impolitely.

-If this had been done 6 months out, we could have implemented some brainstorming/evaluative aspects, but yesterday was supposed to be just details and reporting on who was covering what details.

I liked the process of going line by line and discussing as a group what was going on in each area as in pertained to Palm Sunday. I think it allowed us to see where the holes may be and then adjust before we had a failure. The bus schedule was a great example of this. That discussion led to an email this morning by _____ that allowed us to make changes that will make the overall experience better. It was also nice having all of the players in the room at one time because it allowed the right hand to know what the left hand was doing. I appreciated the process a great deal.

Sometimes that kind of environment leads to people getting defensive about their particular area, but the more we have those kinds of discussions, the more we will learn to trust each other and our intentions.

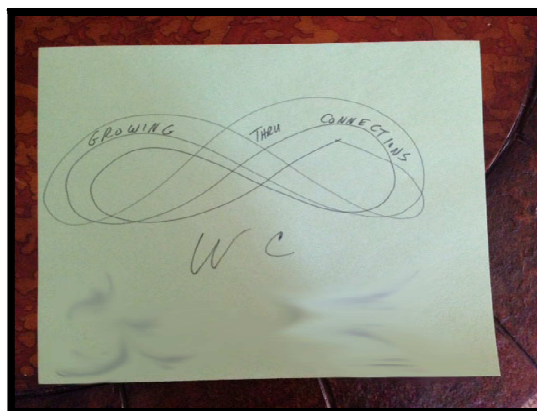


Figure AE 5. WC helix.

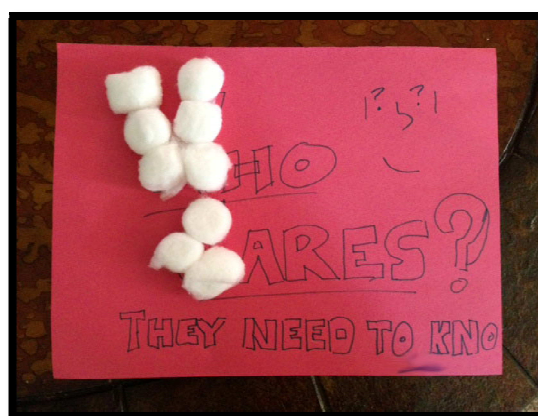


Figure AE 6. They need to know.

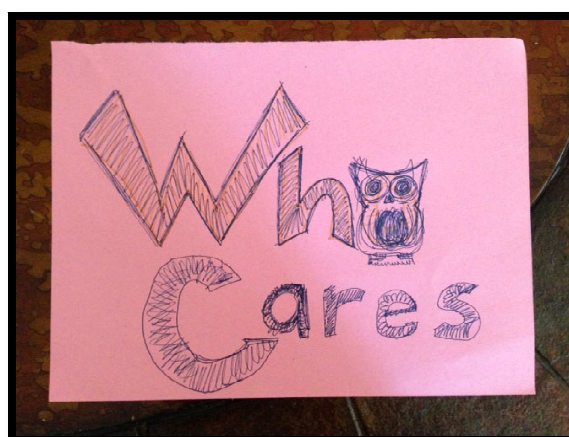


Figure AE 7. Who cares

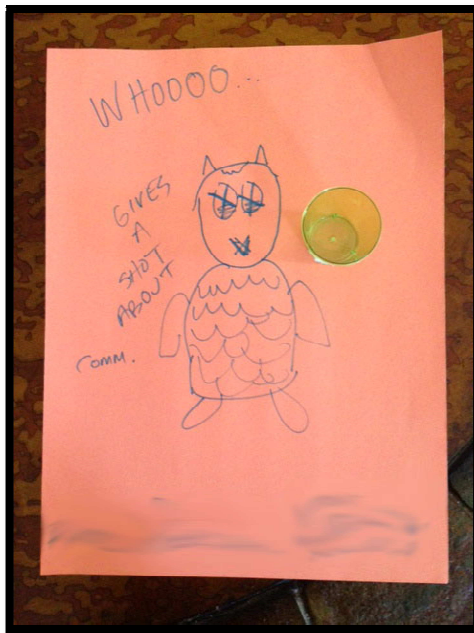


Figure AE 8. Who gives a shot?

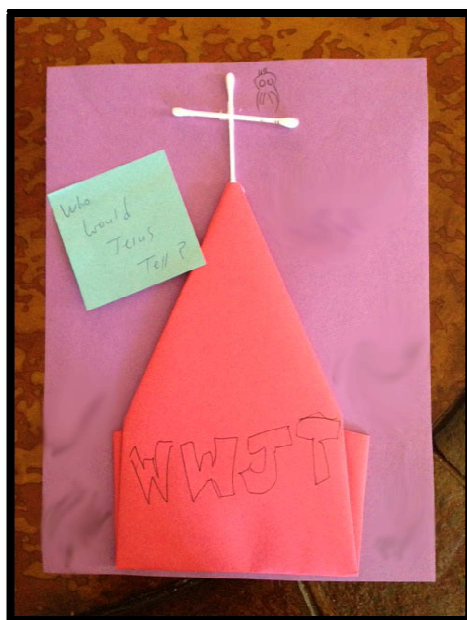


Figure AE 9. Who would Jesus tell?

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